

Alok Sharma MP
Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy
1 Victoria Street
London
SW1H 0ET

Reference No. HW28204

25 February 2020

Congratulations on your appointment as Secretary of State.

I'm writing to raise concerns about the environmental impact of the proposed Cleve Hill solar plant in my constituency.

You will shortly be receiving a report and recommendations from the Planning Inspectorate about this development. As Secretary of State, you will make the final decision on whether to grant permission for it to go ahead.

I strongly hope you will reject the development on the basis that it will do more harm than good for the environment, and destroy the habitat of some of our most loved wildlife.

Cleve Hill is the largest ever onshore solar plant proposed in the UK - covering almost 900 acres, which is larger than the footprint of the town of Faversham.

The development is proposed on a stretch of the North Kent Coast known as Graveney Marshes. The area is home to lapwings, marsh harriers, skylarks and a host of other rare birds and mammals. It draws people from near and far on account of its beauty and tranquillity, and the amount of wildlife to be seen.

Since the proposals were first announced, I have received a huge number of letters and emails from people asking me to oppose the development. There is real concern about the damage this development would do to the landscape, wildlife, and local economy of the area.

Renewable energy is a vital part in making us the first generation to leave the environment in a better state than we found it and achieving our Government's aim of net-zero carbon emissions by 2050. However, we must make sure that renewable energy does not end up causing more harm than good to the environment.

One of the biggest frustrations of local people is that the development is proposed on land earmarked by the Environment Agency for managed realignment, which would allow the sea back in and restore this area to coastal saltmarsh. If the development goes ahead then plans for this wetland habitat would have to be delayed by 40 years - possibly indefinitely.

Cont...

Building a solar plant on land that could become restored saltmarsh, and lock away hundreds of tonnes of carbon every year, simply doesn't seem to make sense as a measure to tackle climate change.

Saltmarsh is such a valuable habitat and any opportunity to restore it should not be lost. The Government estimates that saltmarsh and other coastal habitats provide ecosystem services worth a staggering £48 billion.

We have the most fantastic opportunity at Graveney Marshes to restore a rare and precious wetland habitat – creating a haven for wildlife and a carbon sink for years to come. I hope you will consider this when making your decision.

I would welcome an opportunity to meet you to discuss the impact of this development on my constituency and hear why people are so opposed to it. If possible, I would be delighted to arrange a visit for you to Graveney Marshes to see the site of the proposed development and hear first-hand from people who would be most affected.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Helen Whately MP

Member of Parliament for Faversham and Mid Kent