

Botley West Solar Farm  
Freepost BWSF

**By Email**

Date: 8<sup>th</sup> February 2024

Your ref:

My ref:

Please ask for:

email: [REDACTED]@oxford.gov.uk

Dear Sir / Madam

### **Section 42 of the Planning Act 2008 - Statutory Pre-Application Consultation – Botley West Solar Farm**

I am writing in response to the statutory consultation being carried out in relation to Section 42 of the 2008 Act by Photovolt Development Partners GmbH on behalf of SolarFive Ltd in respect of the proposals for Botley West Solar Farm.

It is understood that the Botley West Solar Farm project is a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project that is being proposed on land that falls outside the administrative boundary of Oxford City Council, but within the administrative boundaries of Cherwell District Council, Vale of White Horse District Council, and West Oxfordshire District Council.

The City Council recognises that they are not regarded as a host authority within the DCO process, however we welcome the opportunity to provide comment on the proposals as part of Stage I (Pre-Application) of the DCO process which is undertaken prior to your client submitting their application.

### **Proposal**

The scheme is seeking to build a new solar energy generation station on three parcels of land to the west of the city. It will extend from an area of land between the A4260 and the Dorn River Valley near Tackley and Wootton (northern site), through a central section situated between Bladon and Cassington (central site), and then connecting to a section further south near Farmoor Reservoir and north of Cumnor (southern site), where it will then connect to the National Grid transmission network.

The scheme will consist of

- Solar PV Modules;
- Onsite cabling;
- Power converter stations (i.e. project substations and control buildings) and supporting equipment;
- High Voltage Transformers, including feeders, switchgear and supporting equipment;
- Fencing, security, and ancillary infrastructure;
- Access from the highway tracks, including temporary and permanent accesses;

- Green Infrastructure; and
- Underground electricity cables connecting the Northern, Central and Southern Sites that will connect into the National Grid Transmission Network
- Associated Infrastructure, mitigation and enhancement measures, and other ancillary works, for example, fencing, security, highway works, temporary works compounds and works sites

### **Consultation Response**

The Council understands that the purpose of this pre-application consultation is to seek comments on the updated proposals for the Botley West Solar Farm following the first round of consultation that was undertaken in November 2022.

The Phase Two Community Consultation Leaflet sets out that your client is seeking comments on the following matters

- The updated masterplan proposals which set out the site layout and cable routes for the solar farm.
- The information contained within the Preliminary Environmental Information Report (PEIR)
- Proposed environmental enhancement measures including biodiversity net gain and new recreational connectivity across the site
- Proposed mitigation measures to minimize or avoid the potential impacts on the environment and local communities

The Council recognises that the host authorities for the scheme (West Oxfordshire District Council, Cherwell District Council, Vale of White Horse District Council, and Oxfordshire County Council) will be providing a response to the above-mentioned matters and what they consider are the local impacts of this Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project, along with the significant material planning considerations that will need to be addressed through the examination process for the DCO application.

As a neighbouring authority, the Council does not intend to provide specific comment on the above-mentioned matters identified within the consultation, as these will be set out by the relevant host authorities who will be more aware of the local impacts both in terms of informing the design of the masterplan proposals, but also the consideration of the local environmental impacts.

However, the Council would wish to provide some strategic commentary that may help inform elements of the masterplan to better inform the needs case for a significant scheme such as this.

#### *The Need for Botley West*

It is understood that the vision for the Botley West Solar Farm is to deliver approximately 840 megawatts of clean, affordable power to the National Grid, contributing to reducing carbon emissions and improving UK energy security.

Despite not having a formal role in the decision-making process for this project, the City Council fully supports the Oxfordshire Strategic Vision to achieve carbon neutral status and a carbon neutral future by 2050, and the Government's commitment to deliver a zero carbon electricity system by 2035. To achieve this aim, the 2018 Oxfordshire Energy Strategy and the subsequent 2021 Pathways to a Zero Carbon Oxfordshire report, both adopted by all six Oxfordshire Councils, set out a requirement for a four-fold increase in installed PV capacity in

Oxfordshire by 2030 and 13-fold by 2050. Both envisage a significant increase in ground-mounted solar farms such as that proposed within this project, along with other methods such as installations on buildings throughout our urban areas.

In this regard a development such as this is an important development for the future energy needs of the county, and the UK.

In addition, the developer has confirmed they have secured a grid connection with National Grid, to provide 840MW of energy to the Grid, and that this will involve the installation of additional primary substation capacity to the west of Oxford. The improvement to the electricity infrastructure would be very welcome to Oxford City Council as this would be expected to address very significant network capacity constraints in the central Oxfordshire area. It would help to support increases in local renewable energy generation and the electrification of homes and transport in Oxford.

The DCO application will need to provide a strong and robust case for the development of this scale, particularly where it will need to demonstrate exceptional circumstances case to justify development within the Green Belt; justify impacts on the setting of a number of heritage assets including the setting of the Blenheim Palace World Heritage Site; along with mitigating other environmental impacts.

Having reviewed the section on the 'Need for Botley West' in Phase Two Community Consultation Leaflet and Chapter 5 of the PEIR (Need, National Planning, and Alternatives Considered), both documents focus more on what we would consider to be the general benefits of a development of this scale. Whilst that is important, it would be of benefit if it could provide more detail as to how this responds to the more local context and the strategic vision for the county. The need and benefits from the development need to be made more tangible for the local communities and those throughout the wider county to understand. It should be supported through practical metrics / graphics to help illustrate what this will deliver in real terms in terms of meeting energy demand, and maybe help quantify what for example you mean by providing an equivalent amount of electricity for up to 330,000 homes (e.g. what does that mean as a proportion of say the City or the towns / villages surrounding the development).

#### *Opportunities Beyond Solar*

The Council would welcome the commitment to delivering community benefits through Botley West, which is being built upon three key areas

- Community funding
- On-site benefits
- Helping to reduce energy bills

Whilst the City Council appreciate that the Host Authorities will want to have direct input into the community fund and benefits that come from the project, it would welcome a discussion with the applicant to understand what opportunities there are for the project to benefit the city whether this be through local groups that operate within the city, or other initiatives that the Council is looking to introduce as part of its wider corporate aims surrounding climate change and moving towards net zero.

#### **Conclusion**

In conclusion the City Council recognises that the provision of ground based solar is a key element of the 2018 Oxfordshire Energy Strategy, and that this development would make a

significant contribution towards this aim whilst also providing improvements to the electricity infrastructure that will address the network capacity constraints in central Oxfordshire. However, having reviewed the consultation documents and the PEIR, we consider that the needs case could be strengthened to better reflect how this proposal will contribute towards the strategy.

I trust that this response is of assistance in terms of helping you develop your DCO application, and that you appreciate that the comments reflect the indicative nature of the proposals at this stage in the process. The Council would welcome the opportunity to comment further on the proposals at the relevant stages of the process as the DCO application evolves.

I trust that the above response will be taken into consideration as you develop the DCO application for submission.

Yours faithfully

  
**Head of Planning & Regulatory Services**