Solar Arrays (Impact on Landscape)

Dr Sarah Wollaston (Totnes) (Con): Click here to watch Sarah speak

What is his policy on whether planning inspectors at appeal or local authority planning committees should determine what constitutes cumulative impact on the landscape from large-scale solar arrays.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Kris Hopkins): I know from recent correspondence of my hon. Friend's concerns about large-scale solar arrays. Although I cannot comment on particular cases, I can assure you that the same expectations on deciding planning applications apply to inspectors and local councils.

Mr Speaker: Order. May I invite the Minister to remember the merits of the third person, of which I am sure he is very conscious?

Dr Wollaston: I thank the Minister for his reply. He will know that local residents and South Hams district councillors were very disappointed that he did not haul in the application for another 58 acres of solar arrays near Diptford. That is the fourth large-scale development within a three-mile radius of a tiny community in my constituency. He will also know that district councillors are under great pressure to accept such applications, because when they turn them down, as they did in Kingsbridge recently, the applications are overturned on appeal, with punitive costs. Will the Minister reassure me, and meet me to discuss how the situation can be resolved?

Kris Hopkins: I am more than willing to meet my hon. Friend. I cannot comment on individual cases, but I should emphasise that the solution to giving confidence to a local council about the decisions it makes, and to the community, is to have a secure local plan, under which people clearly determine what they want to be built in their area. At the moment, the plan that covers the area where the hon. Lady works and lives is not appropriate and does not give that security.

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