

JAMES GRAY MP



**HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA**

Press Release – Immediate

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**James Gray MP raises planning matters of local and national importance
in the House of Commons**

North Wiltshire MP James Gray took part in two Parliamentary debates on matters associated with planning this week. On Tuesday during a debate on the role of Neighbourhood Plans in national planning policy, Mr Gray emphasised the importance of local people being able to decide what houses should be build where, when and in which quantity.

Mr Gray said:

“I am very proud of the fact that Malmesbury in my constituency was one of the first places in the UK to produce a Neighbourhood Plan, setting an example to other neighbourhood planners across the country. However, in practice, Neighbourhood Plans are often trumped in favour of expansion, are already out of date by the time they are fully completed and the so-called five-year housing land supply figures which determine whether an application should be allowed routinely trump the Neighbourhood Plan. Not only that, but because the required five-year land supply is calculated using completed houses, there is an inbuilt incentive for developers intentionally not to complete housing estates in the area. The developers are experts at gaming the system.”

Mr Gray added:

“At the moment, the planning system does not take account of local interests and beliefs and neighbourhood planning. It takes account of nationally set targets, which tend to trump the wishes of local people. I very much hope that during the passage of the Levelling up and Regeneration Bill, which will start tomorrow, the Government will consider some of these detailed points and change the Bill in such a way as to ensure that the interests of local people are looked after when we decide how many houses will be built and when and where.”

During the debate, Mr Gray further remarked that:

“Developers should, of course, be encouraged to reuse brownfield sites in town centres, but, given the choice between a brownfield site in a town centre or a greenfield site in the countryside, they are going to go for the greenfield site. We therefore have to change the planning system to focus house building on previously used land.”

Then on Wednesday, Mr Gray turned his attention to planning regulations on solar farms and battery storage solutions, on which he sponsored his own debate.

“While I am strongly in favour of renewable energy, the Government should rethink the type of land these installations will be built on. Solar farms seem to be spreading uncontrollably here in North Wiltshire. They are an unsightly desecration of the countryside; they reduce the agricultural use possible from the area just when we are facing a real crisis in food production due to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine; and they are of a technology which will probably be outdated before long. Further, battery storage solutions also seem to be springing up all over the place. They are a huge fire risk, and they do not make a single contribution towards renewables. Myself and other Colleagues across the House are therefore calling on the Government to reduce the number of solar farms and battery storage solutions on agricultural land in favour of increasing food production.”

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Note to Editors:

A full transcript of Mr Gray’s contributions during the Westminster Hall Debate on Neighbourhood Plans can be found here:

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2022-06-07/debates/22060730000001/NeighbourhoodPlans>

A full transcript of Mr Gray’s Westminster Hall Debate on solar farms and battery storage solutions is available here:

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2022-06-08/debates/137D2865-E237-451F-8262-07923BDDC549/SolarFarmsAndBatteryStorage>