CALUM MILLER MP

HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

Martin McCluskey MP
Minister for Energy Consumers
Department for Energy Security and Net Zero
55 Whitehall
London
SW1A 2HP

27 March 2026

Dear Martin,

Botley West Solar Plant

I am writing in the wake of your written statement of 26 March announcing a delay to the decision on the Botley West Solar Plant application until no later than 10 September 2026. This raises a number of questions relating to your consideration of what is proposed to be one of the largest solar plants in Europe.

As you know, I have raised concerns with your Department on a number of occasions about the quality of this application and the way in which the developer - Photovolt Development Partners (PVDP) - has approached the process. Your statement makes clear that the Department now requires further information from the applicant, and further time for that information to be considered by other interested parties. That is a striking position to reach at this late stage in the process.

It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that Ministers were not in a position to determine this application on the basis of the case put before them. After an examination lasting over a year, and after months in which local communities were told to place their faith in the process, the Government has now concluded that more information must be sought from the developer before a decision can be made. That raises an obvious question: why was the application not refused and the developer invited to return with a more robust and properly evidenced scheme?

This is not a case in which concerns have emerged suddenly or from a narrow group of objectors. Throughout the examination there were repeated and serious questions about the adequacy of the applicant's work. The Examining Authority itself was openly critical. In its Rule 17 correspondence, it said the applicant's response came across as "very dismissive" and found it "extraordinary" that the applicant had simply repeated its approach and methodology despite those matters having been questioned on numerous occasions. These are not minor

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observations, but rather that they directly question the credibility of the application and to the quality of the developer's engagement with the examination process.

I have consistently made clear that I support an increased role for renewable energy, including solar, in the UK's future energy mix. I want to work with you and your colleagues to get that done. Yet projects such as these must be properly evidenced, properly scrutinised, follow proper process and be delivered with communities, not done to them. In the case of Botley West, many local residents have felt for a long time that the level of developer engagement, transparency and community benefit on offer has fallen well short of the scale of the impact.

I am therefore seeking clarity on three specific points:

1. Please explain why the Department decided to extend the timetable in order to seek further information from the applicant, rather than refusing the application on the basis of the material already before it. If the developer's case was not sufficient for Ministers to make a decision within the statutory timetable, there is a strong public interest in understanding why the consequence was delay rather than refusal.
2. Please confirm what further information is being sought, what process will now be followed for the consideration of that material, and what steps the Department will take to ensure full transparency for interested parties.
3. I urge the Department to publish the report and recommendation from the Planning Inspectorate that has informed this latest step, including the context in which further information is now being sought from the applicant. If Ministers have concluded that further evidence is needed before a decision can be reached, then the public, local authorities and affected communities should be able to understand the basis on which that judgment has been made. Transparency is essential if confidence in this process is to be maintained.

Finally, I would be grateful if you could revisit the Department's position on ministerial engagement. Earlier this year, Michael Shanks indicated in the House that he would be happy to meet me again to discuss these issues. My office subsequently sought to arrange such a meeting but was told that this could not take place given the live status of the application. Considering the statement now made by your Department, which confirms that further information will be sought from the applicant and considered by other interested parties, that position appears difficult to sustain. I would be grateful for that meeting to be reinstated.

Yours sincerely,

[redacted]

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cc Michael Shanks MP, Minister for Energy

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Dear Calum Miller MP,

Thank you for your letter of 27 March to Minister McCluskey regarding the Botley West Solar Farm. I am responding as this matter falls under my Ministerial portfolio.

Your letter will be treated as a post-examination 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.

We would highlight the Governments Planning Propriety Issues Guidance :https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/planning-propriety-issues-guidance with particular reference to paragraphs 20, 21, 55 and 56.

The application for development consent for the Botley West Solar Farm is currently at the decision stage of the Planning Act (2008), and no decision has yet been made. The 26 March 2026 WMS confirms that the Secretary of State has made the decision for extension without prejudice to granting or refusing consent.

Requests for further information will be published on the Planning Inspectorates project webpage: Botley West Solar Farm - Project information. Interested Parties are advised to use the 'Get Updates' functionality, which will enable them to be kept informed of any requests and consultations during the decision-making stage of the process.

The decision letter, alongside the Examining Authority's Report, will be published on the Planning Inspectorate's website once a decision has been made. In taking a decision on any application for development consent, the Secretary of State will follow the relevant requirements of the Planning Act 2008 and have regard to all matters that are relevant to the decision.

Best wishes,

MICHAEL SHANKS MP
Minister of State for Energy