

Suffolk County Council meeting Thursday 12 December 2024 – Motion 2 as amended - Proposed by Councillor Andrew Stringer and seconded by Councillor Richard Rout

‘Energy Secretary Ed Miliband has promised to triple the amount of solar power in the UK by 2030, including a ‘rooftop solar revolution’ to encourage builders and empower homeowners to install solar panels on new and existing buildings.

This council recognises Suffolk will have a role to play in fully reaching the government target of 70GW of solar capacity by 2035, and renewable energy has the potential to reduce future increases in residents’ energy bills. However, current planning policy as applied by the planning inspectorate, Secretary of State and an uncoordinated approach to Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs) are creating significant challenges for our rural communities, including solar farms.

This council will welcome consultation on policies that would ensure solar installations are “roof before rural”, as many communities feel that East Anglia is seeing too much of our most productive and valuable land set aside for solar farms without clear community benefit, while too many new buildings are allowed to be constructed without the benefits of solar generation. There also needs to be a clear plan to retrofit existing buildings to take most advantage of the opportunities our towns and urban areas present.

This council believes that insufficient consideration is currently being given to upgrading the local electricity distribution grid to enable rooftop and brownfield solar schemes, such as over car parks.

Furthermore, the Council registers its concern that steps taken to date by the government and the solar industry to remove links to modern day slavery, particularly Uighur forced labour camps in Xinjiang, from the solar supply chain are insufficient and unacceptable.

This council agrees to write to the Secretary of State to outline these concerns, and to seek assurances that our best quality agricultural land is protected by ensuring existing and future developments play their part in reaching our sustainable energy targets.

This council will also a) continue to review its own buildings and assets to facilitate the installation of rooftop solar panels wherever practical, including libraries, family hubs and buildings on county farms b) work through Suffolk Public Sector Leaders to ensure any such installations by local authorities in Suffolk have the best possible supply chain guarantees.’

On a vote being taken 54 were in favour of the motion as amended, one against and one abstention. A record of the vote is available on the Council’s website at: <https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/asset-library/councillor-assets/2024-12-12-votes-at-council-motion-2.pdf>