

Lime Down Solar Farm - Open Floor Hearing

Tuesday 30th June 2026

Speech

Thank you, Chair.

I am Dr Roz Savage, Member of Parliament for South Cotswolds. I appear here as a registered interested party, on behalf of the communities in my constituency who would live with the consequences of this decision for the next six decades.

I want to be clear about where I stand. I support renewable energy - strongly. I have spent much of my adult life advocating for urgent action on the climate and nature crisis. I hold a UN Climate Hero designation. I have introduced legislation in Parliament to strengthen our response to climate change. I say this not to establish credentials, but because it matters: my opposition to this application is opposition to this development, in this location, as currently proposed.

Badly sited, inadequately assessed, and poorly justified projects do not serve the energy transition. They damage it - by generating local opposition that could have been avoided, by sacrificing environmental assets that should be protected, and by eroding the community confidence that any long-term energy strategy depends upon.

This application has serious, unresolved problems across four areas.

1. Scale and landscape harm

The proposed development covers 3,056 acres in total, with 1,850 acres of solar PV arrays, operational for up to 60 years. Its dispersed nature and exceptional scale would result in the long-term industrialisation of a sensitive rural landscape. The site lies close to the Cotswolds National Landscape. Cumulative impacts - including from the 22-kilometre cable route corridor - have not been robustly or transparently assessed. Wiltshire Council, the host authority, has concluded that compliance with landscape protection policies is "extremely difficult, if not impossible." That is not a minor objection to be weighed in the balance - it is a finding that the scheme, as submitted, may be fundamentally incompatible with applicable policy.

2. Incomplete ecological assessment

There are substantial gaps in ecological survey data along the cable route corridor, including limited or absent surveys for bats, birds, and protected species. The absence of secured,

enforceable, and detailed mitigation strategies means the Examining Authority cannot be satisfied that impacts on biodiversity and designated ecological sites can be adequately addressed. On an application of this scale, that is not acceptable.

3. Agricultural land and food security

Approximately 878 hectares of productive agricultural land would be removed from food production, including a significant proportion of best and most versatile land. The South Cotswolds is farming country. Food security is not an abstract concern here - it is the lived reality of the farmers and rural communities I represent. The case for removing that land from production for 60 years has not been made, particularly when alternatives - brownfield land, rooftops, lower-quality sites - remain available and underutilised. Wiltshire Council has also identified adverse impacts on the rural economy, including farming and tourism employment. These long-term economic harms have not been adequately weighed against the scheme's benefits.

4. Safety, infrastructure, and community impact

The inclusion of large-scale Battery Energy Storage Systems introduces safety considerations that have not been fully addressed. Construction and operation would place prolonged pressure on rural road networks and public rights of way. Communities would experience years of disruption - and the scheme, as currently proposed, offers no clear or guaranteed local benefits in return.

I also want to address the carbon balance. The developer's own assessment, as reviewed by Wiltshire Council, indicates that the carbon break-even point is not reached until several decades into the project's operational lifespan. In a scheme claiming climate credentials, that timeline matters. Climate benefits delayed by decades while landscape, ecology, and food production are harmed in the near term is not a straightforward case for approval.

Wiltshire Council does not support this application. The affected parish councils do not support it. Local communities do not support it. My local party - the South Cotswolds Liberal Democrats - submitted formal representations to this examination in January 2026 setting out these concerns in detail.

The NSIP regime exists because some decisions are of genuinely national significance. I respect that. But national significance does not override the requirement to demonstrate that benefits outweigh harms. That case has not been made here.

The planning balance, as it currently stands, weighs firmly against this proposal. The concerns raised by Wiltshire Council - missing information, inadequate mitigation, policy non-compliance - are significant and unresolved. They should be resolved before any consent is granted.

I urge the Examining Authority to refuse this application as currently submitted, and I thank you for the opportunity to put these concerns on the formal record.