Solar Energy UK (SEUK) and the Planning Advisory Service (PAS) present:

Workshop 2: Solar farms and agriculture

Thursday 12th September, 9:30-10:30

Today's agenda

Time	Topic
9.30am	Welcome and introductions, PAS
9.40am	Presentation: Solar farms and agriculture, Jonathan Scurlock, National Farmers Union
10:00am	Q&A
10:25am	Final remarks - SEUK
10:30am	Session ends

Introduction to the organisations

Planning Advisory Service

PAS supports local planning authorities to provide effective planning services and works with national and local government to help implement changes in the planning system.

Solar Energy UK

Since 1978, Solar Energy UK has worked to promote the benefits of solar energy and to make its adoption easy and profitable for domestic and commercial users. A not-for- profit association, we are funded entirely by our membership, which includes installers, manufacturers, distributors, large-scale developers, investors, and law firms.

Our mission is to empower the UK solar transformation. We are catalysing our members to pave the way for 50GW of solar energy (and 30GW of storage) by 2030 and 70GW of solar energy by 2035. We represent solar heat, solar power and energy storage, with a proven track record of securing breakthroughs for all three.

Solar Farms and Agriculture

Jonathan Scurlock, National Farmers Union

Climate change, energy, net zero: NFU Policy

The National Farmers' Union of England and Wales (NFU) represents the interests of ~55,000 farmer and grower businesses

Given the long-term **impact of climate change on our sector**, NFU members have acknowledged our role in tackling it over the past 15 years.

Agriculture is uniquely **both a source and a sink** for greenhouse gas emissions, making good use of the 75% of UK land area under farming.

In 2019, the NFU set out its vision for agriculture to achieve a **net zero contribution to climate change** across the whole of agricultural production by 2040, focussed on three key themes or ‘pillars’. **Many sectors may now need to reach net zero before 2050 – despite modest progress in some areas.**

Farmers own or host over half of UK solar power and AD capacity, as well as the majority of onshore wind power, while playing a significant role in the supply or fuelling of renewable heat and thermal power generation.

Action on the twin crises of **climate change** and **biodiversity loss** requires farmers and policy decision-makers alike to move on from regarding land as having one single purpose (food, non-food, conservation)

Overview/the challenge – solar farms and food security

- Legally binding target to reach net zero by 2050
- Both rooftop (commercial and residential) and ground-mounted solar installations will be essential to meet our climate targets.
- Climate change is biggest threat to food security (as stated by SoS Ed Miliband in House of Commons) https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-07-18/debates/1B2ABCB9-1455-4C86-8E2F-5E763B38E888/CleanEnergySuperpowerMission
- Unpredictable wet weather patterns impacted both the planting and harvesting of the 2024 UK cereal crop, expected to be 'historically bad'
- Solar farms can directly help to reduce climate change
- National food security concerns often raised by objectors to solar farms (especially very large NSIP projects) when the real issue is local / cumulative visual impact

Multi-purpose land: good impressions count

Solar Energy UK ambition = 50GW solar by 2030, including 25-30GW solar farms, up from 9GW today

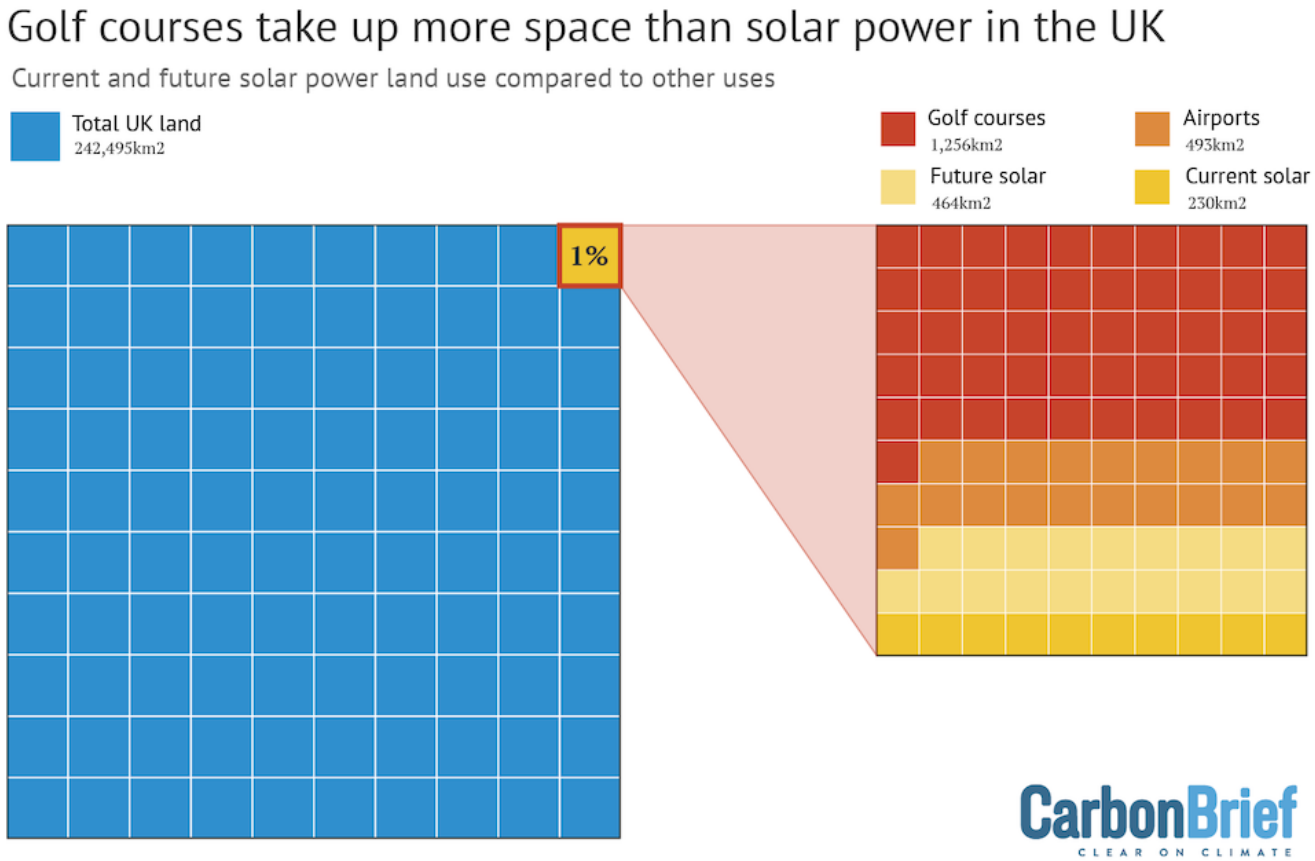
Larger solar farms more challenging, but total land use still modest alongside other renewables

70 GW by 2035

multi-functional land use (food, energy, environment)

Solar farms and agricultural land

- The amount of land needed for solar farm deployment, in line with the UK's net zero ambitions is minimal.
- To meet the Labour government's deployment targets of 50GW of solar deployment by 2030, approximately 0.22%-0.44% of the UKs land area would be needed.
- NFU is engaged with Defra officials on their intention to publish a Land Use Framework – emphasising multi-purpose use of land



Policy Context

- Planning policy directs ground mounted solar farms to areas of previously developed or lower grade agricultural land, where possible.
- NPPF revisions – increased support for renewable energy
- NPS EN-3 “Renewable Energy Infrastructure” (new chapter on solar: “land type should not be a predominating factor” in planning determination)
- Locational requirements – grid availability – grid constraint etc, brownfield sites are available but often in small areas not suitable for solar farm developments.
- No planning policy requiring landowners of BMVAL to use it solely for food production – most flexible, productive and efficient land use (solar can support multifunctional land use)

Striking a balance between food security and net zero

Tom Bradshaw, NFU Deputy President: “Solar farms offer an attractive diversification income opportunity for farmers when we strike the right balance between food security and climate ambitions. National planning guidance and NFU policy both express a preference for large scale solar farm development to be located as far as possible on lower quality agricultural land, avoiding the most productive and versatile soils. Utilising farm building roofs and canopies for solar should also be incentivised as this delivers a sustainable method of energy production while avoiding any land use conflict.” (2022-2024)

Agrivoltaics = food security *and* energy

Next2Sun – Germany (up to 4.1 MW, 14 ha)

Potential impacts during a projects lifecycle

- Construction/Decommissioning
  - Solar farms can cover large areas, but the actual footprint of the solar infrastructure is very small, typically less then 2% of the total site area.
  - Of the area that is disturbed, it is mostly access tracks to the inverters and substations.
  - Construction/Decommissioning is short term, and temporary risks identified and mitigated via Construction Environmental Management Plans/Decommissioning Environmental Management Plans
  - Once a site is decommissioned, all infrastructure can be removed and a site can go back to its previous form of land use.
- Operation
  - Minimal disturbance during operation (exception of routine maintenance)

Panel Discussion

Andrew Mott, Head of Planning and Environment, Exagen

Ed Payne, Senior Investment Associate, Next Energy Capital

Ed Perrin, Development Director at Low Carbon

Jonathan Scurlock, Chief Advisor, Renewable Energy, NFU

Please submit any questions for the panellists via slido

Thanks for joining!

The next session will be on solar and archaeology on 19th September, starting at 9.30am.