



HELEN WHATELY MP
Member of Parliament for Faversham and Mid Kent

HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

OPEN LETTER TO GRAVENEY MARSH CAMPAIGNERS

7 October 2019

Dear Graveney Marsh Campaigners,

One month ago, on Monday 9 September, a group of 50 campaigners gathered in Westminster to protest against the Cleve Hill solar plant.

It was a fantastic afternoon and I'm grateful to everyone who made the journey (and those who were with us in spirit). It showed the strength of feeling against the development and – thanks to a life size model of one of the solar panel tables – it highlighted the scale of what we could face at Graveney Marshes.

The debate was postponed, but we had the opportunity to raise our concerns directly with the Environment Minister, Zac Goldsmith, in one of the committee rooms in Parliament. People told him their fears about the landscape being destroyed, wildlife being driven away, and the noise from the site during and after construction. It was a really useful meeting and the Minister paid tribute to our campaign.

In preparing for the debate, people across Government will have spent hours researching the situation at Cleve Hill. As a result, Ministers and civil servants are well informed about the substantial risks involved in this development and Cleve Hill is firmly on the Government's radar.

Last month I was appointed Minister for Arts, Heritage and Tourism. Having a job in Government means I am unable to lead a debate in Parliament on Cleve Hill, but in many ways the debate has already served its purpose. We have raised the profile of the campaign and made the Government aware of why this development would be so damaging to the local environment.

Thank you to everyone who has contacted me with their experiences of the Marshes or made suggestions for how to oppose the development – it has been a great help. I will continue to do all I can to oppose this development and ensure the voice of local people is heard.

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Hard copies are available upon request. Please let me know if you have any questions about these arrangements.



In the last month, I have written to the Chair of Natural England, Tony Juniper, to highlight the opportunity to restore Graveney Marshes to coastal saltmarsh. Recreating a wetland habitat in this area would help attract even more wildlife and create a giant carbon sink – I have learned that saltmarsh can store up to 8 tonnes of carbon every year. This is a far more exciting future for this landscape than covering it with industrial panels. I have secured a meeting with the Environment Secretary, Theresa Villiers MP, later this month to raise this point with her and will also be having conversations with the Business Secretary, Andrea Leadsom MP, who will make the final decision.

After months of campaigning, the planning inspectors are due to make a recommendation next month. This is a hugely important decision and I know it is probably causing some people sleepless nights. Thanks to the work of GREAT and other groups and people, the inspectors can be in no-doubt about the risks of this development to the environment, public health and local economy.

I'm extremely proud to have been part of this campaign. We have shown that the development does not have the support of local people, and set out an alternative, positive, vision for this landscape.

Whatever the outcome of the planning inspection, I will continue to speak up for local people at every opportunity. We have achieved so much already in bringing people together to oppose this development, and will work hard to secure the best possible future for this landscape, and the wildlife and people who call it home.

Helen Whately MP

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