



Dear Solar Campaign(ers)

We are writing to invite you to take part in a new Parliamentary initiative to challenge current legislation that is unable to prevent the establishment of utility-scale solar installations, many under the Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP) legislation, even when such proposals run counter to the wishes of the affected populations.

We are a small group of independent citizens based in Oxfordshire where Europe's largest Solar Farm proposal (Botley West Solar Farm 1,307 MWp) finished its statutory NSIP consultation in January 2024, with a view to submitting a full application to the Planning Inspectorate sometime later in the year. We are working in collaboration with the local campaign group 'Stop Botley West' <https://stopbotleywest.com/>

Developments such as your own, and Botley West, are being done to us rather than with us, in a legislative framework that gives local people virtually no power to restrict any NSIP proposal, to suggest better places for deployment, or to suggest more efficient alternatives (such as offshore wind). This is partly because there seems to be no overall Government policy on the correct energy mix for the UK, beyond a simple drive to increase all forms of renewables. Neither the type of renewable, nor its spatial distribution, nor any competing demand for the use of land (for example, for growing food) appear to be valid planning concerns for the NSIP process. In addition, developers increasingly use the 'exceptional circumstances' clause to justify using precious green belt land for solar installations or battery storage units.

We want this cavalier use of land and the equally cavalier treatment of the local population to stop. When developers have the whip hand, the democratic process is ignored, and democracy becomes a meaningless joke.

So, what do we propose to do? **We want to take this important discussion about renewables to the heart of Government.**

We invite you to join us in a three-step process as follows:

Step 1: we want to hold a drop-in event in Parliament very early in the New Year to which all MPs and others directly affected by utility scale solar installations will be invited. If you would like to join our initiative, we would welcome any information you care to present to the MPs on your own 'local' solar installation.

Step 2: we then want to persuade some of those MPs who visit the drop-in event, and others, to establish an All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) to examine the role of different renewables in the UK's future energy mix. It goes without saying that the intermittency of solar power in the UK situation means that solar installations alone can provide only a fraction of our total electricity needs. What should that fraction be and where best might it be deployed? An APPG of this sort can call evidence from various experts and produce Reports etc. to push this important topic up the political agenda.

Step 3: finally, we want to ensure that sufficient interest is generated by Steps 1 and 2 that one or more MPs (probably with our prompting!) ask for a full debate in the House of Commons on Renewable Energy in general and the role of large, even utility-scale solar installations in particular. This debate should also include considerations of alternative uses of the land proposed for renewables, and whether or not a larger range of

Agricultural Land Classification-graded land should be kept for food production. There is a developing food crisis and of one thing we can be certain: we cannot eat renewable electricity.

Steps 1 to 3 form an ambitious program that takes the local debates about utility scale solar to the centre of power, the Government. Most utility solar installations are in presently Conservative constituencies. We want to make this an election issue for those MPs seeking re-election, and for those candidates seeking to replace them.

This matter is now both urgent and timely. You may be aware of significant changes that were slipped into the current version of the National Policy Statement on Energy in November last year and passed 'automatically' into law in mid-January. These changes apply a 'presumption in favour' of renewable energy proposals and extend a new category of Critical National Priorities (CNP), originally proposed only for offshore wind, to all renewable energy projects, including solar. Attached please find a letter we sent out to key people from the Prime Minister down about these un-consulted but significant changes to the way we are governed (LettertothePrimeMinister.pdf).

Our initiative is timely because of the forthcoming General Election which will be called for later this year (possibly as early as June). Together we CAN make this an election issue. Together we MUST make sure that local people have more of a say in the future of their local area and community. Developers with the power of the proposed changes in the legislation will act even more like robber barons in the future – given so much power and with no responsibility to the areas in which we, our friends and neighbours, have chosen to live our lives and make our homes.

There is an urgency about what we propose, so we would be grateful to hear from you and/or your campaigning group at the earliest opportunity, please. Nothing of what we propose (Steps 1 to 3 above) can be done by us alone. They each have to be initiated by one or more MPs. If you feel your local MP has sufficient interest to be one of the MP sponsors of our first event (Step 1 above) please let us know. Ideally, we need at least one from each political party – because we want to remain a-political overall. Currently affected constituencies are predominantly represented by Conservative Party MPs, so if your MP is supportive and not a Conservative MP, we are particularly keen to hear from you.

Please reply to our new email solarque23@gmail.com

We do hope you will join us in this exciting and important initiative.

Looking forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Ruth Atherstone

Daniel Bliss

David Rogers

A bit about us

Who are we?

Helen is a Professor of English Language and Literature who has lived in the area for over 20 years and likes walking, cycling, and foraging in it.

Michael - lawyer and chair of tribunals. Has lived in West Oxfordshire for 25 years and is very concerned that fundamental changes to the criteria for granting development consent for the largest solar power stations on productive farmland and swathes of green belt are being imposed without adequate public consultation or parliamentary attention.

Tom is an agriculturalist interested in applied scientific developments and as a former businessman the manager of an electronic engineering business.

David is Emeritus Professor of Ecology in the University of Oxford. He'd prefer to be doing something else, but also wants to look his grandchildren in the eye and say 'Well, I did my best to stop inappropriate development thoughtlessly ruining your countryside'.

Our group name and contact

We are working with our local campaign, Stop Botley West, but have a new name for this nation-wide initiative, SolarQ UK, which invites all similar campaigns to join us in a Parliamentary endeavour to change the way in which utility-scale solar proposals, especially at the NSIP scale, are treated. Our gmail address is solarque23@gmail.com

Who funds us?

We have no independent sources of funding. Probably like yourselves, we depend on the kindness of relatives, friends, colleagues, neighbours and strangers – it's a great way of getting members of our community to talk with each other. But we'd really prefer it if it were cricket or gardening, rather than the threat of an NSIP, that got us together.

Skills we need

If we are to make any impression on Parliament, we'll need decent displays for the Step 1 event. If you already have any, or if you have anyone with artistic skills to help us design them, please let us know (we want to have a consistent standard across all exhibits so we may use your information but not necessarily your material; hope you understand this). We also want to video all events for our (and your) future use. Any video needs to be of professional standard. If you have any skilled video makers and editors, please let us know. Some campaigns also have excellent videos of proposed sites, taken by drones. Again, if you know of anyone with a drone who also likes travel (and a free lunch in a local pub), please get in touch.

Finally, we need experts on every aspect of renewable energy, especially solar. We are already getting to grips with 'Load Factors', 'Over-sizing' (of solar arrays), 'intermittency', 'Biodiversity metrics', 'Strike prices', 'Market clearing prices', National Grid terminology etc. etc. But we still have a very long way to go. Experts help us to understand things better and will also be useful for Step 2, APPG expert witnesses. Let's share information and share expertise.

Go Fund Us

It's early days, you don't yet know who we are, and your campaign is run on a shoe-string budget. But we will need funds for this activity. We have already raised a small sum locally towards employing a full-time Parliamentary aide, to be associated with one of our supportive MPs, who will spend all of her/his time visiting MPs offices, talking with their Special Advisers ('SPADs') and pushing our agenda forward. But we will need more. Our initiative needs continuous, daily Parliamentary contact; meeting and greeting; reminding MPs and their SPADs of promises they made to support us or our events, etc. etc. It is not something that any individual campaigner can do (and, in any case, we want someone with Parliamentary experience for this job). We want to employ someone on a freelance basis for a minimum period of 6 months to carry us through the first three Steps (above) and beyond. That needs funds of the order of £30K.

We have found that presenting this new initiative to local businesspeople, as an addition to whatever regular campaigning is happening locally, will sometimes produce cheques to help out. The sooner we are fully funded for a Parliamentary aide, the sooner we can begin to make a difference!