

DISCLOSURE REQUESTED / UPDATE TO RR

In an article published in The Oxford Times on 6 March, dealing with Botley West, the Applicant's representative [REDACTED] is quoted as saying on behalf of PVDP:

"We are not doing this as an act of vandalism. This is because in long discussions with National Grid, they say a solar farm is needed in this area."

A copy of the article is attached for your convenience. This was published after the closing date for registration of Interested Parties.

You will have seen from our RR that we have analysed the Applicant's claims in respect of Site Selection. There is no reference in the Application documents to any guidance being received from National Grid about a site being needed in this area. Neither does the National Grid on its web site give any guidance about where solar farms might best be located, and it is our understanding that the NG does not in principle offer such guidance.

It is obviously important that the ExA and other parties to the Examination understand whether National Grid has offered an opinion on the specific location of Botley West, or not; what that opinion was in detail; and when it was given.

We would, therefore, make a S51 request that the ExA requires the Applicant to disclose as Examination documents all relevant correspondence and discussion that it has had with National Grid on this matter.

[Copy of Article attached.]

## Solar farm scheme 'not rural vandalism'

### Botley West firm defends siting of plan



Campaigners walk through site of proposed solar farm

DEVELOPERS wanting to build a huge solar farm near Oxford have denied it would be "an act of vandalism" – despite concerns it involves the biggest ever single loss of county Green Belt land.

The Botley West proposal would be the largest solar farm in Europe, covering 3,450 acres of land encompassing 15 parishes around Botley, Woodstock and Kidlington.

Much of the land is owned by the Blenheim Estate.

The group behind the scheme

By Esme Kenney

newsquest.co.uk

says it would bring 840 megawatts of renewable energy to about 330,000 homes in Oxfordshire.

However, opponents including the Stop Botley West group and the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) fear its impact on Oxford's Green Belt, farming land, the Blenheim Palace UNESCO World Heritage Site, and

the visual landscape. The scale of the development means a decision must be made by the Planning Inspectorate, and has to go through a number of stages.

Representations are now being considered by the Inspectorate at the start of the examination stage.

West Oxfordshire District Council submitted its own representation, raising concerns over the impact on rural land.

Continued: Page 2

#### Continued from Page 1

They raised concerns about the impact on the rural environment, agricultural land, and that the developer had not taken their previous suggestions into account.

The leader of West Oxfordshire District Council said that without any changes being made "the detrimental impacts of the scheme substantially outweigh its benefits".

from Stop Botley West, said the Government needed to "start being choosy" about which solar schemes should go forward.

He added: "We are not anti-solar or climate deniers. What we want to see is a measured response to the climate emergency."

"We have concerns at the lack of alternatives that have been explored."

"We do not think the developer has seriously looked at land away from farming land, land away from heritage sites, land away from people. The driver is the profits that the scheme can generate."

A spokesperson for CPRE said: "Botley West will be the largest-scale solar power station in the world to be constructed within such proximity to a large population."

"It would effectively transform a vast swathe of rural Oxfordshire into an industrial landscape, on a scale never previously seen."

"According to the target set in Na-



Protest walk. Image: PA

tional Policy Statement for renewable energy infrastructure, the total land needed is in fact relatively small. Therefore we can, and must be selective about where solar developments take place.

"We strongly believe it should be on rooftops where it will be closest to point of use, without impacting the countryside."

"More than 75 per cent of the site falls within the Green Belt, making it the biggest ever single loss of Green Belt land within the county."

"At a time when food security is so crucial these proposals seem misguided and unwise."

Speaking on behalf of Photovoltaic Development Partners, said that while he agreed

more solar panels were needed on roof tops, the large-scale solar farm was needed. He said: "We are not doing this as an act of vandalism. This is because in long discussions

with the national grid, they say the solar farm is needed in this area."

"Oxfordshire's grids are completely at capacity."

He added that the developer considered locations further west of Oxfordshire or in north Oxfordshire, but they were either unable to find a landowner or faced issues with connections.

MP for Bicester and Woodstock, raised concerns about the lack of decision-making power for local people, and the level of community benefit that residents would receive.

He said: "This solar plant is just too large. If it does go ahead, it would be one of the largest plants in Europe. The current proposed level of community benefit is also far too low."

"The developers have proposed, at most, £200,000 a year. The Scottish Government suggested level would mean £4.2 million a year. There's also a democratic deficit here."

"This is a national strategic infrastructure project but as a result the decision will be taken a long way away from the residents of the area that will be most affected. I want to see their voices reflected, in particular when it comes to the scale and the community benefits that should go alongside any renewables project."

Kidlington's Cherwell Collective food larder and café is a partner in the Botley West Solar Farm scheme

and plans to use some of its land to grow food to support people in food poverty.

Founder said the arguments against the solar farm were "selfish and childish".

She said: "If we don't decarbonise there will be no such thing as green space soon. We won't have chance [for a project like this] especially if we chase it away just because it does not look pretty."

"I do not think how it looks should be weighted very strongly when we need green infrastructure. Our position is that we support decarbonisation and that means massive changes to the energy infrastructure of the UK, and it cannot happen soon enough."

However, she agreed that the level of community benefit for the project was too small, and that "money coming from climate infrastructure should support climate infrastructure".

While developers are legally obliged to provide a level of community benefit for schemes costing more than £4 million in Scotland, there is no legislation on this in England and Wales.

said that the level of community benefit should be considered as a whole package, which would be combined with a £25 million fund for discounted renewable energy for those sign up, as well as use of the allotments on the land.