

My Name is HARRY ST JOHN.

My second wife and I live in Eynsham; both of us have lived in Oxfordshire for over forty years, albeit in different parts. Past and present members of my family have lived in the County, on and off, for over 900 years, so my Oxfordshire roots run deep. I am a retired rural Chartered Surveyor.

I made a relevant rep and am about to make my written representation.

I want to highlight the issues around Compulsory Acquisition under the 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 and using compulsory powers. They say the use of the land for the solar power station is only temporary - albeit about 40 years and it will be dismantled and removed from the land at the end of the consented period.

Most CA powers are granted by legislation to Public Bodies for permanent uses for the **public benefit** e.g. our canals and railways in the 1700s and 1800s, our Motorway system in the 1970s to 1990s, HS2 railway (under construction), the National Grid pylon infrastructure, water, gas and oil pipelines to name but some.

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/investors and of course the principal land owners - the various Blenheim Trusts, the Gee family and another family whose land lies north east of Cassington - all of whom have, we are told, signed up to a legally binding deal to sell or lease their land.

The other smaller owners are threatened to have their parcels of land or rights taken or imposed compulsorily - very largely for the benefit of the big owners - that doesn't sound equitable to me nor the intention or will of Parliament.

Mr Hare, CEO of Blenheim Estate/ trustee of Vanbrugh Trust and other trusts, inferred yesterday afternoon that far from being forced to sell any land under compulsion, the Blenheim ownerships have always sought a deal and have now all signed a legally binding option to grant a suitable lease to Solar Five Ltd - which one assumes might be assignable to a rather larger operator/investor likely to come on board - if the S of S grants consent for the project or some iteration of it.

The 2013 Guidance on CA under the Planning Act 2008 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 outweighing any private loss suffered by anyone whose land is taken compulsorily (in most cases permanently), before he decides to approve a DCO under the Act..

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

That the UK needs more renewable energy sources urgently is probably beyond doubt, but the public have to pay for the electricity they consume, however it is generated - so the only perceivable benefit here is that this industrial scale solar power station is a renewable source but only for about 40 years, at which point the land has to be returned to the current owners for farming.

Quite the opposite seems to me to be the case here - there is a long list of incalculable public DISBENEFITS - summarised so well by many others - in a list of well reasoned objections numbering well over 1000. The Applicant has listened to almost none of these concerns and earlier responses and barely made any change to its initial scheme consulted on in 2022/3/4.

The real gains fall into the lap of the operators whom will sell electric power - one assumes to provide a return on their investment and a profit, into the National Grid for consumption anywhere in Britain - there are only about 260,000 homes in the whole of Oxfordshire and this power station the applicant claims will power about 330,000 homes. **The main private landowners Blenheim**

will be anticipating a very substantial rent for forty years, hence their enthusiasm for the project.

The Community benefit, in contrast, on offer is meagre in the extreme as others have rightly highlighted. Mr Hare said it would be “significant” but gave no figure - perhaps Solar Five Ltd’s agents will enlighten us all shortly. I recall that not long ago, fracking well site operators, if approved, were required to pay 10% of annual revenue to the relevant parishes - not just 1%!

I don’t know the tax status of Solar Five Ltd, but I suspect the convoluted ownership structure may mean any profits or capital gain may not be taxed in this country - so probably no quasi “public benefit” for the Treasury there.

Likewise the same may also be the case with some of the Blenheim Trusts - the Palace Foundation Trust is we are told a charity and income from land it owns within the SF site (c.£500K pa to quote Mr Hare), will no doubt be ploughed back into the WHS PALACE AND PARK - so an indirect public benefit there.

I think it would help us all if Blenheim could provide some greater transparency to the Inspectors with a plan showing which Trust owns which land and how the proposed lease will work - e.g. is it assignable to a suitable successor approved by the owners?

Is the rent linked to actual performance of the power station as output will vary year on year and solar panel efficiency is always improving?

Will the Estate demand a decommissioning Bond to guarantee that whoever is operating the power station facility in 40 years does carry out the decommissioning and land reinstatement in accordance with an agreed specification and on time.

As others have already said, it is clear to anyone that it is land ownership that has driven the extent/boundaries of this Power Station proposal and the willingness of the three principal owners to agree terms without compulsion because of the

tempting pot of proverbial rainbow gold it offers them. It is not the suitability of the site apart from the separate off - flying southern section's proximity to the 400KV pylon grid route from Cowley to Gloucester.

It is inexplicable to me, and many others, how those responsible for Blenheim's long term interests cannot have perceived the potential risk to not only the wider setting of the WHS and thus the WHS status of the Palace and Park, but also the vast visitor income it brings annually to the local economy and to Blenheim. It is by common consent, an internationally precious jewel and the consequential damage to the WHS setting, the historic sylvan, mosaiced landscape a good part of which comprises the Green Belt buffer round the equally historic and world renowned City and University of Oxford.

The resulting cumulative damage to so many component elements that make these heritage assets so important at local, national and international level, cannot be overstated.

I urge you all therefore to recommend the S of S to refuse the application. For him to do otherwise could be seen as nothing less than sheer folly - another "headstone" but this time made of glass and steel.

Harry St John
May 2025