

Motion to promote ethical solar power in our district

Proposed by: Councillor Nicholas Cox

Seconded by: Councillor Vicky Glover-Ward

The Council Notes:

1. That East Hertfordshire District Council (EHDC) is committed to its Climate Change Strategy and the transition to renewable energy.
2. The significant increase in planning applications and private sector projects involving large-scale solar photovoltaics (PV) within the district.
3. Credible international reports, including from the UN and the Sheffield Hallam University Helena Kennedy Centre, which identify a "high risk" of state-sponsored forced labour in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) of China being used in the production of polysilicon, a compound essential to for synthesising monocrystalline silicon found in modern solar PV panels—with a number of credible sources reporting this to be a key component of 95% of solar panels¹.
4. That the UK **Procurement Act 2023** empowers local authorities to exclude suppliers from bidding for contracts if there is evidence of modern slavery or serious professional misconduct in their supply chains.

The Council Believes:

1. That the transition to "Net Zero" must be a "Just Transition" that does not come at the cost of human rights or the exploitation of forced labour.
2. That as a public body, EHDC has a moral duty and a legal duty under the Modern Slavery Act 2015 to ensure its own procurement activities and the developments it encourages are ethically sourced.

The Council Resolves to:

¹ <https://www.ipac.global/news/statement-on-evidence-of-uyghur-forced-labour-in-global-solar-supply-chains>

1. **Audit Council Procurement:** Conduct a review of the council's own supply chains for any planned solar installations, including drafting specifications for solar PV hardware in accordance with the Solar Stewardship Initiative (SSI) standards or any recognised alternative or successor standards.
2. **Update Procurement Policy:** Formalise an "Ethical Procurement Policy" that requires all future bidders for council-led solar PV projects to provide a full "Supply Chain Transparency Statement," tracing components back to the raw material (polysilicon) stage in accordance with the Solar Stewardship Initiative (SSI) standards on any recognised alternative or successor standards.
3. **Planning:** Request that the Executive Member for Planning and Growth and the Director for Place include "Supply Chain Ethics" as a recommended advisory note (informative) on all approvals for large-scale solar farms, encouraging developers to use **Solar Stewardship Initiative (SSI)** certified hardware or other hardware compliant with any recognised alternative or successor standards.
4. **Provide information to residents:** Require that when providing advice, guidance or support to residents on energy efficiency or domestic retrofit, officers signpost residents to credible information sources on how to acquire ethically produced solar PV panels.
5. **Lobby National Government:** Write to the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, supporting the "forced labour" amendments to the Great British Energy Bill, urging stronger national import bans on goods produced with forced labour and requesting that central government provides financial and technical assistance to local authorities, businesses and residents on how to ascertain the ethical standards associated with solar PVs thus enabling the most ethical solutions even if they are more expensive.