



Planning Inspectorate  
Arolygiaeth Gynllunio

## Hearing Transcript

<b>Project:</b>	Botley West Solar Farm
<b>Hearing:</b>	Open Floor Hearing 1 (OFH1) – Part 1
<b>Date:</b>	13 May 2025

**Please note:** This document is intended to assist Interested Parties.

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The video recording published on the Planning Inspectorate project page is the primary record of the hearing.

FULL TRANSCRIPT (with timecode)

00:00:03:06 - 00:00:38:09

A clock by the clock in the room, and I'm starting this open floor hearing for the application for an order granting development consent for the Botley West solar farm. We all carry out introductions in a moment just to introduce ourselves. But for those who are here this morning, apologies for a lot of these housekeeping matters you have heard before, but please bear with me whilst I explain them to, to newcomers to today's event. Um, in terms of housekeeping matters, can I confirm that everyone can hear me? Excellent. And can I confirm that the meeting recordings and live streams have started? Excellent.

00:00:38:16 - 00:01:10:01

Thank you very much. There are no fire alarm drills scheduled for this time, so if the alarm sounds, it is the real thing. You may exit the building that way. Or if the fire is that way, there's fire exits at the back here, and we congregate in the car park at the front of the building. Um, the toilets are located just outside the doors behind you, should you need them. So onto introductions. My name is Mr. Wallace. I've been appointed by the Secretary of State as the lead member of the examining authority to carry out an examination of the above application.

00:01:10:07 - 00:01:12:27

I'll hand over to other colleagues to introduce themselves.

00:01:14:29 - 00:01:23:15

Good afternoon. My name is Catherine Metcalfe. I've been appointed by the Secretary of State to be a member of the panel of inspectors examining this application.

00:01:24:25 - 00:01:32:09

Good afternoon. My name is Mr. Shaikh. I have been appointed by the Secretary of State to be a member of a panel of inspectors to examine this application.

00:01:33:13 - 00:01:41:07

Good afternoon. My name is Miss Cassini. I've also been appointed by the Secretary of State to be a member of a panel of inspectors to examine this application.

00:01:42:03 - 00:02:13:14

Also present today are members of the case team, the case manager, as Mr. Heywood and Mr. Heywood has supported here at the venue by Miss Hannigan and Mr. Stevens. And then Miss Court is manning the online forum. Up there. If you have any questions or concerns about today's event. Please contact a member of the case team. The audiovisual service today is provided by CVS. I would like to welcome all attendees today here at the venue and those watching the live stream and those joining virtually.

00:02:13:27 - 00:02:37:22

Uh, welcome and thank you all for joining us. I'm not intending to ask attendees to introduce themselves now. Um, we will go straight into representations and we will ask you to introduce

yourselves. And if you represent a particular organization, just as you introduce yourself at your representation, um, this will be coming imminently. Once my colleague, Miss Cassini has set out some of the ground rules for today.

00:02:39:08 - 00:03:23:05

Thank you. So moving on to agenda item two. Firstly, a few words to acknowledge the format of the event today. This is a blended event which allows attendance both in person and virtually through Microsoft Teams. It's expected that both blended and fully virtual events will form part of the planning Inspectorate's future operating model. We, the Examining Authority or Exa, are attending this meeting in person, as are several of the attendees. For anyone attending virtually, please be rest assured that you will have our full attention at all times, even if we're not always looking directly at the camera to avoid visual and noise distractions, please can ask that you keep your cameras and microphones off unless we invite you to speak.

00:03:23:24 - 00:03:58:19

We're aiming to take a break around 430 and then 6 p.m., and then we'll aim to close the hearing no later than 7 p.m. if necessary. Secondly, this event has been both live streamed and recorded. The digital recordings that we make are retained and published as they form a public record that can contain your personal information and to which the General Data Protection Regulation, or GDPR, applies. The planning Inspectorate's practice is to retain and publish recordings for a period of five years when the Secretary of State's decision on the Development Consent Order.

00:03:59:24 - 00:04:30:02

Consequently, if you participate in today's open floor hearing, it is important that you understand that you'll be recorded and that you must therefore consent to retention and publication of the digital recording. It's very unlikely that the EXR will ask you to put sensitive personal information into public domain. Indeed, we would encourage you not to do that. However, if for some reason you feel that it is necessary for you to refer to sensitive personal information, we do encourage you to speak to the case team in the first instance.

00:04:30:12 - 00:05:06:02

We would then explore with you whether the information could be provided in a written format, which might be redacted before being published. Thirdly, the applicant will be invited to respond to all of the points raised by attendees today. At the end of the public speaking session, or periodically, should the Xa have any points of clarification to raise. However, please note that the applicant does reserve the right to only observe the proceedings today and respond formally in writing. With that in mind, we have invited the applicant to respond to the representations today in writing at deadline one, which is Wednesday the 4th of June.

00:05:07:15 - 00:05:50:05

My fourth point is directed to those who have registered to speak today to ensure that we are able to finish the business of the day on time. Please keep your representations brief and to the point. We encourage you not to repeat matters you've already stated in writing. As we've already mentioned, when invited to speak, please introduce yourself by name and if relevant, by organization. This is important for the transcripts, recordings or live streams for the Xa and for other parties. The purpose of this hearing is to provide an opportunity for parties to put their views forward verbally to the ASA,

in line with section 93 of the Planning Act 2008, and rules 14 and 15 of the Examination Procedure Rules 2010.

00:05:50:24 - 00:06:22:12

In light of the number of speakers, we are imposing a time limit of five minutes per speaker. In the interests of fairness, this limit will be enforced and we will indicate when you have one minute left. The XO may subsequently ask questions of any organisation or individual about matters arising from their oral submissions. The final point to say is that if you do make an oral submission today, please follow it up with a written summary of your representation in writing at deadline one. I'll now hand over to Mrs.

00:06:22:14 - 00:06:24:15

Metcalf for agenda item three.

00:06:28:07 - 00:06:39:18

Thank you. The list of speakers for today's event is taken from the agenda as issued, and unless anyone has any concerns or questions, we'll now make a start following the order as per the agenda.

00:06:41:09 - 00:06:45:17

So I will first invite representation from Cherwell District Council.

00:06:59:04 - 00:07:31:06

Good afternoon. Uh, Suzanne Taylor. I'm a principal planning officer from development management. Uh, speaking on behalf of Cherwell District Council. Um, first of all, thank you for the opportunity to speak today. Um, you'll be glad to hear that I'm not going to be taking up too much of your time. Um, because most of the details of Sherwood District Council's views on this project are contained in our previous relevant representation and further details, which will also be set out in our local impact report.

00:07:32:02 - 00:08:11:17

Um, this is yet to be agreed by our planning committee. Cherwell District Council have declared a climate emergency and would be assessing solar farms primarily under policy. ESD five of our adopted Cherwell Local Plan 2011 to 2031. This states that renewable energy developments will be supported provided they do not have significantly adverse impact, including cumulatively on biodiversity, landscape and visual the historic environment, including designated and non-designated heritage assets and their settings.

00:08:12:05 - 00:08:35:29

The Green Belt, particularly visual impacts on openness, aviation activities, highway and access issues, and residential amenity. Based on that list, there are currently a number of outstanding concerns which have and will be set out in detail in writing. Thank you. That's all I wanted to say today.

00:08:40:28 - 00:08:46:23

Thank you, Mrs. Taylor. Um, moving on now to Vale of Whitehorse District Council.

00:09:00:11 - 00:09:11:18

Good afternoon, Stewart Walker. Major applications. Team leader in development management for the Vale of Whitehorse. I'm just going to give a quick summary of our key issues for today, and thank you for the opportunity to speak.

00:09:15:05 - 00:09:52:16

The Vale has submitted a detailed, relevant representation already, and the Vale itself is committed to reducing the reliance on fossil fuels and accepts there is a compelling need, as a matter of principle, to increase renewable energy generation and consumption, to support the government's national agenda to reach net zero carbon by 2050. Therefore, it's not raising an objection in principle to large scale photovoltaic generation developments within its district, and this is reflected in policy CP 41 of the Vale's Local Plan, which states renewable energy developments will be supported provided they do not cause significant adverse effect to landscape.

00:09:52:21 - 00:10:24:18

Both designated national landscape and local locally valued landscapes, biodiversity, the historic environment, visual amenity and openness of greenbelt and local residential amenity and the safe movement of traffic and pedestrians. The acceptability of this proposal is inextricably intrinsically linked with the impacts of the development, and whilst the proposed development would make a positive contribution to reducing carbon emissions over its proposed lifespan, there would be adverse effects that need to be balanced against the benefits principle.

00:10:24:20 - 00:10:43:24

Issues that the veil raises in relation to this are set out in our relevant representation, but in quick summary are inappropriate development in the Oxford Greenbelt. Loss of best, most versatile agricultural land. Landscape and visual impacts. Heritage asset impacts. Impacts on rights of way and ecology and in trees.

00:10:45:15 - 00:11:28:15

The Vale has assessed the proposal and considers that it is inappropriate development in the Oxford Green Belt, where very special circumstances are required to be demonstrated, and in that regard, the Vale currently considers that the benefits that the scheme would bring are not such to amount to very special circumstances sufficient to outweigh the harm to the Oxford Green Belt, and as such we would consider the proposal is contrary to policies. CP 13 of the Vale Local Plan. CP 41 and CP 44. In relation to agricultural land use, there's around 80 hectares of productive arable land in the Vale, identified as a mixture of grade two, three A and three B, and at least four hectares of this will be permanently lost through the National Grid substation.

00:11:29:03 - 00:11:39:29

It's also important to highlight the cumulative impacts of solar development on best and most versatile agricultural land. As other solar proposals are currently under consideration locally.

00:11:42:00 - 00:12:15:01

In terms of landscape, the area surrounding the southern site is locally valued and as set out in our relevant representation, it is a landscape sensitive to development. The landform is predominantly rising southwards in the vale, with an elevation predominantly from 65 to 100m, and the site

comprises a network of hedgerows which enclose small, medium, large, irregular shaped fields, and there are extensive views available across the southern site of the proposal and beyond, and there are public rights of way that cross the site, including the Oxfordshire Greenbelt Way.

00:12:17:06 - 00:12:50:27

The scheme would result in the coverage of a substantial area of agricultural land, with solar panels and other infrastructure associated infrastructure to inevitably and detrimentally change this landscape, resulting in a significant adverse effect that will harm its strong, undeveloped and rural character, both within the wider valley landscape between far more and Botley and Oxford, and the rules said landscape setting become the to Paris, where there will be a loss of attractive views and a negative impact on views from the recreational network of rights of way. The proposed development is therefore considered to be contrary to policy.

00:12:50:29 - 00:13:00:10

CP 41 and 44 and 31 of the Vail Local Plan. In regards to landscape impacts and to policy. DB c for TB.

00:13:00:12 - 00:13:01:24

Mr. Walker, you have one minute remaining.

00:13:01:26 - 00:13:35:28

Okay. TBC seven and T 13 of come to Parish Neighbourhood Development plan. It would also have an impact on heritage issues and we will set that out further in writing. But overall, the Vail considers the proposal for Botley West is currently not acceptable as the proposed solar farm would inevitably, in detrimentally change the character of the land to a more developed character for a long period of time, and to satisfactorily address issues that the Vail has. The Vail wishes to see the proposed solar arrays on the southern site reduced or ideally removed from the application.

00:13:36:00 - 00:13:36:20

Thank you.

00:13:43:07 - 00:13:45:09

Thank you, Mr. Walker. Any questions?

00:13:46:21 - 00:14:00:03

So I just one quick question there. If I may, just in relation to that final point, obviously about the southern site being removed in terms of being reduced, are there particular areas that you're concerned about?

00:14:01:28 - 00:14:16:22

Yes, there are, and we will go into that in more detail in the Local Impact report. But in short summary, it's probably the e-commerce submission that have done an assessment of the southern site area of identifying the landscape harm of the fields with panels. Thank you.

00:14:17:23 - 00:14:18:28

Thank you. Thank you.

00:14:21:18 - 00:14:28:12

Thank you, Mr. Walker. Um, if we can now move on to West Oxfordshire District Council. Thank you.

00:14:48:09 - 00:15:19:07

Hello. Thank you. Yes. Um, Andrew Thompson, planning policy manager, West Oxfordshire District Council, um, here today to speak on behalf of West Oxfordshire District Council. Um, West Oxfordshire District Council supports the principle um, the development of renewable and low carbon energy developments in the district. Provided they are located and designed to minimise any adverse impacts with particular regard to conserving the district's high valued landscape and historic environment.

00:15:21:02 - 00:15:52:11

West Oxfordshire District Council announced a climate and ecological emergency in 2019, and has identified measures required to achieve its goals of net zero carbon development in the district by 2050 or earlier. Renewable energy development is identified as playing a key role in helping the district achieve its objective. And the council has approved a number of standalone renewable energy projects in the district in recent years, in accordance with local policy.

00:15:53:26 - 00:16:25:15

We welcome the opportunity to engage in the examination of the Botley West proposals. A project of this scale would no doubt contribute greatly to the supply of renewable energy to the national Grid, and contribute to the national aims of decarbonising the grid and achieving energy security. We have engaged with the applicant through the pre-application and pre examination stages, and we have taken every opportunity to provide feedback on and to influence the proposals.

00:16:26:14 - 00:17:14:14

We do consider, however, that the proposals put before you for examination, particularly the size of the scheme, The location and the extent of the proposals were determined prior to any consultation, and that our engagement to date has had little bearing on the design of the proposed solar farm. West Oxfordshire District Council consider that the applicant's evidence has been prepared in order to maximise the scale of development. We consider that this has had a bearing on the assessments presented to the examining Authority, whereby the applicant has sought to downplay the significance of impacts, particularly those related to landscape and visual impacts, heritage impacts and ecological impacts of the proposals.

00:17:15:28 - 00:17:37:28

The Applicant Supplementary Statement of Needs Examination Library Reference PDB Dash 014 explains that because land is available in close proximity to an existing overhead line with potential to connect to the National Electricity Transmission system.

00:17:40:01 - 00:18:32:24

That it is rational to propose a scheme that delivers the greatest possible decarbonisation and energy security benefit from the land and available grid connection. The applicant explains that the project has been designed to deliver the greatest possible benefit from the available land, and the available

grid connection to this extent. West Oxfordshire District Council consider that the design and location of the proposal has not been shaped by an understanding and appreciation of the local topography and features of the landscape, the impact on the environment and nature and communities, but that it has been designed to maximise the extent of the development through the landscape, with little explanation of the iterative design approach that's been taken.

00:18:33:07 - 00:18:33:27

Thank you.

00:18:35:28 - 00:18:39:13

Thank you, Mr. Thompson. I think there's a couple of questions from the panel. Thank you.

00:18:40:21 - 00:19:08:04

Yes, just a couple of questions, if I may. Um, you said about downplaying the landscape, heritage and ecology impacts in the the build up, if you like, to this application and your feedback and involvement in that. Did you at any point agree with the applicant the methodology, the assessment, setting landscape, the viewpoints that they were looking? What was your influence, if any, in that process please?

00:19:08:28 - 00:19:28:19

And we have certainly engaged with the applicant to identify viewpoints from which to appreciate the impacts of the proposal. Wrong. Um, as stated earlier, we're seeking to sign into statements of common grounds with the applicant with regard to the methodology, but they remain on sand at this stage.

00:19:30:09 - 00:19:52:28

Okay. And because I'm just interested in that word down. Downplaying, if you like. I mean, in terms of looking at the methodology and looking at the the magnitude of impacts and then obviously the, the, their assessments that lead to their conclusions. It was just whether the methodology, excuse me, had been open for you to have an input into.

00:19:54:02 - 00:20:21:09

Yes. And I think it's being reflected through the relevant representations that have been submitted, um, to try and understand what the applicant regards as a significant impact. I think that's been reflected on by a number of the host authorities, whereby a moderate impact hasn't been regarded as a significant impact, and we've sought to, uh, draw attention to that in our relevant representations.

00:20:23:03 - 00:20:29:27

Yes. No, we we had, uh, picked up on that. No, thank you very much. I've got no further questions. Thank you.

00:20:32:05 - 00:20:36:20

Thank you, Mr. Thompson. Um, Covington Parish Council. Next, please.

00:20:49:08 - 00:21:29:23



Good afternoon. Stewart. Thompson. Carrington parish council. Um, in this slot, I'll be representing our views on the ecological impact of the proposed development and why we consider this to be a principal issue. Carrington Parish Council lives throughout the council. Consultation process for this development identified the significant risks to biodiversity the project poses. The developers have made public claims surrounding the positive biodiversity net gain generated by this proposal, as detailed in their environmental statement, but this only deals with on with one aspect, namely the presence and condition of habitat.

00:21:30:29 - 00:22:01:01

We note that a very large proportion of the biodiversity net gain of the project is generated by converting arable farmland to grassland. Taking no account of the likely impact of the proposed development on often protected species or communities, we understand that this is difficult, and because of the lack of scientific evidence that surrounds the impacts of large scale solar developments on UK wildlife, especially at the scale of the Botley West proposal.

00:22:03:01 - 00:22:40:09

The applicant's own environmental statement identifies that the West site, particularly the central section, is home to 12 species of bat, including the Beck Steins bat, which is an annex two species listed under the the Habitats Directive and one for which Special Areas of Conservation have been designated for protection. Furthermore, the environmental statement identifies that this area is likely to be of international importance for bat bat diversity. Bats are one group of species that we know are severely negatively impacted by the presence of of solar farms.

00:22:40:18 - 00:23:00:03

Following peer reviewed studies published by the University of Bristol and others, and from other studies across the UK and Europe. The conclusion in the environmental statement that the solar farm will have negligible impact on bats is neither evidence nor credible, especially given the size of the development.

00:23:01:25 - 00:23:35:11

Likewise, we believe that the diverse and abundant population of farmland birds across the proposed Botley West site, especially again in this in the central section, are also at risk of significant negative impacts. Many of the farmland birds recorded in this statement are of conservation interest, including linnet, skylark and Yellowhammer, which are all red listed. These birds rely on a heterogeneous mix of habitats to complete their lifecycle, as well as the presence of active agriculture as a food source.

00:23:36:13 - 00:24:10:28

The bird community in the area, identified as of county importance in the environmental statement is concluded, has not been significantly impacted by the proposal. Again, a conclusion we didn't we do not regard as evidence based mitigation for ground nesting. Skylarks in the form of nesting plots, is a method drawn from agricultural fields and is unproven as a mitigation for solar farms. Risks are also posed to water birds, for which studies in the US indicate they can mistake solar panels for water.

00:24:11:10 - 00:24:18:00

An important consideration for us in Carrington, given the nearby gravel pits, rivers and other water bodies present.

00:24:19:16 - 00:24:43:03

Overall, we regard the conclusions drawn on the ecology section, as well as the mitigations offered to conserve wildlife as not credible, and therefore casting to the parish council wish to see these matters addressed as a substantive issue. Um, our detailed comments on this matter are represented in the relevant representation. Thank you.

00:24:51:00 - 00:24:52:02

Thank you, Mr. Thompson.

00:24:52:04 - 00:24:52:19

Okay.

00:24:52:21 - 00:24:53:23

Thank you. No questions.

00:24:55:19 - 00:24:59:05

We could call next. Uh, Councillor Dan Levy.

00:25:09:18 - 00:25:41:04

Good afternoon. I'm Dan Levy, I'm the councillor. I'm a district councillor and county councillor for NCM, which includes Grassington, which is a village that would be greatly affected by the proposal. I also represent the north bank of the Thames in the place that the electricity will have to cross the Thames to get to Botley. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you. Um, I am representing residents of the area for which I am elected.

00:25:41:12 - 00:26:14:16

Where, as you will have heard, there is great concern. A lot of what I would say will be contained in the West Oxfordshire Local Impact Report, which Mr. Thompson has already drawn attention to. So I just wanted to draw attention to another, uh, few sets of issues, uh, one of which is that already suffers periodic flooding. Uh, at least once a year, often more often more caused by runoff from the area which is proposed will be, uh, have have panels on it.

00:26:15:00 - 00:26:52:13

Uh, and Castleton is downhill from those, those panels and there is substantial concern there about. About that. Um, one other area which I think has not been yet taken into account. Is that there was a proposed garden village across to the north of Ntcham. Between Ntcham and Freeland. It hasn't appeared on any of the maps that have been produced hitherto. It's designed to have uh 3000 residents in it, and a high proportion of those will be overlooking the even lower valley, where PBP have proposed solar panels.

00:26:52:27 - 00:27:26:25

Um, it concerns me that the, uh, visual effect of that hasn't been taken into account, nor the likely increased flooding of the even load caused by runoff from the new village. Um, that that's that's, uh, Garden Village has nearly fully been approved in outline by the Planning Inspectorate, with just one

item going back for further examination. So it is almost certain that it will be built. It's surprising and disappointing that it hasn't even appeared on the maps that have been produced hitherto.

00:27:28:10 - 00:27:59:08

Um, I also have concerns about how the River Thames will be crossed as part of this process. Uh, the north bank of the Thames is nearly all, uh, wildflower meadow, which has been restored with great expertise by people I represent. The southern side is, at least in part, White and woods, which is a Site of Special Scientific Interest. So I have great concern, and I know it's one of the items you're going to look at about how the Thames is, is going to get crossed.

00:28:00:04 - 00:28:49:08

Thirdly, I have a high concern that the structure of the funding of the scheme is such that we might end up with a partly built and abandoned project, which would be a disaster for the residents I represent. I appreciate that Typically that isn't normally a planning consideration, but given the corporate structure of the proposed development with with the equity element largely being a shell German company and the financing behind that being as yet unexplained and non-guaranteed, I do have concerns about a project of this scale being fully funded before it starts, and us being certain that if it does start, and if the Secretary of State gives consent, that it will be seen through to completion and run successfully for the full period.

00:28:49:29 - 00:29:24:09

Lastly, can I draw attention to the cumulative effect of this scheme on residents that I represent? Whereas it is entirely feasible that each individual resident might be only partially affected by parts of the scheme? When you look at the whole thing, whether it's areas for people to walk in, the views from within the the scheme area or from places like White and Woods across to Castleton. It is a very large scheme indeed, and I'm sure you will take into account the cumulative effect of of the scheme.

00:29:24:17 - 00:29:33:06

As I said, there will be much more information in the various local impact reports, and I will also back up what I've just said with the written report to you. Thank you.

00:29:37:03 - 00:30:22:00

Thank you very much for your for your presentation there. Just one quick question. It might be something not to answer now, but as a bolt on to the local impact report, if you like. Um, we obviously carried out our, um, unaccompanied site inspections back in February. We covered a large sort of area, but it'd be interesting to know how close, if you like, we got to that garden settlement, that village that you were talking about there. And if we weren't that close, or if there's a particular viewpoint that you'd like us to go to to see if you could make that recommendation in as an annex to the local impact report or whatever, just so that then we know ideally where where your concerns lie in that respect.

00:30:22:02 - 00:30:30:20

Yes. I will drop you a note with with the coordinates. Uh, the the highest point is currently a public bridleway. So you've got open access to it.

00:30:30:22 - 00:30:32:19

Excellent. Thank you very much. Thank you for your time.

00:30:32:21 - 00:30:33:07

Thank you.

00:30:34:25 - 00:30:42:16

Thank you, Mr. Levy. Um, next we have, uh, Mr. Anthony Thompson. Thank you.

00:31:03:03 - 00:31:45:06

My name is Anthony Thompson. Thanks very much for the opportunity to speak on behalf of a community project known as Forever fields. The project involved over 100 local artists, 1200 visitors to an art exhibition in November 23rd, and the publishing of this 150 page book in February. A unique project for other fields had two objectives to invite local people to express their feelings about the prospect of losing so much green space through art, photography, film, pottery and other mediums, and to create an art archive in the form of this book to be used as a reference point and support the field's return to open space.

00:31:45:13 - 00:32:25:03

In 42 years time, if the application is given approval. With this in mind, I shall describe three areas of focus to strengthen the examination process. Firstly, mental health and wellbeing. An overriding theme of forever fields is a sense of loss, that public amenity currently offered by extensive public rights of way, wide open space and soaring viewpoints. At risk from the scale of this application will not be mitigated by the developer. Evidence presented by the developer in the environmental statement is based on complex methodology, which was challenging for the general public to interpret or influence.

00:32:25:19 - 00:33:07:24

It is also unhelpful that key data points and photo montages, which would have assisted understanding during consultation, were not available or inadequate at the time. Therefore, Forever Fields request that the application is challenged further on this issue and that environmental statement. Volume three. Appendix 8.4, app 6.5 is rigorously assessed for completeness, accuracy, and implementation. In particular, given the scale of the application, more visual examples are required to assess the environmental impact in a way that supports a mitigation plan, which will fully compensate impact on mental health and wellbeing of local people.

00:33:08:16 - 00:33:45:10

Secondly. Heritage and landscape. It is well known that this area is rich in heritage assets and surrounded by a beautiful rural landscape. However, it was clear during the fields exhibition that there is a growing concern regarding the role of the Blenheim estate as landowner. This is because Blenheim Palace Heritage Foundation, which is the charity and steward of the World Heritage Site, is managed by the same team that managed the Blenheim Estate. Certain directors and trustees of the charity may personally benefit from the application if it is given approval.

00:33:45:14 - 00:34:20:05

Whilst the charity itself will not receive any financial benefit, forever feels therefore requests that input from Blenheim Palace Heritage Foundation regarding the impact of Botley West on the wider

setting of the World Heritage Site, takes into account potential conflicts of interest that exist. Further, we would suggest that the examination offers more time and more weight to other heritage bodies that offer truly independent perspective of the. On the impact of this application on the setting of the World Heritage Site and other heritage assets.

00:34:21:01 - 00:35:02:18

Thirdly, decommissioning and reinstatement. The name Forever Field is a reminder to all concerned that the application for 42 years change of use is disguised a temporary. However, the decommissioning plan presented by the developer lacks detail and commitment. The decommissioning document app 7.6.4 is just 12 pages long, compared to the total application page count of well over 12,000 pages. More concerning is that section 1.2.1 says that a decommissioning plan will be, and I quote, produced and approved following the appointment of a contractor prior to the commencement of the decommissioning phase of the project, implying that a detailed plan.

00:35:03:13 - 00:35:03:28

In this one.

00:35:04:00 - 00:35:37:22

Minute remaining in the mid 2060s. Thank you. The issue is made more complex by the lack of clarity on who owns the land today, whether the land will be acquired through compulsory purchase or not, and who will build and manage the solar farm for the next 40 years. Forever fields therefore, requests that the following areas are given particular scrutiny during the examination. Land ownership. Compulsory purchase plans. Scrutiny of the developer's intentions in respect of actually building the farm if it's approved, and financial assessment of projected decommissioning costs and options for financial reserve and escrow to ensure commitment to decommissioning with reinstatement in mind.

00:35:37:24 - 00:36:08:26

The Fields Book is a powerful document that supports the above requests, and we therefore request that the examination accepts copies of this book for consideration. Finally, the experience of Forever Fields is one of a community community coming together and telling their stories through art and poetry. So I shall finish by borrowing a paragraph in my Carter's book on man and his bike. I had always loved the saying that we read stories to discover that we're not alone. Well, I don't think I ever felt less alone than at that moment.

00:36:09:04 - 00:36:34:27

Here were people, not extremists, but ordinary people, speaking passionately about the very things that make us human, that make life a thing of richness and fulfillment. And they were the very things that can never appear in a cost analysis, the only modern measure of a man's worth. So we look forward to an examination that is fair and reasonable, and a process that allows local views to be considered with a genuine, open mind.

00:36:38:28 - 00:36:50:06

Thank you, Mr. Thompson. Um, Scott, one question. I think, um, the the books that you have there, has that been submitted into the application? I don't think we've seen a copy.

00:36:50:15 - 00:37:20:27

No, it hasn't been submitted. It was published earlier this year. Um, and we as a group had lots of conversations about what would be the best way in which we could perhaps submit it. It doesn't translate easily to a digital version, and therefore I felt that today was the best opportunity to present it. It has been available for circulation and has largely been adopted and picked up by the artists themselves. So it's not in wide circulation at this point. So if you were to take it, it would be early for you to review it.

00:37:20:29 - 00:37:24:00

We would like to get it out more into the community in due course.

00:37:25:15 - 00:37:30:13

Thank you. Is it possible to get it in a digital format, do you think?

00:37:30:17 - 00:37:37:12

I think it's everything is possible. So it means that it's going to be considered. We'll definitely be able to make that happen.

00:37:38:11 - 00:37:48:07

Yeah. I think we would appreciate it if it's possible to get it digitized and in if if not deadline one, then let us know which deadline you feel that you'd be able to get it.

00:37:48:14 - 00:37:49:19

To deadline one.

00:37:50:12 - 00:37:54:01

That's fantastic. Thank you very much. Thank you, Mr. Thompson.

00:37:54:03 - 00:37:54:18

Thank you.

00:37:58:08 - 00:38:01:15

So next is David Foster. Thank you.

00:38:08:28 - 00:38:50:15

Yeah. Good afternoon. My name is David Foster. Um, thank you for letting me speak today. Um, I wish to raise one of the main concerns for residents of Grove Road and Orchard Field Lane in Blaydon Crossroads, the road that runs the back of Glenn and Palace. Um, and would be the kind of nearest point of solar panels to the palace. Um, but I was also concerned about all properties that face directly onto the proposed solar farm industrial estate. And the subject on a raise is sufficient buffer zones for those households. Grove Road and Orchard Lane homes are dominated by views of rolling countryside up to the woods, and would be most impacted by the proposal and hence need adequate protection.

00:38:51:08 - 00:39:21:10

These concerns have not been properly addressed by photo vote over the last three consultations. The proposed buffer zones between 25 and 85m with high boundary hedges are totally inadequate and seemingly random in their size, and our aims are maximising the solar footprint without concerns for residents. There's also risk of foot fall funnelling from the current field walks to behind our homes.

00:39:21:16 - 00:39:54:23

Once the construction has taken place, I have a petition for Grove Road and Orchard Field Lane for a 275 metre buffer zone up to a local path pathway. This extended buffer zone removes some of the day to day impact that solar farms will have on our lives. The area of this buffer zone is 15 acres. I've also estimated the total buffer zones required for Blaydon is 67 acres, so they have little impact on the 3500 acres for Botley West, but will substantially improve people's lives.

00:39:55:19 - 00:40:23:15

Further research or more experienced overseas solar countries recommends at least 500m buffer zone for developers. The properties adjoining solar farms for various health and safety reasons, including exposure to electromagnetic fields, glare and light impact. I also note on my recent observation that the Grove Road has been excluded from the glinton glare assessment in PDP's DC application.

00:40:25:06 - 00:41:01:21

Without the National Energy System Operator necessary NASA guidelines and the current lack of UK regulations. I wonder how the inspectorate will assess the suitable buffer zones on the largest solar farm in Europe. Can the inspector ensure focus on the size of buffer zones and recommend a standardised 500 meter buffer zone in line with other countries? For properties facing directly onto the solar farm for this development and can photo bolt finally accept and the need for increased buffer zones, which they have so far rejected, and properly assess and plan accordingly.

00:41:02:24 - 00:41:03:27

Thank you for your time.

00:41:07:15 - 00:41:14:11

Thank you, Mr. Foster. Any questions? There's no questions for you at this time. Thank you for your input.

00:41:15:27 - 00:41:16:12

Yeah.

00:41:18:11 - 00:41:23:06

So the next person on the list is Dominic Hare. Thank you very much.

00:41:28:26 - 00:41:29:16

Thank you.

00:41:30:17 - 00:42:02:12

I am Dominic Hare, chief executive officer of Blenheim, the major landowner beneath the proposed solar farm. I want to concentrate today on the things which make this project unique. Why Blenheim? Why here? It would be far easier for us as a landed estate with 300 years of history to stay in our lane.

Steer clear and wait for 300 more years to pass. But what will our land look like then? We already see this with increased flooding and hotter summers making our land unviable for growing crops.

00:42:02:25 - 00:42:36:03

You will hear arguments here on the loss of food production and the impact on best and most versatile land. I want to provide more context. We put this land forward above alternative sites based on the experience of farming the land ourselves and with some of the best farmers in the county who in a world without subsidy, could not cover the costs of growing food on large chunks of this land in the last two harvests. This is from failed crops and poor yields from poor soil. The three tenant farmers who cared for this land, with whom we reached fair agreement, reported the same challenge.

00:42:36:27 - 00:43:13:06

This is land depleted, struggling to cope with increasingly volatile weather. And whilst our decision to grow food or leave fallow is not a planning consideration, I can without doubt say this is the poorest of our land for food production and therefore the most suitable for this project. While many solar projects will see land change hands many times during their lifespan, Lennon's ownership will be constant. This uniquely allows us to care for the land through this project, to rejuvenate it, restore nature and return it to a state such that in 40 years time it can be used for growing food with abundance once more.

00:43:14:02 - 00:43:48:19

Few institutions can plan so far forward, but we can. And in the case of our recent solar site just north of Woodstock, we have quickly moved from a field barren of biodiversity to one where the soil is recovering. Flora and fauna grow to support wild bee populations, and carbon is sequestered underground. Hedges have grown up and the site is barely visible today. These benefits are measured and shared openly through our partnerships with the universities. We're just not seeing the biodiversity or wildlife losses that this project is accused of causing in a short time.

00:43:48:22 - 00:44:19:15

We, along with the Southfield Solar Park, show what can be achieved with the bold thinking and credible partners promoting Botley West while making a strong case for regenerating the future. I must also make the same case for cherishing the past. We are proud to care for a World Heritage Site, which brings over one 1 million visitors to the local area, supporting over 4500 jobs in the local community. We take this responsibility seriously and working with Historic England. We have carefully shaped where panels are sited.

00:44:19:29 - 00:44:55:15

We are confident you will see during this examination a scheme which does negligible harm to the heritage asset, one where the benefits far outweigh any harm, and one where, if there was any doubt of buried historic features, these have been investigated and the panels removed. It is also a project which, through existing funding structures, will see an additional half £1 million a year ploughed back into the World Heritage Site for vital repairs, and we will seek to increase that during the project. We do this because we care for the AUV of the World Heritage Site, and how we can preserve that for another 300 years.

00:44:56:00 - 00:45:28:26



We also acknowledge the change this project will bring to our landscape, which is enjoyed by others. We've worked with PVP through the public consultation to mitigate visual impacts as much as possible. Not a single public right of way is removed. We have delivered over 15km of new paths across the estate in the last five years, and through this project will continue to expand our path network. Proper access through this land and space is for local communities to grow. Food will be greater than ever before, addressing a fear of increased flooding around Grassington.

00:45:28:29 - 00:46:00:02

The project will in fact hold back more water than ever on our land. Our Stage Zero schemes, developed with the Environment Agency along the River line will be rolled out further, reconnecting rivers to flood meadows, enabling more water to be held back during flood periods. The Community Benefits agreements will see significant funds reinvested in the local area each year, and I know there is agreement to increase the funds available to go further. All this whilst maintaining farming, sheep grazing underneath and around the panels.

00:46:00:27 - 00:46:07:29

We know the power generated by this project is needed. The population is growing. The grid cannot keep up. We can address this on a scale.

00:46:08:21 - 00:46:10:06

You have less than a minute remaining.

00:46:10:12 - 00:46:17:27

We've not entered this project lightly, but I hope this clears up some of the misinformation which has followed this project and its importance to Blenheim.

00:46:17:29 - 00:46:18:17

Thank you.

00:46:21:27 - 00:46:25:08

Thank you, Mr. Chair. I think there's a couple of questions from the panel. Thank you.

00:46:27:06 - 00:46:42:11

Sir. If I can just ask, you mentioned the quality of the land in terms of growing crops. It's poor. Can I ask, what is it that this particular land lacks? To look at it another way. What will the land gain in 40 years time that will make it better for growing crops?

00:46:42:29 - 00:47:09:28

Uh, the soil is massively degraded in nutritional and organic content. So the act of pausing, not hard farming, not spraying for a prolonged period will see that recover yields in the last two years are well under 25%, less than even average land in our area. So we believe that will recover. We can already see on a neighboring solar farm that we run, um, within two years. Quite significant recovery in that.

00:47:11:10 - 00:47:12:06

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

00:47:14:03 - 00:47:41:22

Just a couple of questions from for me on on that and other matters. Um, one of the things that seem to be missing, if you like, from, from the assessment so far, is what the economic impact would be on Blenheim Palace and the state of Blenheim and how it works. Is there information that you can provide to the examination about the benefits or the harms in terms of the economic viability of your estate?

00:47:42:05 - 00:48:01:28

Yes, we can provide that for the first deadline. But sort of reiterate one thing I said here are existing mechanisms. I.e. who exactly owns each bit of land means that inevitably. A chunk of the underlying rents will flow, um, to a maintenance fund which supports the Blenheim Palace Heritage Foundation, and we will set that out for you in the reply.

00:48:02:19 - 00:48:34:12

Yes, indeed. And in respect of that, you mentioned that £500,000 will be ploughed per annum back into the estate. Um, apart from one sentence in the applicant's um chapter on heritage that is not mentioned at all. In fact, in looking at the community benefits package and all the literature we've had today, that's not mentioned at all. Um, do you have firm commitments that that indeed will be a as a result of this scheme?

00:48:34:25 - 00:49:04:23

It's not a commitment. What it is is the main the Blenheim Palace Maintenance Fund, which owns some of the fields under the proposed solar farm will receive rents from the promoter and the solar farm. The only place they can send that money legally is to the Blenheim Palace Heritage Foundation, so the inevitable fund flow from the underlying rents will send £500,000 a year into the Heritage Foundation. I can ask the promoter to, to, uh, um, set that out more clearly by deadline one.

00:49:04:29 - 00:49:47:27

Okay. And thank you for that. And just one more question, if I may. You mentioned sort of the the the impact on the heritage asset. You say it wouldn't particularly around, you know, panels going near blade and uh, areas have been excluded. Um, when we were on our on a company site inspection, a lot of the promotional literature for the Blenheim Palace was taken from the air. There was quite a lot of, you know, larger views taken from, I don't know, drones, planes, hot air balloons, whatever. And I'd just like to get your view on whether those kinds of promotional materials and the enjoyment of the asset from an aerial point of view would actually be harmfully impacted or not by having these panels now very close to it.

00:49:49:08 - 00:50:20:24

Um, so absolutely, the scale of our views is important, and our World Heritage Site Management Plan details various very specific viewpoints considered to be very precious both in the park to out and out the park to in. I don't think any of those would be affected by um, the placement of panels in, in that wider area. Uh, and you know, since we went public with this solar farm, our visitor numbers have increased significantly. So there's no sense, I think, of of people recoiling from that.

00:50:21:08 - 00:50:41:14

Uh, we certainly wouldn't use 1 or 2 of the views that that if you Google today, um, um, you know, you would see, uh, but but that's not our photography. So I'm very clear that from a marketing asset point of view, and that's what helps us look after the heritage and share it. We will have wonderful shots from all directions which are not affected by this solar farm.

00:50:42:25 - 00:50:45:15

Okay. Thank you very much. Anyone else have any questions?

00:50:45:17 - 00:50:46:02

Yeah.

00:50:46:07 - 00:50:56:18

Can I just ask you to repeat what you said about community benefits? Did you say that the funds were to be increased or did I misinterpret?

00:50:56:20 - 00:50:57:05

Yes.

00:50:57:07 - 00:51:04:24

I think you will see detail at that first deadline. That's a very live thing indeed. So, absolutely, there is a proposal to increase those funds.

00:51:04:26 - 00:51:07:01

And that will be submitted.

00:51:07:03 - 00:51:08:16

That will be submitted by the first deadline.

00:51:08:18 - 00:51:09:25

Great. Thank you very much.

00:51:15:14 - 00:51:19:01

Thank you. Mr.. There's no more questions for this time. Thank you.

00:51:19:03 - 00:51:19:27

Thank you very much.

00:51:22:18 - 00:51:26:00

Uh, next we'll have, um, Mr. George Smith.

00:51:41:27 - 00:51:42:12

Uh.

00:51:43:06 - 00:52:16:07

Good afternoon. Uh, my name is George Smith. I'm a local resident of vention for 50 years. I'm a former district councillor and a former chairman of the Interim Society. Uh, professionally, I'm a material scientist and engineer. I work particularly on energy materials. And, for example, I worked with the DTI on their energy materials research and development program. So I have a certain amount of technical knowledge, um, in this area. Um, I'd like briefly to cover, uh, three points.

00:52:16:13 - 00:52:49:19

Um, they're alliterative, uh, all land use, uh, landscape and, uh, logistics. Uh, in terms of land use. Um, I have to start by saying I'm struggling to recognize some of the evidence given by the previous speaker. Um, I, uh, Walked around that area just this last weekend, and I know that you as a team have been around there as well. I would challenge the statement that this is poor quality, low grade land.

00:52:50:15 - 00:52:59:27

What I saw was a wide range of healthy crops, mixed arable farming and pasture land. Are talking to

00:53:01:14 - 00:53:43:04

people in the local farming community. The consensus view that I get is that progressively in the current century, the quality of that land has been progressively been improved by good husbandry and good farming practice. If the yields have gone down in the last couple of years, I suggest that they may simply be because of the threat that they may not be able to continue farming in this area, and therefore less investment would be being put in. And as I said this morning, I would first of all, like to request that, uh, the land grading for that area be, uh, reexamined.

00:53:43:17 - 00:54:17:15

Uh, the grading is date back a long time, and, uh, they are contentious. Uh, and I also think there should be a proper, uh, economic assessment of the total loss of agricultural output that would arise from this development. Uh, strategically, as far as the British nation is concerned, I would argue that food security should be put on a par with energy security. And it shouldn't be an either or. They're both, uh, important. Uh, so that's on, uh, land use, on landscape.

00:54:18:04 - 00:54:50:01

Uh, I would, uh, I will submit a picture which just appeared, uh, in last week's Oxford Times, page five of Oxford Times, 8th of May. And this is an aerial photograph photographs supplied by the millennium Estate of a small solar farm, which they have just completed north of their estate. And this aerial picture is of a farm which occupies 20 acres. And the impact on the landscape is brutal and savage and ugly.

00:54:51:00 - 00:55:22:14

And if this it's contained essentially within one field. And maybe we can live with that. But if one looks at this picture and realises that the Botley development is 100 times greater, and it's not just on flat land, it's on undulating land, then the impact of this massive development would be absolutely appalling. It would be grotesque out of all reasonable scale compared to the environment in which it's developing.

00:55:23:00 - 00:55:49:03

And of course, it makes an impact on the entire context of the World Heritage site. But this to me, this is produced by Blenheim themselves, and is a stark reminder of what a vast development would look like. My final point on what I call logistics. This is more technical, concerned with my own area.

00:55:49:05 - 00:55:50:08

You have one minute remaining.

00:55:50:10 - 00:56:27:06

Right. Um, first of all, uh, intermittency is of concern. Uh, I would argue that strategically, anybody putting forward a plan for intermittent generation of power should be required to put forward a parallel plan for the storage of that power. Uh, the intermittency is a major handicap. It's got to either be stored or backed up. And without that, the plan is really not viable or sustainable. Um, in terms of the fragility of the, uh, system, people have quoted the Iberian, uh, example.

00:56:27:16 - 00:57:00:00

Uh, that's not a unique uh, there was a major power outage in Britain in 2019, which started in Essex and swept across Cheshire. And the investigation of that showed that it was the instability associated with renewables that had helped to destabilise the network. And thirdly, in terms of the total output from the site, the headline figure we get is 840MW, and I would suggest that that is a peak figure.

00:57:00:12 - 00:57:39:01

And what we really need to know is what the average is around the year, which I don't think has been brought out clearly 2 or 3 things. First of all, when it's dark, you don't get any electricity at all. When it's cloudy, if it's heavy cloud but daylight, then you only get a quarter of the output. And there are various other factors which affect output as well. And of course, in winter time when you need electricity for domestic heating at the output of the solar farm will be leased. So I think we need a more objective analysis of what the true deliverables would be from that.

00:57:39:05 - 00:57:45:27

But in summary, I would say that I believe that this is actually the wrong project in the wrong place at the wrong time.

00:57:47:23 - 00:57:48:09

Thank you.

00:57:52:20 - 00:58:00:01

Thank you, Mr. Smith. Um, no, there's there's no questions from the panel at this time. Thank you very much for your input.

00:58:04:19 - 00:58:08:14

So next I've got Mr. John Corlett. Thank you.

00:58:17:12 - 00:58:51:00

Thank you very much. Yes, I'm John Corlett, and I speak as a resident. Uh, I've already submitted a relevant representation, but here I wanted to try to add some of the lived experience of the residents,

which has been difficult to bring into the process so far. This is my personal story. I've recently clocked up [REDACTED] on this planet, over 50 of which I've spent in the village of Church Canberra. I'm still fit, active, not on regular medication, and until quite recently I was economically productive.

00:58:51:11 - 00:59:25:16

And obviously, I'm fortunate and privileged to be in this part of the country. But I firmly believe I have reaped the benefits of a lifestyle in a beautiful area of Britain. You really should have seen it this morning as the sun came up where I can walk or cycle every day, enjoy community, nature, wildlife, listen to skylarks, or listen to absolute silence at night. But of course, it's not just me. The glaring problem is the sheer number of people whose mental and physical wellbeing would be compromised.

00:59:25:27 - 01:00:01:17

This is not a remote desert or unpopulated uplands. It's rolling hills and green fields and Cotswold stone villages. A green belt around an historic city. The setting of a World Heritage Site. And it's a densely inhabited area with a rapidly growing population. Where up to 30,000 people live. Right next to the target area. Where many more pass through every day. And they're joined in their enjoyment by many of the district's 4 million visitors each year, 1 million of them to Blenheim Palace alone.

01:00:03:12 - 01:00:39:16

In the three and a half years since the plans first emerged. I've personally seen the welfare of friends, neighbours and communities decline. The threat of destruction of so much that we hold dear has taken its toll. We're afraid, stressed, depressed. We spend hours at computers researching technical and legal matters we never expected to engage with. We meet. Not to strengthen our community bonds, but to campaign against what seemed like overwhelming odds. The buoyant village spirit of our jubilee celebration that previous summer is a distant memory.

01:00:40:20 - 01:01:25:10

We feel bullied by billionaire developers, belittled by condescending experts, insulted by superficial consultations, trivialized by lies and obfuscation fed to the media. We share the pain and loss of our local farming families as their lives and livelihoods are put on notice. We fear a landscape where our uplifting views turn from a tapestry of seasonal colours to industrial black, punctuated by high fences, light security cameras, warning signs, unquantifiable noise, devastating glare and sunlight, and where our fog bound valleys in winter are covered by idle, inefficient infrastructure where our skylarks have failed to breed.

01:01:25:14 - 01:01:55:22

Our ancient oaks are compromised. Our happy places have vanished. We cherish our history, of our heritage, of history and archaeology, much of it unexplored to date, in which we know this area to be particularly rich. What will I say to my young grandchildren when they find we allowed a developer to install concrete piles into Iron Age sites across the area, or to surround our ancient villages with glass and steel. Sorry girls. Climate emergency.

01:01:57:16 - 01:02:20:05

Yes, of course, our welfare will also be compromised by climate change. And yes, of course we need the capacity and renewables to replace fossil fuels. But should we endlessly say yes to panels on fields

wherever an opportunistic developer pops up, irrespective of the damage? Especially when we're told that the blockages lie elsewhere in the huge existing queue for national grid connections.

01:02:20:09 - 01:02:22:15

Just a reminder, Mr. Call. You have one minute remaining.

01:02:23:01 - 01:02:56:24

Or should an applicant be required to prove beyond reasonable doubt that they have the best of all the alternatives? The greatest benefit for the minimum cost. Where is the comparison with community solar and wind or around the corner here? Even community hydro among our villages? It would not be hard to find a dozen more communities delighted to follow South Hill Solar in Charlbury or West Mill Solar and wind in Wash Field, but with the beer moth that is Botley West, the cost is just too great.

01:02:56:27 - 01:03:06:15

The impact is brutal. It is the wrong thing in the wrong place for the wrong reasons. We desperately need our planners to strike a balance.

01:03:16:02 - 01:03:20:06

Right. Thank you, Mr. Phillips. I don't think there's any questions from the panel at this time.

01:03:20:08 - 01:03:21:08

Thank you very much.

01:03:30:24 - 01:03:31:09

So we.

01:03:31:11 - 01:03:31:26

We.

01:03:32:07 - 01:04:04:09

Do have a John G. As the next. Can I by all means come forward. Um, can I just confirm because we're we're running ahead of time. Um, from the agenda that was, um, published, is are all the individuals and groups who wanted to speak here, um, or is anyone aware of those who are on the list? Not yet. Um, here and available. Just thinking when's best to take a break and allow those who are later to to appear.

01:04:04:26 - 01:04:35:05

Um, does anyone know if, for example, Michael Brown is here? Excellent. Thank you. Uh, Southfield community energy. Thank you. Uh, Stewart. Stuart Thompson. Thank you. Stop! Botley West. Thank you. Sustainable. Woodstock. Yep. I can see a hand there. Thank you. Um, Mr. Ivanovic is not here, but I understand Mr. Sumner, uh, may be able to substitute Mr. Sumner here. Yes. Thank you very much.

01:04:37:03 - 01:04:37:27

Excuse me.

01:04:41:19 - 01:04:46:19

Um. Come now. Parish council. Thank you. Uh, Vincent. Good start.

01:04:48:19 - 01:05:27:25

Okay. That's the one who's missing at the moment. And then, um, I understand there's also a Mr. Beaumont, um, who's been potential. Yes. Okay. Thank you. So. Apart from Mr.. Good start. Um, we are all here. Um, what I suggest we do. Um, the the agenda predicted, uh, the agenda published. Predicted, Mr. G that you'd be on at 5:00. I propose to hear you now, um, Because you're you're here and you've come forward. But what I propose is that then once we've heard, you will take a brief sort of 15, 20 minute adjournment, and then if in that time, if someone could try and contact Mr.

01:05:27:27 - 01:05:42:06

Guster and see if he can attend earlier, and then we'll resume after the break with Mr. Michael Brown, if that's okay. Um, so apologies for the delay. Thank you for your patience, Mr. G. If we could hear your your testimony, please.

01:05:51:21 - 01:05:53:15

We can press the gray button.

01:05:53:25 - 01:05:55:13

To turn the microphone on. Please, sir.

01:05:57:19 - 01:06:33:00

Hello, my name is John G. I farm Desmond's Farm family farm, which has a pilot line running through it and is just north of Cumnock, which the solar farm wants to use. It's on a but I've allowed 200 acres to go into this solar farm, and it is on particularly difficult land. It's on clay land. Last year we went to drill it in October, but we couldn't. We had about five inches of rain overnight in the end of September, and we had to delay drilling till November.

01:06:33:11 - 01:06:56:14

We got on the land in November, but then it continued to rain and the crop failed. Seed rotted out and so we drilled it again in the spring with spring barley, which is at a lower price, and it's now struggling for rain. So it's a it's difficult land to farm anyway.

01:06:58:15 - 01:07:21:15

If things were different, like they were in the 70s where we had gotten lower, lower yields, but with the cost of inflation, I think wheat prices would be £600 a tonne, but they're not £600 a ton. They're 160 to £180 a ton. We wouldn't even be looking at soda farms. We have to look other ways of making an income.

01:07:23:07 - 01:07:24:25

We don't want to go back

01:07:26:16 - 01:07:40:13



that extra income people spend. They don't want to spend it on food. They want to spend on central heating, foreign holidays to car families, etc., etc. and so by having a solar farm on the farm would produce.

01:07:40:24 - 01:07:41:09

Uh.

01:07:41:28 - 01:08:12:10

A regular income for the farm, which we could then plow some of that money back into our farm. The wildlife benefits would be great by sticking the underneath the solar farm grass or floral mix, which would help the insects, which we can all remember the days when we used to go out driving with our car, and it used to be covered with insects on the front. That those days seems to have gone, and with it the birds and everything else which rely on it.

01:08:14:03 - 01:08:18:12

I don't think there's, um,

01:08:20:00 - 01:08:57:04

any shortage of wheat in the world. You can bring wheat now from Canada or the Black Sea into Liverpool docks as cheaply as you can. Transfer that wheat into lorries and take it to Manchester. It's and it's. And it's not forever. The ground is getting degraded. It most of Oxfordshire is in grade three land and there's talk of solar on roofs. I've got a friend in Cumnock who wanted to put solar on his roof, and he's just been turned down.

01:08:57:06 - 01:09:04:04

It's in a conservation area, which would be the same with most Cotswold villages. Woodstock. It's not really practical

01:09:06:04 - 01:09:31:03

and we want to keep the countryside open. People can walk in it, and I don't think the solar farm will impact on it. I mean, we have a come to clean up once a year and we have to pick up bottles which the runners drink and then just discard on them and pick up fly tipping and everything else. But those people that come and help me are salt of the earth people. And they are.

01:09:33:00 - 01:09:38:05

They think the farmers ought to be allowed to do what they want with their own land.

01:09:39:09 - 01:09:39:24

Ah.

01:09:40:04 - 01:09:40:22

Okay.

01:09:46:21 - 01:09:54:19

Thank you, Mr. Qi. I've just got one question. Um. I'm. Apologies. Due to the microphone issues at the beginning, I didn't catch which farm you were from.

01:09:54:21 - 01:09:58:16

At Denman Farm. Denman farm is the name of the farm.

01:09:58:20 - 01:09:59:05

Thank you very.

01:09:59:07 - 01:09:59:22

Much.

01:10:01:09 - 01:10:17:20

And just a couple of questions for me, if you don't mind. There. You mentioned, um, you We went to drill on the land that was waterlogged, effectively. In terms of at Desmond's farm, do you have any land drainage already serving?

01:10:17:25 - 01:10:40:00

The ground is undermined by the rain. It was ploughed up compulsory ploughing orders in the 40s, and it's been ploughed up ever since. And it's been improved, it's been drained and everything else. But there was no sort of dry spell or cold spell or anything else. It just continued to rain. I mean, it, it's the sort of ground which does suffer in the wet.

01:10:40:26 - 01:11:02:00

No, I mean certainly from our unaccompanied site inspection when we're walking on paths sort of in the area, we noticed it was particularly wet at that time. And that brings me onto the the question now, in terms of general weather patterns, you know, as a farmer, you'll be very in tune with the weather as such. Does it rain more than it shines in this part of the world?

01:11:02:02 - 01:11:12:25

David David Attenborough says it's the one thing that scares him, that this global warming that the, um, is definitely getting wetter and warmer. Yeah.

01:11:13:27 - 01:11:18:26

And would you say there's more sort of wet, cloudy days as opposed to bright sunny days or.

01:11:20:06 - 01:11:31:00

Oh, I would say it's definitely getting wetter than these for antifreeze and stuff like that seems to have gone and it is getting warmer, which are okay. Yeah. On average.

01:11:32:01 - 01:11:33:08

Okay. Um,

01:11:34:28 - 01:11:59:25

okay. I've got no further questions now. Okay. Thank you very much, sir. Thank you. Um, it's now according to the clock and my computer, it's just gone past, uh, ten. Past four. What I suggest now is that we take a break until 4:30, a brief break for everyone, and then we'll resume at 4:30, uh, with Michael Brown. So this hearing is currently adjourned. Thank you.

