

Written Representation by Michael Brown

1. I support smaller solar farms in the right places. For example the solar farm near Charlbury built, run by and for the benefit of the local population is a model of what can be achieved on land owned by one major landowner. However I have strong objections to the Botley West proposal.

2. I have submitted reasons for this in responses to the consultations. Virtually all of my reasons and other points appear to have been largely ignored by the Applicant. I also notice from other Relevant Representations that many others, including the lead host authority, WODC have referred to the lack of engagement by the Applicant.

General points

3. In connection with my repeated concerns about the lack of photomontages, I believe that the Applicant has failed to provide anything approaching an adequate photographic montaged representation of the serious cumulative adverse visual impact on the landscape affecting residents and visitors using the PRoW. I have expanded on this in my Map and accompanying Response note to the ExA Action Point no. 2 from the Open Floor Hearing 1(submission reference no. 36592).

4. I also strongly disagree with the Applicant's assertions that most of the individual viewpoints would not suffer from serious adverse impact when considered, even as they do in isolation let alone when multiplied by the accumulation of impacts along each PRoW, and then multiplied again by the number of PRoW. It is just not credible to contend that the imposition of millions of solar panels, many miles of metal fencing, seven substations and all the other equipment on an undulating rural landscape of over 3,000 acres would not completely destroy its character. Nor is it credible to contend that the resulting industrial landscape would eventually be hidden away behind some new hedging.

5. My wife and I live at an elevated location near viewpoint 24 and look out over the Evenlode Valley to the ridge between Burleigh Wood and Purwell Farm. This will remain in full view covered with grey/blue glass and fencing if this project goes ahead. This is not 'not significant', it is very damaging. I do not believe that the absence of a photomontage for viewpoint 24 was anything other than deliberate.

6. In a similar vein, the assertion by the Applicant that it would keep off 'high ground' has been ignored. (APP-034 at page 779). For example the proposal includes many thousands of panels on top and on both sides of the high ground along the ridge between Burleigh Wood and Purwell Farm as shown on the Illustrative Master plan 2.2C and 2.2D (APP-062).

7. Another general concern arises from the fact that this 40yr project is primarily a commercial project. This is not really being promoted for the general good but is and will if approved be funded by financial institutions whose involvement will be to achieve maximum return. They will be accountable to their shareholders and therefore things like minimising noise and disruption, improving biodiversity, encouraging wildlife, watering tens of miles of newly planted hedging during dry periods and

similar will be of little interest. And at the end they will also have little interest in a comprehensive clean-up as part of decommissioning.

8. Regarding the issue about the location selected by the Applicant, it concedes that as well as the availability of a grid connection the NPSs identify two other 'key inputs' to the selection of suitable sites for large scale solar generation developments, namely: 'suitable radiance' and 'local topography'. (APP -225 Planning Supporting Statement at paragraph 3.5.10). However the selection of the Botley West sites has ignored both of these key inputs.

Cultural/Historic Environment

9. The project would affect not only the wider setting of Blenheim Palace WHS but also a number of conservation villages, Grade 1 listed churches and many other listed buildings. Very little attempt has so far been made to properly protect their settings.

Landscape and Visual Impact

10. The Applicant's assessments significantly under express the seriousness of the adverse effects on both landscape and visual impact. My Response note and accompanying map (submission reference no. 36592) in answer to the ExA's Action Point no. 2 from Open Floor Hearing 1 address this in more detail.

11. I do not believe that assertions of 'not significant' in the Summary of Significant Effects (APP-058) are credible. Much is made of the maturity of planting by the summer of year 15 year. None of photographs or montages show any winter projections beyond year 1. Even if all the planting matures it would not provide the same degree of screening after the leaves have fallen off each Autumn. And in any event there would still be numerous views of panels and fencing in the summer along the PRoW even if the planting matures successfully. Worse, after decommissioning to the extent that the many miles new planting have flourished and remain, the views that everyone has enjoyed to up to now would be diminished permanently.

Ecology and nature conservation

12. At dusk bats regularly fly over and around our garden which borders the north west corner Plot 8-27. They and birds of many varieties will be confused by a sea of grey/blue glass. We also see deer and pheasants regularly traversing this area. Their routes between woods will be disrupted, and fencing may cause injury. Their movement may also trigger security lighting and disturb nocturnal animals.

Hydrology and Flood Risk

13. The flood risk to parts of Cassington in particular has been referred to in a number of responses to the main consultation and in Relevant Representations. The Applicant has so far offered only limited proposals to alleviate this. Based on recent experiences the risk of increased flooding caused by run-off from solar panels would be so great that that much more than a few 'ponds' will be required. Whatever further steps are taken to reduce the increased risk, these would only work if they were well maintained at least during the whole of the operational period.

Traffic and Transport

14. The surrounding road network is already congested most days throughout the year. There are long queues along the A40 between Oxford and Eynsham. Lower Road is not even a B road but takes constant fast traffic. Getting onto it from Church Road has become more and more difficult during the years we have lived here. Construction traffic for panels, fencing and for one of the sub-stations to and from the A40 Eynsham roundabout up to the construction compounds adjacent to Lower Road will make the congestion that much worse. During the Operational Phase there would be maintenance, repairs and replacement teams and equipment still using these roads. Experience suggests that any limitations imposed would soon be forgotten by or be unknown to many solar farm delivery drivers and construction and maintenance staff.

Noise and Vibration, Glint and Glare

15. Both of these are of concern. To my understanding these have been down played by the Applicant. During construction both the noise and vibration from hammering or drilling by many operatives across the sites for thousands of supporting structures for panels and fencing would be high. During the Operation period the cumulative noise from 156 converter stations has again been downplayed by the Applicant. The Applicant's calculation is designed to provide a lower noise level result in an otherwise relatively quiet environment than is likely particularly for all those either living close to, or walking along footpaths close to, a number of the stations. Again it is the cumulative noise that would be worse. Also Glint and Glare are a risk to pilots and birds, and also a worry to those of us living opposite a hillside covered in panels.

Agricultural Land

16. Contrary to a number of repeated assertions on behalf of the Applicant over the last two or so years in the media, and by Mr Hare, Blenheim CEO at the Open Floor hearing on 13th May about the poor quality of the land, the Applicant's own assessment shows quite the contrary. (APP-110). Indeed it shows most of the land either side of the river Evenlode to be of Grade 2 or 3a. The National Policy Statements say BMV land, which this is, should be avoided 'where possible'.

Green Belt

17. Although not available at any of the consultations, the Planning Supporting Statement at APP-225 includes the Applicant's submission in relation to its case for very special circumstances. However it presents a weak case for industrialising great swathes of Green Belt. The case does not get stronger because of multi-repetition.

Conclusion

18. The Applicant's approach appears to have been 'All or Nothing'. So there has been little engagement, little change to the original proposal, and no apparent consideration of reducing the size or dominance of what is proposed. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that maximum profit is the main driver irrespective of the amount of damage that would be caused.

