

Response to the oral submission by Dominic Hare (Open Floor Hearing 1: 13/5/25).

Several comments made by Mr Hare have the potential to be misleading and would benefit from further clarification.

1. Mr Hare is the CEO of The Blenheim Estate which is the privately run interest of the [REDACTED] Family and a commercial operation. It is made up of many private companies and family trusts.

Mr Hare is also the CEO of The Blenheim Palace Heritage Foundation Ltd (BPHF), which is a registered charity. According to the register of charities on the Charity Commission website the charity BPHF helps "The General Public/mankind"

(<https://register-of-charities.charitycommission.gov.uk/en/charity-search/-/charity-details/5074068/what-who-how-where>)

Mr Hare did not make it clear during his submission whether he was speaking on behalf of the private family interests -

'The Blenheim Estate' or the charity 'BPHF', which is designed to help "The General Public/mankind".

This is important given that one of the issues being raised is the benefit to the community of the proposal if approved. In

order to avoid confusion and in the interests of transparency the 'economic benefit' to 'Blenheim' could be detailed

separately; a) Benefit to The Blenheim Estate, b) Benefit to BPHF - the charity.

And, in future Mr Hare could be asked to specify which part of the business he is speaking on behalf of.

2. In his submission and subsequent answers to questions, Mr Hare repeatedly quoted a figure of half a million pounds (£500,000) that would (additionally) be 'ploughed back into the World Heritage site for vital repairs' if the Botley West Solar Farm proposal were approved. He did not clarify if this figure is the total figure that will flow from renting land to the developer PVDP.

During the initial consultation period in 2023, Mr [REDACTED] (PVDP) quoted rental levels of approximately £1,000 per acre compared with £100 per acre as farmland. This would suggest a rental stream of over £3m across the 3,200 acres if the proposal was approved.

It would be helpful for Mr Hare to clarify the total rental benefit to The Blenheim Estate and the total rental benefit to BPHF - the charity. Without this clarification one might be led to understand that the rental benefit accruing from the proposal is 'only' £500,000 and that it is entirely flowing to the charity rather than over £3m which will largely flow to the private family trusts of The Blenheim Estate.

3. Mr Hare suggested in his response to a question at the end of his submission that BPHF (the charity) owns some of the land which will be rented to the developer as follows:

"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 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"

If it is the case that BPHF owns some of the land that will be rented to the developer via the "Blenheim Palace Maintenance Fund", this contradicts answers to previous questions I have asked Mr Hare in writing in a letter dated 7/2/23.

My questions were :

"2. If BWSF goes ahead, will Blenheim Palace Heritage Foundation benefit 'directly' in respect of land options granted, and profits that are generated ongoing and if so, what percentage of total profits from this project will go directly to The Foundation?"

And

"3. Which of The Blenheim Estate companies is the major beneficiary of the land options granted to PVDP, and will profits be paid to third party companies or partnerships as part of this arrangement - specifically Vanderbilt Statagic Ltd?"

And his answers in a letter dated 23/2/23 were:

"(2) Blenheim Palace Heritage Foundation does not financially benefit from the solar farm"

And

"(3) The Vanbrugh Unit Trust is our main property business and it is the landowner of the land involved in the Botley West Solar Farm"

Further, in a separate letter which was focused on why BPHF had not yet made a formal statement regarding the potential impact of Botley West Solar Farm on the World Heritage Site, dated 16/1/24 Mr Hare wrote:

"The Botley West Solar Farm project is, as previously stated, entirely independent of BPHF."

It would be helpful for Mr Hare to clarify the position on this issue to enable 'community' benefit to be fully considered in conjunction with BPHF (the charity) potentially receiving benefit from the scheme.

I am very happy to provide copies of my written correspondence with Mr Hare if this is requested.