



Planning Inspectorate
Arolygiaeth Gynllunio

Hearing Transcript

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| Project: | Botley West Solar Farm |
| Hearing: | Open Floor Hearing 2 (OFH2) – Part 1 |
| Date: | 14 May 2025 |

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

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FULL TRANSCRIPT (with timecode)

00:00:05:21 - 00:00:09:09

All right. Good morning everyone. If everyone can take their seats, please.

00:00:13:18 - 00:00:45:23

Thank you very much. It is now 10:00, and I'm officially opening this open floor hearing for the application for an order granting development consent for the Botley West solar farm. We'll go through introduction shortly, but please bear with me while I go through a few housekeeping matters. First of all, can I check that you can all hear me? Excellent. That's good. And can I confirm that the live streaming recordings have started? Thank you very much indeed. There are no fire alarm drills planned for today, so if it goes off, it is the real thing.

00:00:46:14 - 00:01:15:06

Um, if the fire is behind us, then effectively the exits are out that way and congregate in the car park. If the fire is that way, there's exit doors behind us here. And again, we go around the building and congregate in the car park. The toilets are just outside the doors, there for everyone. 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 application. I'll hand over to other members to introduce themselves. Now.

00:01:17:24 - 00:01:24:28

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

00:01:25:24 - 00:01:33:15

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

00:01:34:16 - 00:01:40:29

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

00:01:42:03 - 00:02:14:24

Also present today are members of the case team. The case manager is Mr. Hayward and he is supported here at the venue by Miss Hannigan and Mr. Stevens. An online Miss Court is in charge of activity on there. If you have any questions or concerns about today's event, please contact a member of the case team. The audiovisual service is a company provided by CVS. So that's the team on our end. I'd like to welcome all attendees here today, both here at the venue, those attending virtually and those watching the live stream.

00:02:14:27 - 00:02:45:24

Thank you for your time and thank you for joining us. I will not be asking attendees to introduce themselves now, but effectively when we go to your representations, if you could identify yourself and if you represent an organization and then we can go straight into your, uh, your testimony. Um, this will be coming imminently. Just one final housekeeping matter for me. It was brought to my attention during yesterday's, uh, open floor hearing that some members of the audience were on their mobile phones.

00:02:46:10 - 00:03:02:12

Um, please, may I request a degree of professionalism during the course of the meeting? If you could refrain from going on mobile phones and and be engaged in the meeting, That would be much appreciated. Um, that's another ground Wolves will be spoken to now by Mrs. Metcalfe.

00:03:06:16 - 00:03:36:20

Thank you. I know some of you will have heard this all yesterday, but for the benefit of anyone who is attending for the first time today, please bear with me. First, 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 is expected that both blended and fully virtual events will form part of the planning Inspectorate's future operating model. We, the Examining Authority, are attending this meeting in person, as are several of the attendees.

00:03:37:06 - 00:04:05:18

For those attending virtually, please be rest assured that you have a full attention at all times. Even if we are not looking at the camera to avoid visual and noise distractions, please keep your cameras and microphones off unless we invite you to speak. We will be taking a mid-morning break at around 1130, and will break for lunch at about 130. We expect that this hearing will finish around 230, but if for any reason it is extended, there will be a further break if necessary.

00:04:07:06 - 00:04:47:28

Secondly, this event is being 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, to which the General Data Protection Regulation, GDPR, applies. The Planning Inspectorate practice is to retain and publish recordings from momentum. Excuse me for a period of five years from the date of the Secretary of State's decision. Consequently, if you participate in today's open flooring hearing, it is important to understand that you will be recorded and that you therefore consent to the retention and publication of the digital recording.

00:04:49:01 - 00:05:17:01

It is very unlikely that the Exa EXR will ask you to put sensitive personal information into the public domain. Indeed, we would encourage you not to do that. However, if for some reason you feel it is necessary to refer to sensitive personal information, we would encourage you to speak to the case team in the first instance. We would then explore with you whether that information could be provided in a written format, which might be more easily redacted before being published.

00:05:18:20 - 00:05:50:27

Thirdly, the applicant will be invited to respond to all of the points raised by attendees at the end of today's session. However, the applicant does reserve the right to only observe proceedings today and respond formally in writing. To this end, we have invited the applicant to respond to the representations made today in writing at deadline. One fourth point is to the speakers today. To ensure that we are able to finish the business of the day on time. Please keep your representations brief and to and to the point.

00:05:51:05 - 00:06:24:17

We encourage you not to repeat matters that you have previously stated in writing when invited to speak. Please introduce yourself by name and if relevant, by your organization. This is important for the transcripts, recordings and live streams for the Exa and for other parties. The purpose of this hearing is to provide an opportunity for parties to put their views forward verbally to the Exa, in line with section 93 of the Planning Act 2008, and rules 14 and 15 of the Examination Procedure Rules 2010.

00:06:25:18 - 00:06:46:08

In light of the number of speakers, we are imposing a five time limit of five minutes per speaker, and in the interests of fairness, I will enforce this limit. I will indicate when you have one minute left. The examining authority may subsequently ask questions of any organisation or individual about matters arising from their oral submissions.

00:06:48:00 - 00:07:02:08

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 will now hand over to Miss Cassini for item agenda item three. Thank you.

00:07:03:03 - 00:07:14:02

Thank you, Mrs. Metcalf. The list of speakers for today's event is taken from the agenda issues, and unless anyone has any concerns, we shall now commence following the order as per the agenda.

00:07:15:26 - 00:07:25:20

So I'll first invite representation from the parish council. Thank you. If you just want to press the gray button on your microphone and you've got five minutes.

00:07:26:18 - 00:07:54:10

Thank you very much. My name is Richard Devereux Cook. I am the chair of Hambre Parish Council, and I speak on their behalf in this session. Um, I also have a relevant representation in my own name,

which is on your list for later on. But I emphasize that this session is about Hambre Parish Council and it's its representation that was made. Um, before I start, if I may. Um.

00:07:57:11 - 00:08:36:10

Mr. Wallace, um, you mentioned the point about no mobile phones. What I would like to say, and it's a general comment, is that there is no internet connection here, and that is a real disadvantage to those of us who want to refer to documents that are already in your document library. We can't access it. I suspect that people are using their mobile phones to try and get around that lack of connectivity, because that's the only way they can do it. Um, in this venue, one would have thought, given its purpose and its use, that there should be a multitude of connectivity.

00:08:36:12 - 00:09:08:11

There's three websites connections for the King Centre. None of them seem to provide any access, and I do have to raise that, and I suspect other people will wish to echo it. It's a real disadvantage. Maybe it can be dealt with, but I mention it because it's important. Thank you very much. So I speak on behalf of Hambre Parish Council. Our relevant representation is in your document library at RR Dash 0376.

00:09:09:00 - 00:09:14:25

I can't see that on my screen because I have no connection. But happily, I have a printed copy in front of me as well.

00:09:16:12 - 00:09:52:23

I take note of the comments that were made just a moment ago about not repeating what is in the relevant representation. I don't intend to do that. I appreciate what was said yesterday about not dealing with merits of an application, and there's always a tendency, as I'm sure you're aware, that those who make those representations want to say what they think, and that doesn't really help you, and it doesn't fit the rubric that is meant to be followed. That, I'm afraid, has been a characteristic of this entire, um, application and the public consultations that came before.

00:09:52:28 - 00:10:32:29

Many people thought that the way forward was to say, we don't like it. And without giving any reasons as to why. And I'm sure you'll have seen that amongst the multitude of relevant representations, the 1100 plus relevant representations, there are quite a number that simply say we don't like it. That we appreciate as parish council is not the way forward. This is about what are the salient points that you need to hear from. So if I may, with with our representation as a backdrop, um, I appreciate that it deals a lot with the reasons why the parish council doesn't like it.

00:10:34:10 - 00:11:08:05

If we go further, uh, we know that within Humber parish, which is about the fourth largest parish in the areas affected by this proposal. This project that we have a population of something like 3600 people. Um, we know that within that area there are some who would say we don't want solar farm at all. We know that there are people who say, not a bad idea. We represent all of them. We can't pick and choose as to who we want to speak for.

00:11:08:20 - 00:11:43:10

And that's an important point. So as a parish council, we have not done what some parish councils do, which is to decide to vote for themselves, favour or not. We decided not to because we wanted to focus on the issues which are relevant to this examination and to the consultations that came before, and to deal in those details which we think are important. The first of those details is referred to in the relevant representation.

00:11:43:12 - 00:12:15:23

It refers to the size of this project. We know that, and I'm sure you do as well, that this is the biggest project in the UK as a single unit. We know that there are others that are conjoined units that come together to form a collection of solar projects, but this is the only one that stands on its own. More importantly, it stands on its own, surrounded by more communities than any other project that we know of in this country.

00:12:17:04 - 00:12:43:12

We reckon that something like 55,000 people are going to be affected in the various parishes, and that is significant. The density of population here is something that we feel needs to be taken into account. We don't know of any other solar farm project that has that density of population so close to the red line boundary of the book.

00:12:43:15 - 00:12:45:04

You have one minute left. Thank you.

00:12:45:17 - 00:12:46:03

Sorry.

00:12:46:22 - 00:12:47:21

You have one minute left.

00:12:47:23 - 00:12:53:28

Thank you very much. Um, so that's the thing that that that concerns us a lot.

00:12:56:04 - 00:13:14:09

There are various issues that will be picked up later by other people, and we support a lot of what other other representatives are going to be saying. Um, and I have to say, my own contribution later will pick up on 1 or 2 of these issues in more detail because we feel it's necessary. I feel it's necessary. We

00:13:15:24 - 00:14:02:19

do question a point that is raised in our relevant representation, which is the life of solar panels. We understand that solar panels, PV panels have an effective life of something like 25 years. They deteriorate over time, losing about 0.05 of their efficiency over each year, which means that within 25 years they're likely to need replacing. There's been no mention of that in the applicant's case as far as we can see, but we feel it's an important point that needs to be mentioned, needs to be borne in mind, because if panels are replaced after 25 years, they effectively extend the life of the project for another 25 years, which takes it well beyond the decommissioning date which is being talked about.

00:14:02:21 - 00:14:14:14

Of the 30, 30, 37 to 40 years. We feel that's a point that you, the panel, the, the, the examining authority need to bear in mind. And we hope that you will.

00:14:17:06 - 00:14:28:13

That, I think at the moment is all I want to say on that point. Um, I regret that I'm also speaking on the following point to do with community benefits.

00:14:30:24 - 00:14:35:04

Thank you very much for your contribution. Thank you.

00:14:39:10 - 00:14:43:15

I have no questions for gentlemen. No, thank you very much.

00:14:45:25 - 00:14:53:28

If I could next invite. Be SF Community Benefit steering Group to come to the microphone, please.

00:14:57:03 - 00:14:58:13

That as I've just indicated.

00:14:58:24 - 00:14:59:09

Sorry.

00:14:59:11 - 00:15:00:14

Yeah. Sorry.

00:15:01:02 - 00:15:36:15

Okay. Again. Name? Richard Devereaux Cook. I happen to be chair of the steering group for the community benefits interest in relation to the West project. I stress that what I'm going to now be saying deals only with the issue of community benefits. Because that is all that we are set up to do. Our relevant representation can be found in your document library at RR 0107. And it's a very comprehensive submission again, which I do not intend to go to in any detail at all.

00:15:36:17 - 00:16:08:13

I'm sure that you've seen it already. Um, what I want to do is to, is to stress that we, as a group of parishes surrounding the footprint of the Botley West project amount to something like 16 to 18 parishes. And out of those parishes, parish councils, we came together to deal with the issue of community benefits together rather than separately. That was an important consideration in what what we decided to do.

00:16:09:04 - 00:16:42:08

Uh, we have had meetings with the developer. Those meetings are ongoing, discussions are continuing. And I can't tell you what the progress of those is other than that they seem to be helpful and indeed productive. Um, but I can't at the moment give you more details than that. They may well become apparent in the not so distant future. The point is that we represent all of those parishes.

00:16:42:23 - 00:16:48:01

So all of those people in all of the districts, we.

00:16:50:02 - 00:17:24:25

Feel that we have a valid voice. There are some parishes who may not be so closely connected, falling outside the Red line boundary. My own parish finds itself contributing about 30% of its parish area. Its footprint to the solar farm, i.e. the Red line boundary, comes into hambre parish area played in parish covers about 50%, so there is a considerable use of the parish areas in what is involved in this project.

00:17:25:19 - 00:17:56:02

Um, we obviously are concerned about that. It's another factor of the size issue and the fact that this is such a unique project that, as I said before, there is no comparable project so closely cited to the, the, the communities, the populations around this particular part of West Oxfordshire. And that makes it unique. And it is something that makes it difficult to come up with comparable figures.

00:17:56:04 - 00:18:27:09

Looking around at what else has been done by the way of community benefits. There's a lot of work, including in our representation, about what has been decided previously. We cannot suggest that you look at those with any great hope of finding an answer. Indeed, we recognise that it's not a matter, strictly speaking, for you as the examining authority. Anyway, um, it is an add on point, but it was mentioned as part of the applicants DCO application and so therefore we respond to it in that light.

00:18:28:03 - 00:18:39:21

As I said, matters are ongoing and I can't help you, I'm afraid at this point with details about that. That's all I want to say. Thank you very much.

00:18:39:26 - 00:18:55:25

Thank you very much. I don't have any questions. Any of my colleagues? Nope. Thank you very much for your time today. Thank you. If I could invite the Churchwell Collective to come to the desk, please.

00:19:20:24 - 00:19:24:23

Sorry. Could I ask you to press the microphone button. Thank you.

00:19:26:25 - 00:20:02:07

I thought I'd just shout. I'm doctor Emily Connelly. I'm the founder and managing director of Chartwell Collective. Unlike many of the hearing participants, my comments today have been moderated. So due to our relationship with the National Lottery Community Fund, I will not and cannot engage in party political discussions. Please do not misinterpret anything I say as preference for one party or platform. And I am also not trying to lobby. I am here as the leader of a grassroots movement building local climate infrastructure.

00:20:02:28 - 00:20:07:16

I have had many conversations with members of my community which inform this view.

00:20:10:17 - 00:20:47:19

Climate action is beyond and above party politics and has been too often politicized. Like our individual health, the well-being of our planet should be a core goal that we all hold and protect. A development of this size is not a magic elixir. The impact on the grid is only a small step in what we must do to decarbonize. The potential of this development. Is the leverage that you hold to maximize the benefit to our community. So the collective's view is that specific aspects of the plan have benefits beyond the energy which will be generated.

00:20:47:27 - 00:21:20:09

Some benefits are byproduct of the change of the use of land. The farm around Blenheim has been overworked for centuries. Allowing it to lay fallow could reduce agricultural runoff into our rivers. It could increase biodiversity and contribute to broader ecological goals of the county. The land is spent and we should let it heal. There are also direct benefits. In discussions prior to the proposal, we have reached agreement to use land on the margins of the farm to create food forests.

00:21:22:15 - 00:21:46:10

These sites will engage the community in growing their own food using permaculture methods, which increase yields but also build soil health. The immediate benefit of this is an increase in the available growing food growing space for our food work, which currently serves over 3000 registered members facing food and fuel poverty in the areas immediately surrounding the proposed solar site.

00:21:48:25 - 00:21:57:07

A long term benefit is moving forward an inclusive food strategy by increasing access to fresh produce for the marginalised rural community.

00:21:59:07 - 00:22:09:18

Promises of land use are not enough, however, and we would encourage you to ring fenced funds as part of contingency for all partnership agreements included in the plans.

00:22:12:13 - 00:22:44:03

Finally, I would like to address the Community Benefit Fund proposed. We are concerned that the fund could be number one. Too small. Number two. Too broad. And number three, susceptible to being politicised. The UK has already established a benchmark for community fund contributions from solar farms. First put in place by the Scottish Government. That benchmark is £5,000 per megawatt annually. We strongly suggest this benchmark be set for Botley West as a contingency for approval.

00:22:46:27 - 00:23:24:18

Further, to maximise the community benefit of the farm. The fund should be ring fenced for decarbonisation activities. This includes, but is not limited to, building more circular infrastructure, carbon literacy and decarbonisation, outreach and education, biodiversity, ecological interventions, water cleanup and other relevant climate resilience work that will maximise the impact of the energy changes. Finally, we request that Botley West establish and finance an independent body to oversee the community fund, which explicitly excludes local councils.

00:23:25:26 - 00:23:43:06

We are especially concerned, given the devolution proposals, which would come into effect at the same time as this solar project, that the community fund should be protected. There is a reality that the solar farm will generate tax funds that will be significant, contributing to the councils for them to deal with.

00:23:43:29 - 00:23:44:18

You have one minute.

00:23:44:23 - 00:24:28:26

Thank you. There is a risk of the community fund becoming a political tool for purposes unrelated to national decarbonisation goals. That risk is too high. We fundamentally believe the Community Fund should be overseen by stakeholders with direct experience and expertise in climate action, rather than politicians. I would like to summarise by saying thank you for having me. The question today is not if this development should go forward, but rather do you see the opportunity and potential to protect resources and priorities to support widespread decarbonization and maximize community benefit in this rare one time opportunity? Thank you.

00:24:29:12 - 00:24:33:22

Thank you very much, Mr. Wallace. Thank you. Have a question? Sorry, sorry.

00:24:33:24 - 00:24:35:22

Thank you. Sorry.

00:24:36:12 - 00:25:07:29

Um, yeah. Just, uh, just a couple of questions, if you don't mind. Um, you mentioned about the. By having the solar farm there, it reduces the agricultural runoff to rivers and so forth. And you said the phrase let the land heal. Um, one of the issues that came up at the open floor hearing yesterday was concern about the piles that were going in, the pens that are holding the panels into the ground, potential contamination from both the screws and from the concrete, if you like, if it's embedded in.

00:25:09:03 - 00:25:13:12

Do you see that as being a problem or a hindrance to the land healing.

00:25:15:12 - 00:25:35:20

I do not think that that is as damaging to the land as the current, um, chemical additions and the turning over of the land which releases carbon, and I think it's a trade off. Like any huge project, there are trade offs. And I think the impact, the overall impact and benefit is still going to be positive for the land and soil health.

00:25:36:21 - 00:25:55:19

Okay. Thank you. And you mentioned about the grow your own food area. There's obviously, um, talk within the applicant's application about setting aside land for the community growing. Um, have you had much involvement in sort of steering or contributing towards the concept of that at all?

00:25:56:00 - 00:26:31:28

Yes, I have, so we've been in consultation, um, for a few years now about that, because we've been testing food forests around, um, different sites to maximise impact and soil health as well as yield. And so I've had conversations not only with, uh, the Botley West developers, but also with Eden projects around rolling out these food forests on a massive scale to help build food security locally in any place that we can grow. So I think this in particular provides an opportunity for a large stretch of land to test this concept on scale, which could have kind of maximum impact well beyond any kind of energy impact.

00:26:33:26 - 00:26:35:04

Okay. Thank you very much for that.

00:26:35:06 - 00:26:35:26

Thank you.

00:26:38:08 - 00:26:49:09

I'm sorry. One more. Um, you mentioned a figure of £5,000 per megawatt per annum. Um, and you mentioned. Could you repeat, sorry, where that figure came from?

00:26:49:15 - 00:27:04:12

Um, yes. So that is what the Scottish National Government, um, the central government, uh, uses as their benchmark for solar farms and their community benefit funds. Of course, they make it voluntary. And I would suggest very strongly you shouldn't make this one voluntary.

00:27:05:28 - 00:27:06:14

Thank you.

00:27:06:16 - 00:27:07:04

Thank you.

00:27:07:26 - 00:27:10:12

Thank you. know, that's the end of the questions.

00:27:10:14 - 00:27:11:12

Thank you very much.

00:27:11:19 - 00:27:15:28

Thank you. Could I next invite Cpre Oxfordshire, please?

00:27:24:00 - 00:27:24:21

Thank you.

00:27:27:16 - 00:27:40:01

Good morning. Thank you. I'm Lisa Warren, director for CPR campaign to Protect Rural England in Oxfordshire. It's an independent charity working to protect and enhance the countryside

00:27:41:16 - 00:28:17:02

CPR. I fully support the UK's transition towards clean energy, but we believe this transition cannot come at the cost of our landscape, food security, the green belt or rural communities. The Climate Change Committee's seventh carbon budget report, published in February 2025, requires a further 0.6% of England's land surface area to fulfil the government's target of solar energy by 2040. This is in fact a relatively small land area similar to what is occupied by golf courses.

00:28:17:25 - 00:28:53:00

Therefore, decision makers need to be selective about where ground mounted solar developments are located. And there is no obligation to approve every application. CBRE has long advocated for solar panels to be installed on rooftops in brownfield sites, as this preserves land and is close to the point of use. This approach is gaining traction. A government leak in the week of the 28th of April indicated that rooftop solar will become mandatory on all new buildings in England by 2027, as part of the future home standards.

00:28:54:06 - 00:29:14:20

We recognise the imperative of moving away from fossil fuels, but undue haste combined with suboptimal planning reforms, poor strategic planning, limited stakeholder engagement and lack of innovative solutions risks undermining the government's clear power mission and leads to poorly sited, ad hoc solar development.

00:29:16:11 - 00:29:33:09

The publication of the Land Use Framework presents an opportunity to consider how land could be used more effectively to balance multiple needs. Oxfordshire is, in fact ahead of the curve, with the county council funding a project to develop a land use framework for the county, expected to conclude later this year.

00:29:35:02 - 00:30:05:25

Our main concern is the excessive scale of the proposed development, development and its potential to significantly alter the rural character of the area. Combined with new housing, it risks transforming a largely agricultural landscape into an industrial one. Additionally, the visual impact on visitors approaching Blenheim via the A44 from Oxford appears to have been completely overlooked. We believe the impact in flooding in the local area has significantly been underestimated.

00:30:06:03 - 00:30:23:01

Many of the surrounding fields are known to rely on land drains, which will be damaged during construction. The destruction of these land drains, combined with the slope of the solar panels accelerating surface water runoff, will inevitably increase the flood risk for Oxford and nearby communities.

00:30:24:26 - 00:31:04:15

Another key concern is the impact on agricultural land. Over 36% of the site is classified as best and most versatile land. Though we believe this figure is underestimated as part of the land was excluded from the ALC survey without clear justification. CBRE maintains the applicant has not adequately shown how the development of Vois or minimises the harm of BMV land. This area has a history of

high yielding crops, with neighbouring farmers reporting weevils of 8.5 tonnes a hectare well above the national average, describing it as low productivity is inaccurate and dismissive of its proven value.

00:31:04:18 - 00:31:36:25

There is an alternative. Land farmed in a regenerative nature will improve soil structure and yields. Turning to the Oxford Greenbelt in 2024. CBRE commissioned a survey which revealed that 80% of respondents believe it should remain open and free from development, as required by the NPF. Public opinion is strongly in favour of protecting this vital landscape. Finally, with regard to public rights away, we're concerned the project will significantly impact their use.

00:31:37:07 - 00:32:05:13

The public's enjoyment of these routes is likely to be diminished by the presence of solar panels, tall fencing and dense hedgerows intended to screen the development, all of which will create an enclosed and visually intrusive environment. Overall, it's keeper's view that the scheme has submitted is contrary to policy statements. M one and three National Planning Policy framework. The policies of the West Oxford Local Plan 2031 and Woodstock Neighbourhood Plans.

00:32:07:01 - 00:32:44:12

We strongly oppose this proposed development and believe consideration should be given to removing all panels on greenbelt land, BMV heritage assets and increasing buffer zones near residential areas. Can it really be viable to build 1004 hectare solar farm on productive arable land in a green belt between a world renowned historic city and a World Heritage Site in an area that would directly impact the amenity of many thousands of residents. We're inclined to think that in any reasonable judgement, this is perhaps one of the last places in the world one would select.

00:32:44:24 - 00:32:45:15

Thank you.

00:32:46:04 - 00:32:56:12

Thank you very much. I do have a couple of questions. The survey that you mentioned in 2020 for the green belt is that in the public realm?

00:32:56:18 - 00:32:57:29

No, but it can be if it needs to be.

00:32:58:01 - 00:33:02:09

Would it be possible to submit that into the examination? Yes.

00:33:02:11 - 00:33:03:10

Of course, no problem.

00:33:03:22 - 00:33:04:07

Okay.

00:33:04:09 - 00:33:05:00

Mr. Wallace?

00:33:06:01 - 00:33:34:04

Yes. One quick question. You mentioned about, um, regenerative farming perhaps being a better way of restoring the land. As such, the applicant's proposal effectively, um, leaves the land fallow, as is heard. Nothing there. But also having sheep grazing on a particular, uh, proportion of it, I believe, within the Blenheim estate land itself. Do you see any real, tangible benefits to that at all in terms of the quality of the the soil and the landscape?

00:33:34:06 - 00:34:09:29

I think there's an alternative to the way the land is currently being farmed, and that is in a regenerative way where you're looking at really putting back the organic matter into the system to improve the soils. Having livestock in that system, moving away from conventional ploughing to direct drilling, there is an alternative to conventional farming, and many farmers are doing this across the country now and proving that they can have just as good yields and also improving the soil structure at the same time. So you can still farm produce yields filled the food that have food for the country but be less intrusive on the on the environment.

00:34:12:06 - 00:34:32:05

Thank you for that. And just one quick query in terms of the how the farming and the crops that are grown here, how they contribute to the rural environment, if you like, of of Oxfordshire. Is there anything in any special crops, anything special that adds to the quality of the landscape, for example, in terms of farming?

00:34:32:07 - 00:34:49:29

I think, you know, Oxfordshire is known for mixed farming. It's it's known for arable and livestock farming and it's part of the character of Oxfordshire and the landscape. Um, purely grassland is, you know, vast swathes of grassland is not necessarily what we see in Oxford. We see mixed, mixed farming.

00:34:52:15 - 00:34:53:28

Okay. Thank you very much.

00:34:55:11 - 00:35:01:28

Thank you for your contribution. If I could invite Eskimos to make their representation, please.

00:35:10:05 - 00:35:10:28

Are they.

00:35:13:21 - 00:35:14:16

Available?

00:35:18:04 - 00:35:19:16

Anybody from e-commerce?

00:35:24:09 - 00:35:24:24

Okay.

00:35:25:08 - 00:35:30:03

Um, in that case, we move on to low carbon hub IPPs. Please.

00:35:37:23 - 00:35:39:25

Thank you. If you just want to. Yeah.

00:35:43:09 - 00:35:44:06

Is that on? Okay.

00:35:44:16 - 00:35:45:01

Yeah.

00:35:45:03 - 00:35:45:18

Yeah. That's fine.

00:35:45:20 - 00:35:46:05

Thank you.

00:35:46:26 - 00:36:20:00

Hi. Um, I'm Beth McCallister from the low carbon hub IPPs limited. At first, I just wanted to send our apologies from our CEO, doctor Barbara Hammond, who couldn't be here today, I'm afraid. But she said she'd be very happy to respond to any questions following this hearing following our submission. So low Carbon hub IPPs is a community benefit society. We have almost 2000 investor members and 50 community group members. We manage 56 renewable energy projects across Oxfordshire that generate an ongoing income.

00:36:20:20 - 00:36:51:20

All of our profits go towards a community benefit fund. This funds a range of projects from energy efficiency for homes, schools and businesses, energy innovation projects and much more. We continue to remain neutral on the Botley West project. Our role has been to work with our network of community members to help them gain the access to answers and information so they can make their submissions to the consultations. As we put in our written submission, our focus is on the community benefit proposals.

00:36:52:26 - 00:37:26:19

I won't repeat all of our submission here. Here. We just wanted to highlight that we're not normally a campaigning organization, but just this once we felt it was too important an issue to not act. And so since our submission, we have launched a petition about the level of community benefit currently being proposed, addressed to Blenheim Estate as the key landowner for the proposal. We're asking to you for them to use their influence to push for a greater community benefit fund should the project be approved. We've reached nearly a thousand signatures since launching the petition at the start of April.

00:37:27:25 - 00:38:00:03

And we feel that getting the community benefit funding right here is crucial, not just for the long term relationship between the developer and the community. Should the project go ahead. But it could also

set the precedent for other large scale projects being planned across the country. So what do we think is a fair community benefit? Our petition and campaign is asking for 2% of the project revenue to be allocated to communities. A conservative estimate tells us that 2% could create £840,000 in community benefit, much more than the 200,000 currently on offer.

00:38:01:13 - 00:38:11:01

We believe that these funds and the funding pot should be tied to the performance of the project, not just a one off. Um, so if the project does well, the communities also benefit.

00:38:12:16 - 00:38:44:09

We also propose that a separate fund to be set up and managed by an independent board, made up of the key stakeholders from the developer, landowner, local authorities and members of the community. This funding could really be game changing in supporting people to do decarbonisation of their homes, businesses, schools and enabling that really difficult task of reducing energy demand, which is a really key factor in tackling climate change. A properly funded, long term, consistent community benefit fund set up like this could make a real difference.

00:38:44:16 - 00:39:11:22

It could create significant social benefits and also help people out of fuel poverty in the area. It could also set the national standard for what's to come as a more large scale projects such as this in the planning. We really feel that getting the community benefit proposal right here could really help people benefit from that transition to the zero carbon energy system we need. And crucially, it's going to help to ensure that no one is left behind in that transition. Thank you.

00:39:12:22 - 00:39:15:01

Thank you very much. I think, Mr. Wallace, you have a question?

00:39:16:01 - 00:39:47:07

Yes, indeed, a quick question. You may want to take this away and discuss, but I'll just ask it whilst you're here. Sure. You mentioned about tying the the benefits to the performance of the project. Excuse me. I'm. I think the phrase used as a project as well, the community does well. Earlier on, we heard from a speaker who said that the performance of the energy from the solar farm, the panels degrade over time, their energy efficiency goes down over time.

00:39:48:15 - 00:40:05:21

Is then no. Just a question in my mind. Is then tying the community benefit to the performance of the of the solar farm? Not perhaps the best thing if eventually if that's going down in terms of performance, then the level of benefit would presumably go down as well.

00:40:05:25 - 00:40:34:10

Yeah. I mean, again, maybe we could ask Barbara to comment on this, um, in a written way, but I think that we still think that is the, the fairer approach. Um, and then and also because in the long term, in a long term approach, if, for example, the ownership of the project would change, what we'd like to see is that consistent community benefit funding in place, whereas maybe a one off funding that might go down over time. I still think it needs to be tied to the performance of the project.

00:40:35:02 - 00:41:06:00

Okay. And just one other question. You're you're one of a group of a number of groups who are obviously, uh, Petitioning and campaigning for a better community fund. Fully understand that and the position of everyone. Is there any coordination between these other community groups in the sense that once this fund is set up, once the money is there? Are you planning to bid for certain funding, or how does that funding distribute amongst all the various groups? How will it be used if you like?

00:41:06:08 - 00:41:36:25

I mean, I think that's what an independent board needs to be set up to decide and realize what the needs are of that particular community. So I think it's really important that it responds to what the community needs. We have the figures about, for example, how many households are in fuel poverty in that area. And as you know, the low carbon hub, we would always emphasize that more decarbonisation is needed and more support in helping people to decarbonise their homes would be the thing that we would propose. But no, we wouldn't. We don't have, you know, it would be for the independent board to decide that.

00:41:36:27 - 00:41:37:18

Okay. Yeah.

00:41:37:20 - 00:41:39:03

Okay. Thank you very much. Thank you.

00:41:39:05 - 00:41:39:27

Thank you, thank.

00:41:39:29 - 00:41:46:15

You, thank you. Your contribution. If I could next invite David Sherratt to make his representation, please.

00:41:52:18 - 00:41:53:09

Thank you.

00:41:57:11 - 00:42:34:14

Good morning. As you've just heard. I'm David Sherratt, a resident of church Hamburg for the past 32 years. And I'm acting today in my own in my capacity as a private individual. I'm a biomedical scientist who uses quantitative, experimental methods to understand complex biological processes and systems. I'm a fellow of the Royal Society and past president of the UK Genetics Society. Today I focus. Today is food security and food production by the land proposed for the West Solar Farm in early 2024.

00:42:34:16 - 00:43:04:25

PVP produced an analysis of agricultural land quality in the proposed solar farm area. They estimated that 38% of the land fell into the category Best and Most Versatile. My own careful calculations for different areas of the whole site indicate that, for the subsequently reduced area planned for solar panels, this figure for being the best and most valuable is close to 45%.

00:43:06:00 - 00:43:36:09

Furthermore, in the Central Region area, the land west of the load river adjacent to hambre comprises about 80% best and most valuable. By my quantitative calculations, government guidelines and WDC policy state that any proposal for a solar farm involving the best and most versatile agricultural land would need to be justified by the most compelling evidence. This evidence remains lacking.

00:43:37:11 - 00:43:48:19

the 80% best and most valuable land west of the even load, which comprises about 15% of total panels. Should be removed from any solar farm development.

00:43:50:19 - 00:44:21:04

Parenthetically, my response on 27 724 to the PVD consultation document, in which I asked for clarification of inconsistencies and errors and misleading statements in their analysis of agricultural land quality, has been ignored. I have had no response and my concerns remain unanswered. The land proposed for solar panels is fertile, being almost entirely best and most valuable in class three B.

00:44:21:13 - 00:44:57:22

This is consistent with conversations that I've had with local farmers over the years, have told me that this land is extremely productive when appropriately managed. With incorporation of extensive organic material, The land is highly fertile, productive despite recent climatic challenges. As we've heard earlier today, it can yield more than eight tonnes of wheat per hectare per annum. The statements yesterday by Dominic Hare that the land is of poor grade and is no longer suitable for high grade agriculture, is not supported by science.

00:44:58:03 - 00:45:33:27

The gravels, bedrock and clay that underlie the topsoil have remained unchanged over centuries. Reductions in crop yields are large, partly the consequence of poor topsoil management. The combination of climate change and political uncertainty means we need to grow more crops in the UK. Sadly, the total amount of high quality land and crop cultivation is decreasing each year, according to government figures. This decline must be halted, as does the degradation of land quality through poor management.

00:45:35:03 - 00:46:05:27

The combination of threatened agricultural land of high quality discussed now along with hydrological hydrological issues relating to the numerous watercourses that flow through the proposal of, are leading to potential massing flooding downstream towards Oxford. Issues of heritage, visual impact, amenity and decommissioned that have been addressed here previously all conspire to indicate that the developer should not be allowed to go forward as proposed.

00:46:06:09 - 00:46:08:25

We need to have one moment. One minute left.

00:46:08:27 - 00:46:21:05

Thank you. Last sentence. We need strategic developments for solar power rather than the opportunistic proposal before us, which would remove excellent agricultural land from the national pool. Thank you.

00:46:23:18 - 00:46:38:14

Thank you very much for that. You've raised a couple of issues there that I'd just like to explore further. First of all, we mentioned about your calculations that is closer to 45%. If possible, could you submit those into the examination? Because I'd be interested to see.

00:46:38:27 - 00:47:16:17

That information in outline was submitted on 27 of 724. I can provide more detail. Yes, I think precisely the data provided by PvP, the maps and re quantitatively analyzed it, and I can provide the details of how I did it. Of course, we do not know how PvP came to their numbers, and this is one of the things that I had asked after their consultation. We need data. I'm a quantitative scientist and a lot of the things that we hear about are are are un quantitative.

00:47:17:09 - 00:47:19:28

There just seems to be personal view.

00:47:20:29 - 00:47:50:11

And that's where, you know, we would certainly appreciate seeing your methodology, your calculations, your research by that point. That'd be that'd be marvelous. Thank you very much for that. And then a bit of an odd question. Uh, forgive me on this one, but we've heard a lot about flooding in the area and surface water flooding and that the clay becomes waterlogged. Yeah. Do you, from a scientific point of view, think that the flooding actually helps the fertility of the land in any way?

00:47:50:22 - 00:48:11:02

I think it doesn't help at all. It will wash off whatever topsoil and good quality land there is there. I mean, the, the, the runoff from the panels. And I have to say, this is not a quantitative I mean, this is just using my judgment as a scientist would increase flooding and act to degrade the land even further.

00:48:11:24 - 00:48:15:02

More so than if it was just left to the to the elements, as it were.

00:48:15:11 - 00:48:15:26

That is.

00:48:15:28 - 00:48:19:26

Correct. Okay. Thank you. I believe my colleague, Mr. Schaake has a question for you.

00:48:21:03 - 00:48:43:03

Mr. Wallace. Mr. Sheriff, you mentioned right at the start, and this follows follows on from Mr. Wallace's questions regarding the discrepancy between the applicants calculation in terms of best land in your calculations. Yeah. Just to confirm what you've done is actually just assess their raw data. You haven't actually gathered any raw data yourself. That is correct.

00:48:43:05 - 00:49:09:09

I've assessed their raw data and their original statement that 30%, 38% overall was BMV was based on their original plans. Subsequently, they removed a significant number of solar panels, perhaps in areas that are of low quality land. And that means my assessment was on the revised on their revised solar plan

00:49:10:27 - 00:49:24:16

solar map. The site, if you like. So the data that I used was theirs, but the data from their maps. But I was working on their their revised plan for solar panels.

00:49:25:15 - 00:49:26:13

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

00:49:28:24 - 00:49:34:22

Thank you very much. I think that's the end of our questions. Um, if I could invite Harry Saint John, please.

00:50:01:20 - 00:50:16:12

I wonder if you, um, give me a minute. Of course. To enable, um, my iPhone to show what I want to say. Um, in the, in, um, landscape.

00:50:16:28 - 00:50:20:18

Yeah. Please, please. Just just take. Take your time.

00:50:20:20 - 00:50:21:06

This is the.

00:50:21:08 - 00:50:21:24

Problem.

00:50:22:06 - 00:50:53:00

Of not having a, um, an internet connection. I have to say, I raised this yesterday, and I'm truly surprised that that hasn't been resolved by today. Um, this is a massive, important, um, public examination. And surely, to God, um, there should be a proper, uh, internet connection. It really does put everybody, uh, yourselves included.

00:50:53:13 - 00:51:17:21

But more particularly, um, the people who are sort of involved with this at a disadvantage. Um, and I think, I think that needs some urgent action. I don't know where the venues for further, um, hearings are going to take place if they're in other village halls, um, can that be checked in advance so that we know that it works? Sorry.

00:51:18:01 - 00:51:21:26

No. That's fine. Just just take your time and let me know when you're ready.

00:51:22:07 - 00:51:22:28

Thank you. I.

00:51:36:08 - 00:51:37:18

Did it quite quickly.

00:51:40:09 - 00:51:53:07

My name is Harry. Sinjin. My wife and I live in ancient. And both of us have lived in Oxfordshire for 40 years or more. Um, I'm

00:51:55:03 - 00:52:24:06

a trustee of the Wychwood Forest Trust, which is a local environmental charity. I need to just point that out. That covers about 40 parishes of West Oxfordshire. And indeed, the Blenheim estate formed part of that, um, royal hunting forest from Norman times onwards until it was given to the Duke of Marlborough by Queen Anne.

00:52:25:24 - 00:53:06:09

I've made the relevant representation and I'll expand on that in a written representation. I particularly wanted to highlight the issues around compulsory acquisition under the 2008 Planning Act, and, in my opinion, the singular failure of the applicant to demonstrate the compelling case in the public interest for the land to be acquired permanently using compulsory powers. They say the use of the land for the solar station is only temporary, albeit 40 years, and that it'll be dismantled and removed from the land at the end of the consented period.

00:53:07:11 - 00:53:41:01

Most compulsory acquisition powers are granted by legislation to public bodies for permanent use for the public good. So our canals and railways in the 17 and 1800s. Our motorway system in the 1970s to 1990s HS2 railway I could go on. In contrast, this project is being promoted by a private company for private profit, namely for the benefit of the promoters, including any subsequent developers or investors.

00:53:41:07 - 00:54:11:26

And of course, the principal landowners, the various Plenum Trust, the GE family and another family whose land lies north east of Castleton. All of who? All of whom have, we are told, signed up to a legally binding deal to either sell or lease their land. The other smaller owners are threatened to have their bits of land or rights taken or imposed compulsorily, very largely for the benefit of the big owners.

00:54:12:12 - 00:55:09:21

That doesn't sound equitable to me, nor the intention or will of Parliament. Mr. Hair, of Blenheim Estate and a trustee of various trusts, inferred yesterday that far from being forced to sell any land under compulsion, the Blenheim ownerships have already sort of always sought a deal and have now all signed a legally binding option to grant a suitable lease to solar five limited. The 2013 guidance on compulsory acquisition under this act sets out clearly in about 12 pages what the Secretary of State will need to have in the way of compelling evidence of the public benefits that outweigh any private loss suffered by anyone whose land is taken compulsorily, in most cases permanently, before he decides to approve a DCO under this act.

00:55:10:06 - 00:55:15:21

This is what Parliament has always advocated when compulsory powers are being exerted.

00:55:17:22 - 00:55:28:28

Quite the opposite seems to be the case here. There is a long list of incalculable, incalculable public benefits summarized so well by many others.

00:55:30:19 - 00:55:48:29

The real gains fall into the lap of the operators whom will sell the electric power, and also, obviously to the principal landowners who I assume receive a very large rent for 40 odd years. The community benefits.

00:55:49:13 - 00:55:50:13

You have one minute left.

00:55:50:15 - 00:55:54:12

Thank you is meagre. As others have pointed out. Um.

00:55:56:13 - 00:56:14:07

I've already said that it is clear that it is land ownership that has driven the extent and boundaries of this power station, and the willingness of the principal owners to agree terms without compulsion because of the tempting pot of proverbial rainbow gold it offers them.

00:56:15:27 - 00:56:57:21

It is not the suitability of the site that counts. It's the ownership. It's inexplicable to me and many others, how those responsible for blending interests can cannot have perceived the potential risk to the status of the palace and park. Remember Gerald Ratner's mistake that killed his golden goose and the vast visitor income it brings annually to the local economy and to Blenheim, an internationally precious jewel, and the consequential damage to the sylvan mosaic landscape comprising the green belt buffer around the equally historic and world renowned city of Oxford.

00:56:58:10 - 00:57:20:13

The resulting damage to so many component elements that make these heritage assets so important a local, national and international level cannot be overstated. So I ask you to recommend the Secretary of State, um, not to approve this. Thank you.

00:57:21:23 - 00:57:26:03

Thank you very much. I don't believe we have any questions for you, but thank you for your contribution.

00:57:27:28 - 00:57:31:21

Could I invite Jonathan Ford next, please come forward.

00:57:45:01 - 00:57:48:07

Thank you. When you're ready. Yep. Microphone's on for you.

00:57:53:28 - 00:57:54:22

Thank you.

00:57:55:09 - 00:57:57:11

The previous speaker.

00:57:57:13 - 00:58:04:07

Referred to God. So I'm going to follow in his, uh, precedent here. Um, my name is Jonathan Ford.

00:58:05:04 - 00:58:18:11

I speak as a member of the public. I'm also a father and a scientist. My purpose this morning is to, however inadequately, is to align my words with those of the God who loves us all.

00:58:20:08 - 00:58:52:12

Examine us. Climate change is the issue of our time. It is urgent and it is deeply important. We need to think big. We need to act fast and make the most of our limited finances. We're continually hearing about the limited finances available to us as a country. I understand that the proposed development would help us to do all three.

00:58:53:29 - 00:59:08:09

The IPCC states that the large scale solar has the most potential to mitigate climate change between now and 2030. It can be deployed quickly and it is cheap.

00:59:10:17 - 00:59:33:08

What is the issue of our time, if not climate change? Abraham Lincoln it was slavery. For Winston Churchill, it was the war in Europe. These were resolved at enormous human cost. And we are thankful. Greater love has no man than that he lay down his life for his friends.

00:59:34:23 - 00:59:49:15

President John F Kennedy gave his country a decade to put a man on the moon. We, the UK, produce vaccines for Covid 19 in a matter of months. Where there is a will, there is a way.

00:59:51:26 - 01:00:01:18

No single act of mitigation will prevent climate change. However, every well considered act will reduce its severity and will slow it down.

01:00:03:20 - 01:00:11:09

As with Covid 19, delay of the crisis enables us to find and develop solutions.

01:00:13:24 - 01:00:33:08

This development can make a big difference, a difference far beyond Oxfordshire. Imagine the City of Oxford, global city of learning powered by renewable energy. This will make global leaders sit up and think we can and we shall do the same.

01:00:35:04 - 01:00:51:06

If the development is stopped, other similar projects will be stopped. If it goes ahead and is done well, it will act as an exemplar. It can help our grandchildren. It can help the natural world. We have responsibilities to care for both.

01:00:53:11 - 01:01:15:02

Examiners you have heard today and will do over the coming weeks of many downsides to the proposed development. Like any life giving surgery. There are downsides. I urge you to consider these in the context of the global cancer that is climate change.

01:01:17:07 - 01:01:48:21

And finally, examiner's applicant and those here. I urge you to collaborate to ensure the proposed development is an exemplar for climate mitigation, of course, but also for landscape design, nature conservation and community benefit. Not. Yes or no? Yes. But better. A legacy to be proud of. A better world.

01:01:54:07 - 01:01:57:15

Thank you, Mr. Ford. I don't believe we have any questions.

01:01:58:21 - 01:02:00:27

Thank you. Thank you very much. Very well put.

01:02:04:07 - 01:02:11:00

I ask for a representation from Squibb Williams speaking on behalf of Dustin Dryden. Next, please.

01:02:20:09 - 01:02:54:22

Good morning. My name is Karen Williams, and I represent Dustin Dryden. He's a local man who is uniquely and profoundly affected by this proposal. Over the 25 years that I have known him, Dustin has worked consistently and successfully to achieve a large aviation business in the area and a successful agricultural base. He provides careers for over 100 people through his businesses. 13 years ago, his home became Gussy Farm, which is a family home.

01:02:54:26 - 01:03:28:16

It's a wildlife habitat, including a modest lake at the center. It's also a workplace, and it's located in the middle of the central section of this proposal. So Mr. Dryden is profoundly and uniquely affected by that. Um, by the fact that his home will be wholly encircled at close proximity by solar panels. And this, of course, will endure for the entirety of his family life. Now, behind the Botley West plan is a business proposal, essentially, and Mr.

01:03:28:18 - 01:04:09:02

Dryden is an exceptional businessman. He asks the following questions. Are diligently pursued by the examining authority. Question one relates to disclosure of the heads of terms and options agreements that lie at the heart of the applicant's proposal application. Question one is how will the examining authority ascertain that the Blenheim and Vanbrugh Estate trustees have properly executed, legitimate and valid heads of terms and options agreements with the applicants, ensuring at the same time that the majority of the land proposed for the development is in fact lawfully acquired.

01:04:09:05 - 01:04:56:25

We've heard presentations addressing this point. I'd refer you briefly to the Land and Rights Negotiation Tracker, wherein it's mentioned that the applicant has concluded the negotiations for these heads of terms in December 2020, and that options agreements have flowed thereafter from December 2022. Whilst, of course this material is a start, may be commercially confidential, verifying the terms whilst protecting the commercial confidentiality aspect, verifying the validity of the terms and agreements is crucial because significant taxpayer funds will of course be spent throughout this examination process that could be rendered void if there are hidden, fatal flaws in the land agreements.

01:04:57:21 - 01:05:52:12

It's imperative, I believe. On behalf of Mr. Dryden, to clarify the unique and distinct status of the Blenheim land at the earliest stage of this examination, and we respectfully ask the examining authority to consider directing the applicants to disclose the heads of terms and options agreements in an appropriate manner. Question two. Turns to funding. And the question is, how will the examining authority ensure that the examining process examination process thoroughly scrutinises the financial standing of the funding streams asserted by the applicants in their funding statements? We would suggest that this is an application of reasonable due diligence, given the significant concerns of the funding of this proposal, which the media have linked to Russian investments and which plainly involves a complex and opaque network of associated shell companies.

01:05:52:25 - 01:06:13:25

How will the examining authority ensure that Botley West is not a, quote, zombie project to use? The current Secretary of State's words. The designees has indicated already that adopting a strategic and planned approach will eliminate the need for billions of pounds spent on unnecessary grid reinforcement and activity.

01:06:16:13 - 01:06:29:12

And suggests that projects and fast track connections will be improved. Botley West will not be a home grown power. Some say that it's a land grab benefiting obscure overseas interests.

01:06:30:20 - 01:06:31:26

You have one minute remaining.

01:06:32:01 - 01:07:08:29

I shall speak very quickly. Question three turns to credibility, referring to the Land and Rights Negotiation Tracker document that the applicant that the applicants have informed you that all individuals affected, as listed in the book of reference, have been approached to negotiate how their land is affected. Mr. Dryden's significant interests are indeed mentioned in several parts of that book of reference. However, there have been no approaches whatsoever made to him by the applicants, which raises the question about the credibility of the applicant's assurances or claims.

01:07:09:12 - 01:07:32:10

And we would hope that, um, that credibility will be substantively scrutinised where there are claims made regarding land negotiations that do not, in fact exist, as in this instance. Finally, the need. How

will the examining authority verify the applicant's repeated claims that the UK government cannot meet net zero targets without this project?

01:07:34:15 - 01:07:57:16

Considering the scale and the environmental impact and the social impact of this project. These assumptions have to be fact checked, and it would appear that the applicants believe simply repeating the claim frequently enough, it becomes the truth that Botley West is the only way to net zero, and powerful marketing cannot be allowed to usurp accurate data analysis.

01:08:00:13 - 01:08:17:24

If, indeed, the applicant's insistence that the need for Botley West is, in fact a sham. The need, then this examining authority and the Secretary of State must diligently ensure that the people of Oxfordshire and the land are not scarred for life unnecessarily.

01:08:24:22 - 01:08:26:06

Thank you, Mr. Williams.

01:08:28:03 - 01:08:31:09

Can I ask the representation from David Rogers, please?

01:08:45:17 - 01:08:46:24

Mr. Wallace panel.

01:08:46:26 - 01:09:27:11

Good morning. My name is David Rogers. I'm here as a private individual. I'm also representing the citizen science view of Solak. A very good colleague of mine, a physicist, once said, nothing moves faster than a bandwagon in a vacuum. I put it to you that the vacuum is the government's net zero policy, and that the bandwagon includes the solar gold rush, of which a bw SFS proposal is a part. Now, I'm aware that planning inquiries look at process rather than outcome, but I want to push back a bit on that contention, because this is the only chance of members of the public to express their concerns to you about the damage this would do to their wonderful Oxford environment.

01:09:27:13 - 01:10:00:05

And I think the real question for the panel is, does the gain from Botley West exceed the pain which is clearly going to experience by Oxfordshire? Now, let me give you a thought. Experiment cover nine square kilometres of Oxfordshire in glass and steel for the next 40 years. This is what Botley West will do. I'm going to give you two options for the outcome of that nine square kilometres. One is that they produce electricity 24 over seven for 40 years. The second option is that they produce nothing at all.

01:10:00:24 - 01:10:33:22

You've got the same pain. You've got the same nine square kilometres covered solar panels. But the two options have very different outcomes. We obviously want option one the most electricity for that pain. In reality, the option is much, much closer to option two. It's virtually nothing. And the reason for that is that the load factor of solar in the UK, the percentage of time they're producing their stated output power is 11%. It's about 2.6 hours a day. This is a very poor yield for a very massive project.

01:10:34:21 - 01:11:08:03

In the various statements from the developers, we're told that west of 1300 megawatt capacity will provide Hundred and 40MW of clean power to the grid. It will never, ever do that. If you put the worst characteristics into the European PV GIS scheme, the maximum power output of 1300 megawatts is never greater than 627MW. That's at midday in July, 627 versus the claim of eight 40MW in winter.

01:11:08:06 - 01:11:39:19

It falls to 217MW. That's the maximum at midday and winter. It's what Matt Ridley, in a different context about solar, said. In winter, you get the square root of diddly squat from solar in the UK. So that's one statement. Now, in the statement of reasons that you quite rightly asked the developer to give you that they say that the government's Clean Power 2030 paper says that solar is at the heart of the UK's net zero policy. It does indeed say that.

01:11:39:21 - 01:12:13:11

But the same document, the same document wants to triple both offshore wind and onshore solar at the same time, tripling both. But I put it to you that each gigawatt of offshore wind is equivalent to four gigawatts in terms of output of onshore solar. So it's pretty clear what the government's priority is. It's offshore wind. It's not onshore solar. Nowhere in the inquiry so far have people asked, well, how near are we to the various government targets? The implication is the numbers we've been given is that we've got a long way to go.

01:12:13:13 - 01:12:44:15

We're miles off the target. We need Botley West in a hurry. The answer is exactly the opposite. The government sponsored the Renewable Energy Planning Database, updated quarterly. How much electricity is being produced by the renewables at various stages of the development process? In the October version of the RFP. There is 35GW of ground mounted solar in the pipeline. Only 26% is operational. This is the number that's often quoted that we have to increase dramatically.

01:12:44:17 - 01:13:14:26

But there is so much more in the pipeline. By 2030, we'll have 35GW of sub solar's. If you add in the 56 remaining structures, if you add in the 50 end chips, it's another 20GW. That totals 55GW already of solar power for a target of 49GW of solar by 2030. You add in five gigawatts of rooftop solar. We've got 60GW of national power from solar already.

01:13:15:01 - 01:13:52:01

Of a national target 49. We are already in excess of the national target. There's no rush to add more solar. We're already exceeding the national targets. Oxfordshire has its own pathways to a zero carbon Oxfordshire. A wonderful document. All the district councils signed up to it. Their aim is for maximum of 868GW by 2030. In that renewable energy planning database. We already have 1190 gigawatts, 1190 versus 868 target, with 37% above target already with the subnet.

01:13:52:03 - 01:14:26:14

If you add in Botley West 1375, we are 295% ahead of almost three times in excess of the target by 2030. There's the danger of overcapacity too much too soon, the dangers of no inertia in the system

and blackout. I would ask you, in determining the planning balance, whether or not exceptional circumstance of net zero override, for example, green belt protection, that you must remember that if Botley West is approved, Oxfordshire will have three times over capacity.

01:14:26:16 - 01:14:39:00

This is neither a planned nor a balanced system. Does the planning gain of Botley West exceed the planning pain to Oxfordshire, which you've heard about from the other speakers. Thank you very much.

01:14:41:07 - 01:14:43:21

Thank you, Mr. Rogers. I believe you have a question for Mr. Wallace.

01:14:44:06 - 01:15:06:03

Yes, indeed. Just a quick question, if I may, sir. Um, you mentioned, um, some calculations there about the 840 megawatt seem more like 627 maximum 217 in winter. Yes. You've obviously derived those statistics from somewhere. Yes. Is it? Are you able to provide the background to us in this?

01:15:06:05 - 01:15:37:07

I'd like to say two things. These come from the European photovoltaic system. Uh, it's a system in the EU. You can plug in the characteristics of any particular, uh, solar PV proposal, which I've done with the West, and it tells you what the output is on hours per day for the months of the year. And I want to emphasize that if you add up from that system, the total output per year, it's exactly the same as the candidates claim, it's exactly the same amount. So these figures are, they coincide with the developers.

01:15:37:11 - 01:15:44:17

What the developers don't tell you is it never will be 840MW of power into the national grid. It never will be.

01:15:45:11 - 01:15:50:00

Okay. I welcome any information you can give us to substantiate the position.

01:15:50:06 - 01:15:51:17

Yes, I'm very happy to provide.

01:15:51:19 - 01:15:52:11

Thank you very much.

01:15:52:13 - 01:15:53:17

Excel spreadsheets.

01:15:55:08 - 01:16:07:23

Thank you, Mr. Rogers. Um, we'll now take a 15 minute break. Uh, we'll resume at 1130. Okay. The time is now 11:15 a.m., and this open floor hearing is adjourned.