

## Open Hearing 2 PINS Inspectorate

Oxford 14 May 2025

Good afternoon, I am Tom Lewis and I am in favour of renewable energy but critical of the unjustifiably large and damaging proposal to build Botley West Solar Farm (BWSF). I live in Church Hanborough, one of the 15 villages that will be affected by the project.

You will be well aware from previous submissions, but here are a few facts.

- If it is built the Solar Farm would stretch from Wootton in the north to Botley in the south, from Hanborough in the west to Kidlington in the east . It will be the largest solar farm in Europe and adversely affect residents in 11,000 homes within 1.5km of the site. If the panels were laid end-to-end they would stretch from Oxford to New York.
- 75% of the solar farm is to be constructed on Oxford's Greenbelt, which is described by local authorities as *"functioning well"*.
- 38% of the 1400ha is on Best and Most Versatile agricultural land growing National average yields of cereals. This land will be lost to food production for the 42-year life of the project. Management of the land during this time has not been detailed.

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- It will involve installing up to 2,200,000 solar panels, ancillary equipment and at least 30km of cable runs, tall fences, lights and cameras. It will cross beneath The Thames at Eynsham and connect to a new sub-station near Farmoor, before the electricity generated during daylight hours is uploaded to the national grid network and within seconds used throughout the UK, not just Oxfordshire.

Published surveys by both the Stop Botley West group and by the developers themselves find that overwhelmingly residents oppose this project. And not only residents, Oxford City Council for instance stated that

*“The DCO application will need to provide a strong and robust case for the development of this scale particularly where it will need to demonstrate exceptional circumstances to justify development within the Green Belt; justify impacts on the setting of a number of heritage assets including Blenheim Palace (Ref 1).*

**The Developer has ignored this advice.**

The Non-Technical Summary of the Environmental Statement of the DCO states (Ref 2) that:

*“There are no significant adverse effects either temporary [or] permanent on the local landscape character arising from construction and operation of the Project.”*

This is patently untrue.

- Nearly all of the land is controlled 'Blenheim', and the setting of Blenheim Palace, a UNESCO World Heritage Site was cited in their 2017 Management Plan (Ref 2) as being *"important to the landscape and to the surrounding historic villages"*.

This too has been ignored.

- Pluvial flooding is already a serious issue particularly for the villages of Cassington, Worton, Yarnton and Kidlington. The developers have consistently ignored peer-reviewed scientific evidence that<sup>1</sup> solar panels increase runoff. All the water flowing off this area ends up in the River Thames increasing the risk of flooding downstream. Driving supporting piles into the ground to a depth of 1.8m will inevitably damage the land drains leading to an increase in flooding.

I would like the Inspectorate to ask the Applicant to address the following three issues:

Number 1 The Developer, in the DCO has not provided a justification for the significant adverse impact it will have on Public Rights of Way throughout the area, and that the proposed mitigation is inadequate.

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Number 2 The co-developers have not answered why alternatives to the current scheme have not been investigated.

Number 3 Will not the development have a severe impact on the setting of Blenheim Palace, particularly as all of the land involved in the scheme is to be the subject to a Compulsory Purchase Order (Book of Reference (Ref 4)) and its future would then not be under Blenheim's stewardship during and after decommissioning in 42 years' time?

Contrary to what we heard yesterday from the Dominic Hare, although not revealed on whose behalf he was speaking, (the private Blenheim Estate or the Blenheim Palace Heritage Foundation -the charity). If the land is Compulsorily Purchased by the Developer, then neither part of 'Blenheim' will not be entitled to any rent from the land. It is curious that Mr Hare is the CEO and as a Trustee of the Blenheim Palace Heritage Foundation and also in the management of another 'Blenheim' company or Trust that owns the land on where the solar panels will be sited. Over one year ago my colleague wrote to the independent Trustees of the BHF to elicit their response to BWSF. They would not reply directly and so far have refused to endorse

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or criticize the project, however I understand that the current Duke of Marlborough, through his role on Woodstock Town Council is on record in opposing BWSF.

**I have significant concerns** that if this project proceeds the village of Church Hanborough will be surrounded by an industrial landscape of glass and aluminium. It is environmental vandalism on a large scale, and I urge the Inspectorate to advise rejection of this project.

Thank you for listening

Tom Lewis

#### References

Botley West Solar Farm (BWSF) Environmental Statement

PINS Reference: EN010147

Non-Technical Summary Document Ref: EN010147/APP/6.2

1. BWSF Consultation Report Appendix 5.1.10; Section 42 Applicant Responses.
2. Blenheim Palace World Heritage Site revised Management Plan 2017 Appendix 3
3. Non-Technical Summary 6.3.20
4. Book of Reference PINS Ref: EN010147 Document Ref: EN010147/APP/4.3 Revision A