



The coalition's green policy is in disarray after an undercover film revealed George Osborne's father-in-law claiming that the chancellor is behind a Tory campaign to oppose commitments against climate change.

Lord Howell of Guildford, a former minister in Margaret Thatcher's cabinet who stood down as a foreign office minister in September, said the chancellor was "putting pressure" on David Cameron over "absurd" climate change targets.

The comments by Howell were disclosed in Greenpeace undercover filming as coalition tensions on climate change were exposed further when the Tory energy minister at the heart of the row over windfarms and green policy pulled out of a scheduled joint appearance before a select committee of MPs with his Liberal Democrat boss.

John Hayes, who pointedly refused to answer any questions about his possible involvement with a rival anti-windfarm campaign in today's Corby byelection, will miss a hearing next Tuesday when he was due to appear alongside the energy and climate change secretary Ed Davey.

Senior insiders said tensions over environmental issues within the coalition have escalated into an "unholy war".

Hayes, who was appointed to the energy and climate change department in the September reshuffle with instructions from No 10 to slow the pace on windfarms, was drawn into the row over an attempt by the Conservative MP running the party's Corby byelection campaign to

support an anti-windfarm candidate.

In an undercover recording by Greenpeace, passed to the Guardian, Chris Heaton-Harris admitted providing encouragement to the Telegraph columnist James Delingpole. He withdrew two weeks ago, the day after Hayes told the Daily Mail that the development of onshore windfarms should be slow.

The Tory minister has so far only issued one carefully-worded statement in which he did not respond directly to an accusation that he conspired with Delingpole and Heaton-Harris.

Declining to answer questions, the minister's office said: "Mr Hayes has nothing to add to his statement yesterday." In his previous statement, Hayes did not directly address a question about whether he had been strategising with Heaton-Harris and Delingpole.

The intervention by Heaton-Harris, who has apologised if he had wrongly given the impression that he had "choreographed any sort of secret plan", overshadowed the final day of Tory campaigning in Corby. In a series of developments, as a large number of Tory MPs were drafted into the marginal seat:

- A third Greenpeace film revealed that former Tory minister Peter Lilley claimed Hayes had been brought into Davey's department to "duff [him] up".
- Theresa May, the home secretary, told Radio 4's The World at One on the campaign trail in Corby that Heaton-Harris was simply "guilty of some silly bragging".
- Delingpole said he had been in regular contact with Heaton-Harris but insisted there had been no plot, adding the timing of was "all a rather handy coincidence".
- Davey's office said the Tories' behaviour highlighted in the latest Greenpeace recordings made the Lib Dems even more determined to defend the climate change act.

In the recordings released on Wednesday, Greenpeace highlighted the pivotal role played by the chancellor in the abrupt change of pace among Tories on climate change. Lord Howell described the government's carbon reduction targets as "absurd" and said his son-in-law is playing an important role in changing tack.

"The prime minister is not familiar with these issues, doesn't understand them," he is recorded as saying. "Osborne is of course getting this message and is putting pressure on."

Lilley, who was famously described by John Major as one of three "bastards" in his cabinet, said that the chancellor played a decisive role in ensuring sceptics were promoted in the reshuffle because he regrets the government's climate change commitments.

Asked by the undercover Greenpeace reporter, who was posing as an anti-windfarm campaigner, if the chancellor was a supporter, Lilley said: "The chancellor is on side – probably. Privately he regrets all the commitments that were made."

He added: "Basically I think Osborne wanted to get people into key positions who could begin to get the government off the hook from the commitments it made very foolishly [such as the] 'greenest government ever'."

Lilley added that Hayes had been brought into DECC to "duff up" Davey. "Ed Davey – he's much more sensible than Chris Huhne, more open to reason. But he's not been subjected to it yet ... he's being subjected to a bit from inside by John Hayes, who's prepared to duff him up."

The former social security secretary is also dismissive of Greg Barker. He says: "He's barking! He's a complete nutter."

Davey reacted furiously when Hayes was appointed to his department without any consultation. The Spectator reported at the time that Cameron said to Hayes: "I want you to deliver a win for our people on windfarms." In the latest Greenpeace videos Heaton-Harris quoted this and said

this referred to him.

Tim Yeo, the Tory chairman of the commons energy and climate change select committee, highlighted concerns when he expressed unease at the decision of Hayes to cancel his appearance before his committee with Davey. "Hayes had originally accepted the invite and the plan was both would appear jointly before us live next Tuesday afternoon," Yeo told the Guardian. "That's not going to happen unfortunately. It would have been a helpful opportunity for Decc ministers to show they are completely united." Yeo wrote to Davey on Wednesday confirming the committee had expected Hayes to attend and inviting him again.

Barry Gardiner, a Labour committee member said Hayes's withdrawal was "predictable, given you have a secretary of state and a minister of state who are at daggers drawn. Hayes is fulfilling a clear mandate from Cameron to reassure backbenchers in the Tory shires there will be a clamp down on wind power. But how can good energy policy be developed when he and Davey are tearing strips off each other?"

Delingpole said he had not been approached by Heaton-Harris to stand in Corby, though he said his plans suited the MP. "I am absolutely delighted that the Guardian thinks I'm so important," Delingpole wrote in the Telegraph. "If I am the man who changed government wind farm policies, that is absolutely brilliant.

Delingpole said he decided to stand after hearing from concerned members of the public living in the constituency. But he said: "It suited us both absolutely perfectly. We both achieved what we were trying to achieve."

"If what happened behind the scenes was that Chris persuaded Mr Hayes to make his announcement when he did, well I don't care. As far as I'm concerned it was just a rather handy coincidence."

Mr Delingpole said he was in regular contact with Mr Heaton-Harris, whom he described as a "mate" and a "kindred spirit", but he insisted Mr Heaton-Harris was trying to dissuade him from standing against the Tories.

On one occasion Mr Heaton-Harris rang Mr Delingpole to highlight Mr Hayes' "enough is enough" speech.

"I don't know what was going on in his mind, but certainly I have been talking to him a lot over the course of the campaign," Mr Delingpole said. "His cause is my cause.

"He was on to me all the time saying 'look, you're going to be splitting the Tory vote' and pointing out there had been massive changes in the party.

"He would tell me all the wonderful things the Tories were doing and in that sense he took an active interest in my candidacy.

"I don't think he wanted me to see it through. I would have taken away Tory votes."

He denied his withdrawal from the contest was pre-arranged with the Conservatives, saying: "Ultimately it became absolutely nonsensical for me to continue standing in the election, when the Conservative and UKIP were becoming more aggressively anti-wind.

"There was absolutely no point me campaigning against something when I had already got what I wanted.

Mr Delingpole said Conservative policy had been increasingly opposed to wind farms before he suggested standing, with the rise of Owen Paterson, the Environment Secretary, John Hayes and Chancellor George Osborne signalling a change.