

LAYLA MORAN MP

Liberal Democrat Member of Parliament for Oxford West & Abingdon

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

Our Ref: FN/LM52720
16 July 2026

Dear Secretary of State,

Botley West – All Interested Parties – Invitation to Comment

I am pleased to be able to set out issues and concerns highlighted to me by constituents regarding the most recent request for comments by interested parties on the answers to the Request For Information.

I would ask that the Secretary of State (SoS) takes my previous comments into account as well as the additional concerns set out below.

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. 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.

However, how we deliver renewable energy matters. I strongly believe that schemes are most successful when communities are listened to, concerns are taken seriously, and proposals are adapted in response to local feedback. When residents can see that engagement has been meaningful, confidence in both the project and the planning process is strengthened.

It is therefore deeply concerning that many constituents continue to raise questions about the Applicant's adherence to requests and timescales set by the Examining Authority (ExA) and Secretary of State. The Applicant's request for an extension to submit key assessments has further undermined confidence. In particular, residents remain concerned by the continuing absence of a property-by-property Residential Visual Amenity Assessment, despite this issue having been raised repeatedly throughout the Examination process.

Of equal concern is the suggestion that insufficient time has been available to undertake this work. Constituents tell me that these issues were raised from the earliest stages of consultation and have remained unresolved despite repeated representations.

Public confidence in the NSIP process depends upon fairness, transparency and adherence to agreed timetables. I therefore support the position set out in your letter of 8 June that accepting substantial new evidence at this late-stage risks creating an 'undesirable precedent and could undermine confidence in the integrity of the planning process. It would also raise legitimate concerns regarding fairness to those who have worked to the agreed timetable throughout the examination.'

There remain significant concerns about this scheme that have not yet been fully addressed. Of particular concern is the ability of this scheme to connect to the grid. National Grid (NGET) state that their earliest connection date is Q4 2031 as opposed to a previous date of Q4 2029. This is a slippage of another 2 years. I support the call from the ExA to impose a Grampian requirement to prevent construction of Botley West from beginning until the NGET substation gains planning permission. Residents should not be left with a white elephant of redundant infrastructure for several years prior to it becoming operational.

There also still appears to be confusion as to the Order Limits of both the NGET proposal and the Botley West proposal. An infrastructure project of this size and scale cannot allow scope creep at any stage of planning, let alone at such an early stage.

I would like to request that careful thought is given to the representations of Cumnor Parish Council who have diligently engaged with the Examination process in good faith throughout but have serious concerns regarding:

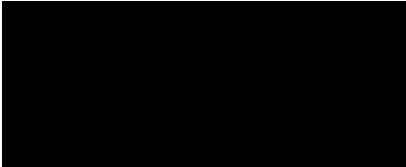
- The National Grid (NGET) Proposal as outlined above
- ICOMOS, along with Host Authorities and Cumnor Parish Council, recommended the removal of the southern site. It is worrying to see that there is no reference or response by the Applicant to this.
- No new information is provided on Mitigation Hierarchy
- Flood Risk continues to be a major concern for residents, and I ask that the SoS looks carefully at the evidence provided by Cumnor Parish Council and compare this to that provided by the Applicant to understand any inconsistencies.
- In terms of Landscape Impacts, the recommendation from the ExA to complete an updated Landscape Visual Impact Assessment has not been done. Constituents are concerned that the request to submit more accurate visuals and photomontages of key, elevated viewpoints has still not been completed.
- Throughout this process there have been repeated concerns raised about the cumulative impacts of a proposed adjacent solar farm (Red House Farm) and the Botley West associated NGET provided substation. The Applicant has yet to acknowledge these major projects and yet the cumulative impacts of these schemes will be significant and permanent.
- The request from the ExA to push back panels to 250m distance from residential properties is key feedback echoed by many residents and is a reasonable request. It is disappointing to see that a conditional push-back of 100-250m has been offered but with no firm commitment until after the DCO approval. This offer is unusual as I understand it only relates to panels and excludes a 250m buffer from the NGET substation which would have equivalent or more serious impacts. This is an area that I ask the SoS to look into carefully.
- Ecology and biodiversity. Residents are concerned that the methodologies are inconsistently applied by developers across the two adjacent solar farm proposals for Farmoor Valley leading to conflicting conclusions, with particular impacts on skylarks and bats.
- There are significant concerns around the methodology used for assessing the impact on ancient woodland – and disappointing to learn that the applicant has only been able to find 11 veteran trees amongst the stands of ancient woodland that surround the proposed southern site and that 4 areas of ancient woodland have been omitted.

The question before the Secretary of State is not whether we need renewable energy—we do. The question is whether this proposal, in its current form, has demonstrated that it can deliver those benefits without unacceptable impacts on local communities, landscapes and

habitats.

On the evidence before us, there is insufficient evidence for the SoS to judge the planning balance and it should, on that basis, be refused or withdrawn and re-submitted. Many of my constituents remain unconvinced, and I respectfully urge the Secretary of State to give those concerns significant weight.

Best wishes,



Layla Moran