

Submission of Closing Statement by Layla Moran

Member of Parliament for Oxford West & Abingdon

Registered Party Ref No [REDACTED]

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I am pleased to be able to take this opportunity to set out to the Planning Inspectorate (PINS) issues and concerns that have been raised to me by constituents regarding the Botley West solar proposal

I would like to thank the people that live in Oxford West & Abingdon for engaging with this process so diligently. Many residents have taken a great deal of time reading and responding to a significantly high volume of documents over the period of consultations and hearings.

From the beginning of this process, residents have consistently raised their concerns to me over the sheer size and scale of this proposal, and specifically the impact on the Southern Site which sits wholly within Oxford West & Abingdon and which will also include the National Grid power station.

The scheme as it stands is just too big, with little consideration of mitigations or alternatives for low carbon sites and grid connection points.

Like many constituents who have written to me, I firmly believe that we need to address climate change now. We know that by investing in renewable energy we will have an immediate and lasting impact on climate change and Net Zero. Building more low carbon energy infrastructure will help establish the UK as a world leader in renewables. It will help improve the UK's energy security, reduce energy bills across the country, and help us progress towards achieving Net Zero.

Oxfordshire has limited opportunities to create energy from renewables. Solar power is part of that mix. We need a range of low carbon energy solutions that deliver energy all year round and not put all our eggs into the solar basket. We need a Land Use Strategy that delivers food production, energy security and land for affordable housing. Using our valuable farmland should be driven by a land use strategy not a developer.

We have the opportunity to reform our planning system to drive a rooftop first strategy to deliver Oxfordshire's renewable energy.

My constituents have very clearly expressed to me that it is vitally important that the impact of any new solar plant on the greenbelt, biodiversity, amenity, and wildlife be considered.

Residents continue to tell me they have serious concerns over the impact on the local ecology and local wildlife sites and habitats, the impact of traffic during construction, the impact on flood risk and the impact on the Site of Special Scientific Interest at Wytham Woods. Hill End Outdoor Education Centre raises concerns about the detrimental impact to the residential and visual amenity of the 20,000+ visitors to their centre. Residents tell me that many of these concerns have not been adequately addressed within the evidence presented to the Inspectorate.

I note also Cumnor Parish Council's significant and serious concerns about the consistent lack of detailed responses to their questions from the developer to the Planning Inspector during the Examination process, their concerns about the lack of compliance with Cumnor Neighbourhood Plan Policies on 'Flood Risk' and 'Important Views', and the errors and omissions in key pieces of evidence such as the RVAA.

I also note that Cumnor Parish Council support the Examining Authority's proposed conditions that:

- No construction may commence until National Grid's application to VWHDC is granted, and
- The applicant, PVDP, must demonstrate how they intend to fund decommissioning in 42 years' time.

It is concerning to see that even after almost 6 months of Examination, the developer has still not been able to fully satisfy the questions and requests for evidence that the Planning Inspectorate has asked for, and asserts that some matters will only be addressed after planning permission is granted.

Given the scale of the power station and the potential impact on the area, this would appear to be a short-sighted way to plan for major renewable infrastructure projects.

I have raised questions around the funding of this project from the outset. I am disappointed that the questions around the funding of this scheme have not yet been fully answered. There remains a lack of clarity on how decommissioning will be guaranteed and also how community benefit will be delivered to a level appropriate to the extensive impact to local communities.

The recent Government working paper on "community benefits and shared ownership of clean energy infrastructure" makes clear the Government's expectation that future clean energy projects will adequately benefit the communities that host them. I continue to be disappointed by the low level of community benefit being suggested by the developer which falls short of comparable renewable projects.

I therefore support the Oxfordshire Host Authorities' request for the removal of the proposed southern site from the application.

Increasing Britain's renewable energy capacity is vital, and local residents fully support that objective. But if it is to carry public support, it has to be balanced with the need to protect our environment, landscape and good quality farmland. As the Government's working paper makes clear, the communities directly affected by large solar farms must receive a fair share of the benefits. The current proposals fall far short on all these counts