

Response to Botley West Hearing – 13-15 May 2025

NIP Reference 20054849

I attended the first two days of the recent hearing in Botley, 13th and 14th May, representing Sustainable Woodstock. My wife, [REDACTED], spoke. Sustainable Woodstock are in favour of the project with several reservations, discussed below. I thought that the hearing was well organised and access was straightforward, although I did find registration for different days confusing, for your future reference.

The Inspectors listened and were patient and respectful, it is clearly a very involved and difficult job.

This response is in addition to another response from Sustainable Woodstock, from [REDACTED]. I have responded to the consultation whenever asked so will just refer to the subjects that were discussed at the hearing and express my thoughts on subjects I have not done so before.

The proximity to houses and possible noise from substation inverters was a concern and not answered in full to my mind. There appears to be no legislation regarding locating solar panels next to houses (I assume it is the same as building new houses?) and for the size of the proposed development there is a big unknown as to the noise from so many inverters in close proximity. Can this be modelled?

This brings me on to my next point. We have consistently been told by Blenheim and the developers PVDP that the development has to be 840 MW to satisfy the agreement with the National Grid in relation to their input into the solar farm. Disappointingly the National Grid were not present at the hearing but my question is, can this amount be smaller? Can the panels be located away from the residential areas more sympathetically even if this means a reduction in the total output of the solar farm?

Also of concern are the paths with fencing either side through fields of solar panels. I did not hear a solution to making these safe for lone vulnerable walkers. With high fencing either side there appears to be no way of avoiding awkward situations and providing an escape route. I would very much like to bring this to the Inspectors' attention.

There is a huge opportunity here for connectivity to be increased during this development. One of Sustainable Woodstock ([REDACTED]) has written in detail regarding paths and cycling possibilities and the reasons for them.

I strongly believe that Blenheim should be responsible for overseeing the condition of the solar farm and not a third party company. I would go further to say it should be a requirement of the DCO. The reasons being that they are on site, they will be on site for the foreseeable future and they feel a responsibility to the community and future re-use of land.

I was very surprised at the comments from Oxford Airport and if they are part of the consultation why the arrangement of panels at the end of the runway had not be corrected by the developers beforehand.

I am also concerned, as are others, on the details providing the decommissioning of the development at the end of the its lifespan. What will this involve? Removal of fencing, panel supports, removal of inverter stations etc. It is very likely that PVDP will not be responsible at this stage, another very good reason for Blenheim to be overseeing the solar farm. It is mostly their land after all.

Finally, I would like to write a few words about community benefit. I appreciate that community benefit is not considered in the decision-making process but would like to thank the Inspectors for listening and questioning several speakers who spoke about it at the Hearings. It is hard to believe that there is no legal requirement for community benefit for solar farms in England, especially ones of this size that will affect so many people. Botley West is so close to so many homes that if permission is granted, fair compensation must be awarded. We have supported the petition of Low Carbon Hub and are lobbying our MP, Calum Millar. He is working very hard for us in Parliament to review policy on community benefit which hopefully will bring this issue into the spotlight. I would like to remind the Inspectors that PVDP initially offered zero pounds in community benefit as they appeared to play on the lack of knowledge of local authorities and residents. Only now have they responded but with far too little in my opinion. If a system was in place for community benefit for such projects this would not be an issue and all of this petitioning, discussion and meetings would be unnecessary.

Thank you.