

Cassington Parish Council IP 20055026

Preliminary meeting Agenda Item 3 Initial Assessment of Principal Issues: Summary

██████████, Parish Councillor

Cassington Parish Council submit that the Issue of Ecology has not been included in the List of Principal Issues. As outlined in our Relevant Representation we have identified likely significant impacts of the proposed solar power station on bats, farmland birds and potentially mammals. The site has been identified in the ES as of international significance for bats and there is clear scientific, peer-reviewed evidence of significant impacts on bat population by solar farms in the UK (RR-0135). We also contest the applicants have not adequately considered habitat connectivity in the ES and the likely impacts on farmland birds of this proposal. Furthermore, the effectiveness of skylark plots in maintaining the current population of breeding skylarks across the development site is unproven in terms of its effectiveness. We contest that the matter of impacts on Ecology are significant, especially for bats and farmland birds and therefore this topic should be in the list of Principal Issues for Assessment.

Preliminary meeting Agenda Item 4 Draft Examination Timetable Summary

██████████, Parish Councillor

Cassington Parish Council is in the process of hiring a consultant hydrologist for the Principal Issue of Flood Risk, Hydrology and Water Resources. We have very limited financial resources and so request that hearings on this specific topic are identified clearly in advance and that we are able to give a firm date for the presence of our expert at the hearing and when his input will be needed. Our expert charges by the day for presence at the hearing and so we cannot afford to have him attend hearings where he may not get the opportunity to speak or be examined.

Substantive text to support the above below

Agenda Item 3 - Cassington Parish Council - Initial Assessment of Principal Issues: Ecology

[REDACTED], Parish Councillor

Cassington Parish Council have throughout the consultation process for the proposed development identified the significant risks to biodiversity the project poses. Whilst the developers have made public claims surrounding the positive Biodiversity Net Gain generated by the proposal as detailed in the ES, this only deals with one aspect, namely the presence and condition of habitat. We note that a very large proportion of the Biodiversity Net Gain of the project is generated by converting arable farmland to grassland, taking no account of the likely impact of the proposed scheme on, often protected, species or communities. We understand that this is a difficult area to assess because of the lack of scientific evidence around the impacts of large-scale solar developments on UK wildlife, especially at the scale of the Botley West proposal.

The Applicant's own ES identifies that the Botley West site, particularly the central section, is home to 12 species of bat including Bechstein's, an Annex II listed species under the EC Habitats Directive and one for which Special Areas of Conservation have been designated for protection. Furthermore, the ES identifies that this area is likely to be of international importance for bat diversity. Bats are one group of species that we know are severely negatively impacted by the presence of solar farms, following peer-reviewed studies published by the University of Bristol and others from studies in the UK and Europe. The conclusion in the ES that the solar farm will have negligible impact on bats is neither evidenced nor credible, especially given the size of the development.

Likewise, we believe that the diverse and abundant population of farmland birds across the proposed Botley West Solar Power Station, especially again in the Central Section, are also at risk of significant negative impacts. Many of the farmland birds recorded in the ES are of conservation interest, including linnet, skylark and yellow hammer, which are all red listed. These birds rely on a heterogeneous mix of habitats to complete their life cycle, as well as the presence of active agriculture as a food source. The bird community of the area, identified as of County Importance in the ES, is concluded as not being significantly impacted by the proposal, again a conclusion we do not regard as evidence based. Mitigation for ground-nesting sky larks in the form of nesting plots is a method drawn from agricultural fields and is unproven as a mitigation for solar farms. Risks are also posed to water birds, for which studies in the US indicate they can mistake solar panels for water, an important consideration given the nearby gravel pits, rivers and other water bodies.

Overall, we regard the conclusions drawn on Ecology, as well as mitigations offered to conserve wildlife, as not credible and therefore Cassington Parish Council wish to see

these matters addressed as a substantive issue during the Examination. These issues are of national significance given the very poor state of the UK's biodiversity and the continued rollback of legislation aimed at protection of nature by this and previous governments. Our detailed comments on this matter are presented in our Relevant Representation and submissions during consultations.

Agenda Item 4 Flooding expert witness and Draft Examination Timetable

██████████, Parish Councillor

Cassington Parish will be one of the most severely impacted areas if this development is accepted in its present form. 50% of the Parish will be taken up by the development with severe impacts on the landscape, on our farmland, local heritage, amenity of our residents, on nature and on flood risk. It is on the last issue which I wish to elaborate.

Cassington is vulnerable to flooding, resulting from runoff from the limestone hills to the north into a drainage feature down to the low ground of the village underlain by Oxford Clay, a soil type known for poor drainage characteristics.

As a result, Cassington Village, Jericho Barns and Worton, as well as surrounding parts of the road network, including the A40 and A4095 are all vulnerable to flooding. In Cassington, homes on Elms Road are of particular concern as they have been periodically flooded, the most recent being in September 2024. I am taking the opportunity here to bring to your attention that a proportion of the householders in Elms Road are pensioners, living in bungalows, several of whom have significant mobility issues. We therefore view flood risk as a serious and significant issue in the Parish.

Mitigation for potential flooding at Cassington has been specifically planned based on the Surface Water Modelling Report and is proposed as a combination of shallow ponds, bunds and ditch widening to the north / northwest of the village. However, this modelling, and indeed the overall design of the Drainage Strategy, is predicated on the contention that the Solar Arrays of this scheme will not add to the rate of water runoff from the land on which they are positioned, a contention that both we and our hydrology expert disagree with.

Furthermore, there is no evidence of land infiltration testing for the modelling undertaken by the Applicant's consultants or that they have accounted for damage to land drainage to the north of the village or ground compaction. We also note that the current landowners, Blenheim Estates, have failed to maintain the current balancing pond or drainage ditches in the village on their land, potentially exacerbating the extent of flooding experienced in 2024, raising further questions about maintenance of drainage features proposed for this development.

Given the high level of concern in the village surrounding flooding issues, Cassington Parish Council have been approached to allocate funds to hire a hydrology consultant to provide expert opinion on this matter and to represent village concerns surrounding flooding at the relevant points in the Enquiry. Since the costs per diem of attendance of our expert at the Enquiry are substantial, they are asking the Inspectorate to enable, as far as is possible, notification in advance of when our expert will be required in the Hearing to give evidence because of our financial limitations.

There are other significant issues for Cassington Village and Jericho Barns, including the very narrow buffer zone between the proposed development and people's homes. However, we believe these matters should be dealt with under existing substantive matters for examination, most notably under Landscape and Visual Amenity.