

**Katie Lam**  
**Member of Parliament for the Weald of Kent**



House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA

December 2024

To Whom it May Concern:

As the Member of Parliament for the Weald of Kent, I write to share my serious concerns about the proposed solar farm and the lasting impact it will have on my constituents and the local environment. I appreciate the attractions of renewable energy, but these projects must be handled responsibly, with appropriate consideration for the communities and landscapes they affect.

This proposal is deeply worrying to residents, to local councils, and to me. It threatens the safety of our community and the unique character of our rural landscape. My main concerns are:

**Safety Risks from Battery Storage:**

Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESSs) use a large number of batteries, and while they're designed to store energy safely, we can't assume they're completely risk-free – especially when planned so close to people's homes.

In 2020, residents in Liverpool experienced a BESS fire that took nearly 60 hours to put out – showing these aren't just theoretical risks. BESS fires are often caused by "thermal runaway," where heat inside a battery triggers a chain reaction. This can happen from damage, overheating, or a manufacturing fault.

Some batteries in this installation will be just 160 metres from homes. When these systems catch fire, they burn for a long time – exposing people to toxic smoke – and need huge amounts of water to extinguish. Exact figures for how much water the applicant plans to store on site to mitigate this risk have not been made clear, so I am concerned that too much pressure will be put on the local supply in the event of an incident. In their 2025-2029 delivery plan Kent Fire and Rescue Service specifically cite new developments and commercial projects putting pressure on the water supply as a concern when considering how much water is available to them in emergencies. Southern Water has also raised concerns that the construction of this site could involve digging in areas that risk damaging critical sewage systems, potentially disrupting essential services for thousands of residents and creating serious environmental and health risks if the systems are compromised.

The applicant has spread over 100 batteries across the site, making it even harder for emergency services to respond effectively. Water used to fight a fire could also mix with toxic chemicals from the batteries, polluting nearby rivers like the East Stour River and cause severe harm to local wildlife and ecosystems, contrary to the standards set out in National Policy Statement EN-1 4.3.

This application must be judged based on the reasonable worst-case scenario where the safety of local residents is concerned; we should not assume that these systems are safe until proven otherwise.

### **Local Landscape and Infrastructure:**

There are also practical concerns about the disruption construction will cause. With at least 12 public roads running through and around the site, as well as several public rights of way, the proposed project will lead to an increase in non-local traffic and noise in the area. This will have a serious impact on local residents, their ability to go about their everyday lives and their ability to access the countryside, contrary to the guidelines set out in section ENV10 3 of Ashford Borough Council's local plan. Although the final decision on this application is not being made at the local level, the local plan designed to facilitate sensible and sustainable development that both benefits and protects local residents must not be disregarded.

I am also concerned that this project doesn't meet the standards set forward in NPS EN-1 4 and 5 when considering the harm that these proposals will have on our local landscape, as well as on several local heritage assets nearby. It's highly visible from many key points, and the developer hasn't provided enough evidence to show how it will affect the views or reduce its impact; a lot of the photos and visualisations they've shared aren't clear enough to show the true size of the project or what it will really look like. EN1 4.7.2 is clear that infrastructure projects should be 'sensitive to place' and I'm worried that this cannot be properly judged with the information currently available.

If this application is approved, it will do irreparable damage to the rural character of our landscape. The safety risks from the BESS haven't been satisfactorily considered. Our planning system is meant to balance national goals with protecting local communities and landscapes. This project clearly goes too far and should not move forward.

Thank you for taking the time to consider my views.

Yours Sincerely,

Katie Lam MP  
Weald of Kent