

Final

SBW OPEN FLOOR HEARING REPRESENTATION

I am here today to represent Stop Botley West and to give an introduction to the group and its concerns.

Stop Botley West is a community group that came together at the end of 2022 soon after local residents were first informed about the proposal to construct a 1,000-hectare solar farm in amongst the 15 villages where we live.

The group has over 1,500 active supporters and we represent the views of many of the thousands of people who live close to the proposed site as well as others from further afield who know and love this very special place. Many of our campaign supporters have registered as interested parties in the examination and some will speak at the hearings.

The area proposed for the solar farm is densely populated which means the daily lives of tens of thousands of individual citizens would change dramatically if Botley West Solar Farm were to go ahead as proposed.

The villages of Begbroke, Bladon, Cassington, Church Hanborough, Cumnor, Farmoor, Filchamstead, Wootton, Worton and Yarnton are all adjacent to or within 500m of the proposed site. Eynsham, Freeland, Kidlington, Long Hanborough, North Leigh, Tackley and the town of Woodstock all lie within 1.5km. Botley and the City of Oxford lie within 2.5km.

There are 10,800 properties and over 22,000 residents living within 1.5km of the boundaries of the proposed site. About 250 of these properties lie within 100m of the site. With the Applicant offering a standard buffer zone of just 25m, many would have solar panels right beside their homes and gardens. They include the UNESCO World Heritage Site, Blenheim Palace.

Schools, businesses, churches, recreation grounds and other community amenities would also be dominated by solar panels. Properties would be at increased risk of flooding because of the vast area of solar panels.

The footpaths regularly used by local residents and visitors for exercise and recreation would also change dramatically. 26km of Public Rights of Way lie in or next to the proposed site including popular long-distance routes like the Shakespeare Way, Thames Path and Oxford Green Belt Way. These would become corridors between high metal fences enclosing solar panels.

A great swathe of beautiful countryside would change dramatically. The proposed site sits largely within Oxford's Green Belt, on the edge of the iconic Cotswolds National Landscape. Most of it is productive agricultural land, 38% of it classed by the Applicant

as BMV. It is an unusually varied habitat that is home to red-listed birds such as linnet and skylark and it is recognised as being of international importance for bats. The latest research shows how harmful solar farms are to such wildlife.

With so much historic, cultural, social and natural heritage under threat, it is not surprising there is profound and widespread opposition to the scheme. The Applicant's preliminary consultation found 80% of respondents were opposed to the proposal and the statutory public consultation found 76% were opposed.

Stop Botley West and its supporters are often dismissed as "NIMBYs" – a slur used by people who want to avoid considering the full picture. In fact, we are whistleblowers. We know and understand the place better than most because we live here. We want to be sure that the harm the development would do is properly understood and taken into account.

We are asking: is this really the right place to construct the country's biggest solar farm?

That is of course what this examination process is all about. During the examination Stop Botley West will provide detailed evidence through the legal counsel and consultants who will represent us. We hope our contribution will be of help to the Examining Authority.