CALUM MILLER MP

HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

Rt Hon Ed Miliband MP
Secretary of State for Energy, Security and Net Zero
1 Victoria Street
London SW1H 0ET

12 February 2026

Dear Ed,

Botley West Solar Farm

We are writing following confirmation that the Planning Inspectorate has submitted its recommendation to your Department on the Botley West proposal. Before any decision is taken, we want to place on record the seriousness of the concerns that remain unresolved for a project that spans our constituencies.

In Departmental Questions this week, Calum raised with your Ministers concerns about engagement, transparency, ownership clarity and the level of community benefit. We have submitted representations at every stage of the process in good faith: hoping to influence the developer towards a project that would command more local public support. We now write directly to you because what happens next will be seen locally as a test of whether genuine concerns, raised constructively and repeatedly, are truly being heard.

We want to be absolutely clear about our starting point. We support renewable energy. We support solar. The climate crisis demands rapid deployment. That is why we welcomed the Government's backing of the Liberal Democrat Private Member's Bill to require solar panels on new build homes, and why we continue to advocate for rooftop and industrial solar at scale.

With any scheme, I hope you agree we need to bring communities with us and demonstrate that schemes are fully costed, are delivered in accordance with a carefully constructed energy strategy and can deliver the benefits claimed. Our worry is that this totemic scheme falls so far short of this that it risks undermining public confidence in any Government leading a sustainable and just transition.

Botley West would be the largest solar development in the UK and one of the largest in Europe. It would cover almost 2,500 acres, with more than 11,000 homes within 1.5 kilometres. No other project of this scale has been proposed in such close proximity to so many residents. That reality places a uniquely high obligation on both the developer and the decision-making process to meet the very highest standards of transparency, evidence, engagement and, crucially, community benefit.

Liberal Democrat MP for Bicester and Woodstock
[redacted]@parliament.uk

In that respect, the process to date has been deeply troubling.

Basic questions around ownership, financing and delivery still do not have clear answers, despite repeated requests from local representatives and the scrutiny of an extensive Examination. On 27 June 2023, Layla asked a Minister from the then Government, "how can we know that Russian money is not still being greenwashed through our economy here in the UK? I would welcome a meeting with him or Treasury Ministers to get to the bottom of where the money is coming from." We are now almost three years further on, with multiple consultations undertaken, media investigations raising serious questions and an NSIP Examination process completed, yet the position remains opaque. This is an approximately £800 million project and it remains unclear who will ultimately be responsible for delivering and operating the scheme.

The Planning Inspectorate has conducted the Examination diligently and in good faith. However, it has repeatedly been placed in an unacceptable position by the developer's failure to provide timely, clear and complete information. Constituents and the Inspectorate have repeatedly sought visualisations, impact assessments and evidence necessary to understand the true effects of the development on neighbouring communities. Towards the end of the Examination, the Inspectorate described it as "very disappointing" that critical information on visual impact was still outstanding.

This is not a minor procedural concern. Obfuscation and delay on a scheme of this size undermine confidence not only in this project but in the wider system for delivering renewable infrastructure fairly and lawfully. Public consent for the transition depends on developers playing by the rules and on regulators being able to enforce them. On Botley West, that confidence has been badly shaken.

We also continue to have serious concerns about the deliverability of the scheme. National Grid has stated that it is unable to deliver the necessary substation before late 2029. During the Examination, the Inspectorate suggested that a Grampian condition might be applied so that any development could not proceed until planning permission for the substation had been secured. Given the scale of disruption involved, and the risk of communities being left with a vast solar installation with no viable grid connection, we would welcome clarity on whether you are minded to enforce such a condition.

There is also a clear mismatch between the scale of this proposal and the community benefit currently on offer. For a project of this magnitude, affecting thousands of households and large areas of agricultural land, the proposed community benefit appears far lower than comparable solar projects. If communities are expected to host nationally significant renewable schemes, there must be a credible, proportionate and transparent commitment to local benefit, particularly where impacts are so concentrated.

To be crystal clear: we want solar schemes to succeed. Neighbouring solar farms, such as Southill in Charlbury, demonstrate how renewable energy can enrich local communities, with direct returns to residents and funding for community projects. But schemes must be delivered with communities, not imposed on them. They must be properly evidenced, properly financed, transparent in governance and ownership and matched by a community benefit package that reflects the true scale of impact. The quickest way to poison public confidence is to dismiss legitimate concerns about process, evidence and accountability as simple opposition to renewables.

Liberal Democrat MP for Bicester and Woodstock
[redacted]@parliament.uk

Given the scale, location and unresolved issues surrounding the developer's approach to Botley West, we would be grateful for your assurance that these concerns will be fully weighed before any decision is taken, and that the integrity of the process, and public confidence in it, will be upheld.

Michael Shanks kindly agreed to meet with Calum to discuss these issues further. Given the significance of the decision now before your Department, we would welcome you joining at that meeting, or for a separate meeting with you, so that we can share these concerns directly with you.

We are copying this letter to Michael Shanks and Lord Whitehead.

Yours sincerely,



Calum Miller MP



Layla Moran MP

Liberal Democrat MP for Bicester and Woodstock
calum.miller.mp@parliament.uk

Department for Energy Security & Net Zero

Department for Business & Trade

Chris McDonald MP
Minister for Industry
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Our ref: MCB2026/02123

18 February 2026

Calum Miller MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

By email: [redacted]@parliament.uk

Dear Calum Miller MP and Layla Moran MP

Thank you for your letter of 12 February to Rt Hon Ed Miliband MP regarding the Botley West Solar Farm. I am responding as this matter falls under my Ministerial portfolio.

I can confirm that your letter will be treated as a representation and will be carefully considered alongside all matters that are relevant to the decision-making on the application for development consent in accordance with the Planning Act 2008.

Given the Secretary of State's quasi-judicial role in taking decisions on applications for development consent for energy infrastructure proposals, it would not be appropriate for the Secretary of State or Minister in this department to comment on specific matters related to the proposals, as this could be seen as prejudicing the decision-making process.

Yours sincerely,

Chris McDonald MP
Minister for Industry
Department for Energy Security & Net Zero and
Department for Business and Trade

Guidance for Minister McDonald's correspondence based on his steers:

1. When discussing arrangements for a meeting, please ask stakeholders to contact Private Office using the following (or similar) phrase. It **must** include our email address*:*

   "Thank you for your kind offer to meet. I would be happy to accept this invitation. Please do get in touch with my Private Office at mcdonald@businessandtrade.gov.uk, who will be able to set this up".

2. Avoid using superfluous or strong adjectives and verbs (e.g. excellent", "important", "laser-focused" "slashing") as well as any phrases resembling clichés. For example, replace phrases like "I am very delighted" with "I am pleased". The tone should not be overly emotional. There is room for empathy and warmth in responses, but the tone should be generally business-like and formal. The Minister also prefers not to reference HMG stock terms such as 'Plan for Change' unless absolutely necessary.

3. Where there is bad news – e.g. about people losing their jobs – address it empathetically. Do not ignore it.

4. The Minister prefers not to use phrases such as 'I am delighted/pleased by…' when referring to good news or a positive HMG announcement. He prefers to keep things factual, rather than refer to, as he describes it, his emotional state. As an example, instead of 'I am delighted by the announcement made at the Budget', use 'Following the announcement at Budget' and then address the letter writers' original points.

Tone and language

- Should always be that of a normal business letter.
- Professional but relatable - plain English over technical jargon.
- Empathetic - recognise feelings behind the issue: frustration, pride, hope.
- Bold and proactive - outline a clear vision
- Pragmatic and constructive - explain challenges but focus on solutions.
- Optimistic - always leave readers with a sense that change is possible.

Punctuation and structure

- Avoid unnecessary hyphens where possible. Copilot has a tendency to overuse hyphenated words, so double check all letters for these before submitting.
- The Minister is keen that letters are concise and clear. If there is a way to use less words to say something, do so!
- Remember to delete this guidance page before submitting drafts to PO!

Key Phrases to Avoid

- ❌ *I am writing to*
- ❌ *Delighted/pleased – see point above*
- ❌ *Moreover*
- ❌ *However* (in the middle of a sentence; use only at the start)
- ❌ *Therefore* (over-formal; use "so" or restructure sentence)
- ❌ *I do not underestimate*
- ❌ *Okay*
- ❌ *Reach/reaching out* (replace with: contact)
- ❌ *Stepped up / doubled down*

Good examples

The Minister has shared the following as an example (from 1944!) of the sort of professional and succinct tone he would like to see:

‘The effective use of fuels of every kind is of vital importance now, and will continue to be essential to the country’s well-being so long as we are dependent on coal for our heat and power. The promotion of the efficient use of fuel has been a major preoccupation of the Ministry of Fuel and Power since its formation. I trust that this book, in which has been assembled a very great deal of information not readily available, will not only serve the present need, but will be of permanent value to all those concerned with this industrial use of fuel.’