

Briefing Note

Our ref 64194/06/MS/OW
Date 4 June 2025
To Planning Inspectorate
From Oxford Aviation Services Limited

Subject Deadline D1 – Summary of Oral evidence

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This Statement has been prepared on behalf of Oxford Aviation Services Limited (“OASL”), the operators of London Oxford Airport (“the Airport”), in response to the Rule 8 letter received concerning the application by Photovolt Development Partners (“PVDP”) for an Order Granting Development Consent for the Botley West Solar Farm project.
- 1.2 The Airport, gave oral evidence to the panel of Inspectors on the afternoon of 15 May 2025, as part of the Issue Specific Hearing (“ISH”). The matter for discussion was Aviation Safety.
- 1.3 In attendance, on behalf of the Airport, were:
- [REDACTED] Managing Director of London Oxford Airport
 - [REDACTED] Planning Director, Lichfields (the Airport’s planning advisor)

2.0 Summary of evidence

- 2.1 [REDACTED] first introduced himself, to provide context for his answers, confirming that [REDACTED] is both the Managing Director of London Oxford Airport and the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) Accountable Manager, meaning [REDACTED] is personally responsible for any corporate breach of regulation.
- 2.2 [REDACTED] also confirmed that [REDACTED] is a professional pilot, with 35 years’ experience, including as a qualified instructor and air display pilot. [REDACTED] trained at Oxford Airport in 1990 and is very familiar with the Airport. [REDACTED] explained that Oxford Airport is one of the UK’s pre-eminent training airports, specialising in the training of commercial airline pilots. With many national and international pilots flying today having trained at Oxford Airport. The key points from [REDACTED] evidence can be summarised as follows:
- 1 The runway is used in both directions - its use depends on the prevailing winds.
 - 2 Regardless of direction of take-off or landing, overflight of the proposed development is necessary due to approach and take-off paths.
 - 3 There may be other airports that may have solar panels under flight paths, however the context at Oxford is very different, the majority of aircraft are light aircraft, including single engine. In the event of engine failure they would be forced to land in the fields

immediately underneath the approach, in which solar panels are proposed. Often these aircraft are in the hands of trainee pilots

- 4 In the event of an engine failure they will have no option but to land in an off aerodrome location. If that forced landing is into a solar array, the chances of survival are likely nil.
- 5 Last year, such an engine failure occurred immediately after take off. The instructor took over the controls and landed the aircraft safely off aerodrome. If this development had been in place as planned, they would have landed into the back of solar panels, with almost certainly a fatal outcome.
- 6 The Airport is not ideologically opposed to the development. However the increased risk posed by the development is not acceptable. The Airport has a duty of care to its tenants, which includes flight training organisations.
- 7 The written submission showed the area of land which the Airport believes should be removed from the scheme. This remains the principal issue for the Airport.
- 8 The Airport also highlighted concerns with the developments potential to attract more birds and other wildlife to the site, through new green infrastructure and the effect of the solar panels appearing as waterbodies. There are also concerns with the displacement of wildlife from the existing open land. The Airport already invests significant financial resources in deterring wildlife from the airfield.
- 9 The issue of lake effect as a result of solar arrays warrants further consideration. Waterbodies attract larger bird species which can be extremely dangerous for jet aircraft, such as the larger business jets that use Oxford Airport.
- 10 The Airport also registered concerns about potential for thermal plume, both in respect of the attractiveness to larger birds, soaring across using rising air currents and through turbulence effecting lighter aircraft. Turbulence is potential an issue for inexperienced pilots. The Airport also has concerns about thermal plume distorting primary radar returns, leading to inaccurate or partial radar picture.
- 11 Glint and glare may also be an issue, particularly given the recent experience at Amsterdam, which has been forced to close one of its runways for two hours a day due to glare from a recent solar installation.
- 12 Oxford Airport has been one of the UK's pre-eminent training airport's since 1932, and whilst not ideologically opposed to the development, there is a need to protect the safety of the Airport's customers and tenants and with it the viability of the business. If built as proposed, the Airport would probably have to close to flight training, as the risk to life would be too great.
- 13 ■ explained that he has himself once had to make an emergency off aerodrome landing, explaining that instinct take over and you automatically look for the nearest safe place to come down. In most cases, at Oxford, you have very inexperienced pilots who may not have the instincts an experienced pilot may have and will therefore require a reasonable expanse of open land upon which to alight. Clearly a solar array presents an exceptional level of hazard.

2.3 [REDACTED], Planning Director at Lichfields added the following:

- 1 The issues raised point to a lack of evidence submitted in support of the application. In many respects this links to the scoping out of Major Accidents and Disasters from the ES Statement.
- 2 It seems as though the EIA Scoping submission did not give these matters due regard, which led to a decision being made by the Inspectors to accept the scoping out of the chapter. As a result, appropriate reporting has not been carried out, this is despite the Inspectors scoping opinion (AP126) specifically asking that the submission ensures that the operations and safety of Oxford Airport is not compromised.
- 3 The Ecology ES Chapter, for example, notes the potential for displacement of ecology during construction, operation and decommissioning – however there is no further analysis of the effects.
- 4 The Airport as asking for the analysis to be done, so informed decisions can be made.