

This is a copy of a letter from Pippa Heylings that seems to have been sent to those constituents that copied their Statutory Consultation response to her. If I see a copy of Pippa Heyling's own Statutory Consultation response I'll add that here.

Dear _____,

Thank you for contacting me regarding the Kingsway Solar development.

I apologise for the wait for a full response from me, however I wanted to wait until the end of the statutory consultation period so that I could hear from my constituents before feeding back my views and planned actions on this issue.

I have heard from many constituents about this solar farm proposal, which will directly impact West Wratting, Weston Colville, Weston Green, Willingham Green, Balsham and Carlton. I completely understand the distress and anxiety felt by so many and also share many of the concerns that have been expressed.

Both your individual comments and the hundreds of submissions to the statutory consultation, which I have been copied in on, clearly lay out the issues, concerns and objections about the revised plans for the proposed solar farm development. It is hugely important for local voices to be heard through the statutory consultation and I know how much time and effort that can require, so I would like to thank all those who have submitted responses.

In order to represent your views and hold both the government and the developer to account, I have secured two key meetings next week. On Monday 3rd November I have secured a meeting with the Minister for Energy, Michael Shanks and on Tuesday 4th November, I will be meeting with David Vernon, the project lead for Kingsway Solar and the Head of Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects at Downing Renewables.

In the meeting with Kingsway, I will highlight the concerns I have heard from you and other constituents about the development and demand assurances that these comments will be taken into consideration. I will also raise concerns about the quality of the engagement by Kingsway and the lack of clear answers at this crucial stage.

Having attended the drop-in organised by Kingsway Solar in Balsham, I have serious concerns about what I consider to be an extremely poor-quality level of engagement by the developer. I expect a greater level of respect for constituents. Local people have spent a huge amount of time researching this project, and many have relevant expertise that they bring to bear on different aspects of the project. I would have expected the Kingsway representatives at the drop-ins to both prepare better to be able to answer constituents' questions and listen much harder to what constituents are actually asking and commenting on.

I know that your local councillors, Geoff Harvey (District) and Henry Batchelor (County), have paid keen attention to the project proposals – engaging with local residents in the affected villages and undertaking a lot of analysis – and subsequently submitting their comments to

the consultation. They make important, strong points that amplify local voices, and I will continue to take their representations, along with those of residents and local authorities, on board in my actions as the Member of Parliament.

At the national level, I am concerned that the government is greenlighting large-scale projects like this without having clear rules and frameworks in place, such as the Land Use Framework, the Strategic Spatial Energy Plan, the Local Area Energy Plan and clear mandatory guidance for community benefits. Without clear rules in place, there is the risk of this being the Wild West of profit-led opportunism, with developers racing to get to the front of the queue in terms of NSIP approval and connection to the grid with the NESO grid connections reforms. The disparity in the delivery of solar across the UK is troubling, showing what happens when it is not guided by clear frameworks and rules for genuinely taking into account the considerations of local people, the environment and competing land uses.

We know that there is a need for more renewable energy, including solar projects, to bring down bills and meet our climate goals. We have succeeded in getting the government to agree to require solar panels on the roofs of all new homes and we are now pushing for solar panels on all car parks, factories and storage warehouses. However, there is still a need for some large-scale solar across the country. In my meeting with the Minister, I will escalate my demands for decisions nationally on the Land-Use Framework and Strategic Spatial Energy Plan so that our land use planning, including large-scale solar farms like Kingsway Solar, can be joined up and achieve a balance among the competing values of the land. I will also push for a decision on mandatory guidance on community benefits for renewable energy and that these should be negotiated with the community ahead of any developments. If this development is to go ahead, it needs to be gold standard- bringing people along and protecting biodiversity. Kingsway Solar must fully understand the responsibility that comes with delivering and operating a nationally significant infrastructure project. From what I have seen so far, they are not living up to this.

If this development is to go forward, I will be pushing for:

Clear and detailed proposals about how the infrastructure will be visually mitigated to protect views and public rights of way

Ambitious biodiversity net gain targets rather than the bare minimum of 10% that Kingsway has set out. Other large-scale solar developments have set this target far higher (such as Botley West with a 70% target) and I see no reason why Kingsway should not be pressed to aim far higher

Engagement with organisations such as the RSPB and Natural England, given their track record of working with solar developers to ensure biodiversity protections

The community benefits figure, which has been set at £300,000 per year, to be revised up – in Scotland, this number would be £2.5million per year (as per the £5000 per installed MW for Scottish onshore wind)

I am also acutely aware of renewed concerns relating to the Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) and the potential impact that a BESS fire could have on the chalk aquifer and drinking water. During the last stage of consultation, I pushed for Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service to be given additional time to respond, as I felt that their contribution would provide an essential contribution to the planning. In June, my Liberal Democrat colleague,

John Milne MP, led a debate in Parliament on the gap in current regulations and the need for increased regulatory safety in BESS, calling on the Government to bring forward enforceable national regulations. In response, the Minister confirmed that there will be new safety guidance issued. That is still not forthcoming. I am not yet convinced that the risks associated with the installation of BESS have been adequately planned for, given the significant risks posed in the unlikely event of a fire and will be discussing this further again with Kingsway and the Minister.

Thank you again for getting in contact with me.

Yours sincerely,

Pippa