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I am writing to you both regarding the issue of so-called energy from waste (EfW) incinerators which has become a matter of serious concern in my South West Wiltshire constituency. On 21 February 2023, the Planning Inspectorate in Bristol gave permission for Northacre Renewable Energy Ltd to build an incinerator in the town of Westbury. Not only is this incinerator unwanted, the building of more such EfW facilities is incompatible with our national environmental targets. I therefore urge the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs to enact a moratorium on the construction of incinerators, or, at the very least, establish a firmer national framework to limit incineration inflation.

A moratorium is needed because the current national planning framework is not serving Defra's stated aims. Defra has consulted on a target, in pursuance of the 2021 Environment Act, to halve residual waste by 2042. This target was reiterated in the Government's Environmental Improvement Plan, published 31 January 2023. If this goal is to be met, we need less incineration and more action higher in the waste hierarchy. With the current number of incinerators, including those under construction, we have the capacity to incinerate 18.9 million tonnes per annum. To meet the 2042 target set by Defra, however, we need to reduce our capacity to 13.9 million tonnes per annum. We are therefore likely to be 8.5 million tonnes over capacity by our target date. Even more troubling, this figure has been calculated (by the group UK Without Incinerators) under the assumption that we put a moratorium on new incinerators now. If we do not, we will end up 14 million tonnes over capacity.

In addition to the problem of overcapacity, the environmental impact of incinerators is deeply concerning. There is good evidence to show that incineration, once seen as a greener alternative

to landfill, is not part of a Net Zero future. Firstly, there are the high levels of carbon emissions which have been calculated at 6.4 million tonnes per annum across the UK. Secondly, incineration stands in tension with recycling. Defra have estimated that 55% of English residual waste feedstock could be readily recycled and that 76% is potentially recyclable. The more we send to incinerators, the less likely we are to move towards a circular economy.

If a moratorium is not put in place, we should at least strengthen and clarify the national planning framework. Whilst local authorities determine whether or not a proposed construction corresponds with national environmental aims, national authorities must provide a clear framework within which to do so or planning authorities will be placed in an impossible position. As the Climate Change Committee stated in 2020, local authorities receive 'limited guidance as to how decisions feed into a national strategy for meeting the UK's Net Zero objectives'. Indeed, as the case of the Westbury incinerator has shown, there seem to be outright contradictions.

On the one hand, Defra has outlined targets which imply that all ongoing construction of EfW facilities should cease. On the other hand, it has made statements which accept or even encourage incineration building. The Planning Inspector responsible for the Westbury case has selected some of these statements and curated his decision around them. He refers to the Waste Management Plan for England and the WRS which states that recovering energy from residual waste has a valuable role to play in the future of the economy. Additionally, he quotes a statement made by Defra on 1 December 2022: 'the market will determine the life of incinerators and whether we need future incinerators.' That would only be reasonable if incineration was helpful in achieving our green ambitions. Given where it falls in the waste hierarchy it plainly is not.

In addition to this contradiction, the measures dissuading the building of incinerators are not strong enough. The Westbury decision acknowledges that the 2042 target was established by a Defra consultation pursuant to the Environmental Act, but only in a footnote. The Inspectorate was effectively able to overlook, or at least barely take account of, the Government's national framework for reaching its environmental aims.

My constituents strongly oppose this incinerator and it conflicts with the Government's green agenda. I urge Defra to put in place a moratorium on the construction of future so-called EfW facilities or at least strengthen the framework to limit their construction.

I stand ready to discuss.