



## **APPENDIX 4**

Letter from the Secretary of State (Robert Jenrick)  
to Oliver Heald dated 16 August 2021.

Objection to development at  
Maggotts End, Manuden  
(Pelham Spring Solar Farm)

PINS Reference: S62A/22/0011

## Appendix 4

### Letter from the Secretary of State (Robert Jenrick) to Oliver Heald dated 16 August 2021



Rt Hon Sir Oliver Heald QC MP  
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Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP  
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Our Ref: 11804589

16<sup>th</sup> August 2021

*Dear Oliver,*

Thank you for your email of 5 July on behalf of your constituents, regarding recent planning applications for solar farms in your constituency. I appreciate how important this matter is to your constituents and I am grateful to you for contacting this department on their behalf.

I hope that you will understand that for reasons of propriety I am unable to comment upon specific planning proposals. Local Authorities are required to make decisions in accordance with the Local Plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Local Plans should set out the opportunities for development and clear policies on what will or will not be permitted and must take into account national planning policy in the National Planning Policy Framework. I hope that it will be helpful if I set out below the policy in this area.

The National Planning Policy Framework expects local authorities to protect and enhance valued landscapes and sites of biodiversity and recognise the character and beauty of the countryside and the benefits of the best and most versatile farmland in their policies and decisions. We believe that local authorities are best placed to assess the visual and other impacts of any building or structure proposed; it is right that they decide where necessary development should go, and where restraint is essential, having regard to national as well as local planning policy.

For instance, a number of proposals for solar farms in the countryside have been rejected as causing visual harm, harm to amenity or harm to openness. On the one hand, the Framework expects the planning system to support transition to a low carbon future to renewable and low carbon energy generation. Paragraph 151 adds that development planning should consider identifying suitable areas for renewable and low carbon energy sources and infrastructure. At the same time, local authorities should protect all that we value in landscapes and natural capital, as indicated above.

Similarly, with regard to onshore windfarm proposals, the Government has been clear that the need for renewable energy does not automatically override environmental protections and the planning concerns of any local communities affected. The Framework indicates that planning permission for new wind energy projects, except for their repowering, should be granted only if the site is in an area identified as suitable for wind energy development in a local or neighbourhood plan and if, following consultation, it can be demonstrated that the planning impacts identified by the community are fully addressed and the proposal has its backing.

I would like to reassure your constituents that we place great importance upon our agriculture and food production, and this is reflected in the National Planning Policy Framework. The Framework requires local planning authorities to take into account all the benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land. Where significant development of agricultural land is shown to be necessary,

planning authorities should seek to use poorer quality land in preference to that of a higher quality. They should also consider the needs of the food production industry and any barriers to investment that planning can resolve. The Framework states that, to promote a strong rural economy, local and neighbourhood plans should promote the development and diversification of agricultural and other land-based rural businesses. Moreover, local planning authorities are asked to encourage re-use of brownfield land provided that it is not of high environmental value, to recognise the character and beauty of the countryside, and to maintain the strong protections in place for Green Belt and other designated countryside.

I trust this information is of help to you and your constituents. Thank you for writing in on this important matter.

*Yours, Robert*

**RT HON ROBERT JENRICK MP**