Solar Arrays

Sarah Wollaston (Totnes, Conservative) Click here to watch Sarah speak

What assessment he has made of the effect of large-scale solar arrays on rural environment and agricultural land; and if he will take steps to help communities resist inappropriate developments.

Gregory Barker (Minister of State (Climate Change), Energy and Climate Change; Bexhill and Battle, Conservative)

Solar PV has a big, bright future in the UK, but not at any price and not in any place. Our priority continues to be to work with the industry to drive down costs, but it is also to ensure that deployment is focused on buildings and brownfield sites, not prime agricultural land or areas of outstanding natural beauty.

Sarah Wollaston (Totnes, Conservative)

I am delighted that the Minister shares my concern and the concern of communities in Diptford, south Devon, and other areas about the inappropriate proliferation of very large-scale solar PV on greenfield sites. Could he go further and set out the practical steps that he is taking to ensure that these developments occur in the right places?

Gregory Barker (Minister of State (Climate Change), Energy and Climate Change; Bexhill and Battle, Conservative)

My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Well-sited solar can be great and often is, but inappropriate development risks alienating public support. That is why I am pleased to say that, in the next few weeks, as a result of close work with the Department for Communities and Local Government, we will issue revised planning guidance for renewables. That will mean that renewable energy does not automatically override environmental protections and the planning concerns of local communities. It will also make it clear that care should be taken to preserve heritage assets and beautiful countryside, and include the impact of planning proposals on views and landscape when it comes to things such as solar. That is in addition to our sustainability criteria, on which we are working closely with the industry.

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