

Application by Photovolt Development Partners (PVDP) on behalf of SolarFive Ltd for an Order Granting Development Consent for the Botley West Solar Farm project.

Written summary of oral comments given at the Hearings during the week commencing 12th May 2025.

Date Thursday 15th May, Issue Specific Hearing 1 (ISH1).

Name of speaker: David Rogers

I made one comment during **Issue Specific Hearing 1, Green Belt**

The three maps on the last page of this document were prepared in 2022 just after the Botley West Solar Farm proposal was made public.

At the time, Oxfordshire was working through its agreed Local Plan sites to the early/mid 2030s and was developing an Oxfordshire 2050 proposal – a joint effort of all the Local Authorities. This proposal was eventually abandoned as the Local Authorities could not reach agreement on housing targets.

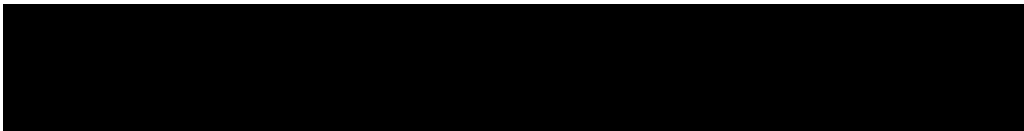
The individual District Councils are now developing their own Local Plans but these are likely to be disrupted by the recent announcement of plans for a 'Greater Oxford', with 50,000 to 75,000 more houses¹; the appointment of a new Chair of the Oxford Growth Commission²; and the resurrection of the Oxford-Cambridge Arc proposals (shelved by Michael Gove in 2022) under the new name of the Oxford-Cambridge Supercluster³, a nod to the idea of 'Europe's Silicon Valley'⁴ between the two ancient Universities.

The recent nation-wide re-assessment of housing targets also increased all of Oxfordshire's (already controversial) Local District Council housing targets by an average of 60%.

It is not clear how all of these pressures will play out in terms of land-use in Oxfordshire in general and in the green belt in particular. The attached map gives some indication of what is likely to happen.

The maps show Oxford's green belt in pale green, built-up urban areas in grey, the current Local Plan sites (i.e. to the mid-2030s) in pale brown, the proposed Botley West Solar Farm cross-hatched in black and the then-current Oxon 2050 sites (i.e. sites put forward for development) in more open, hatched black. The latter indicate the landowners' interest in developing those sites. That interest is unlikely to have diminished, given the extra pressures on Oxfordshire with all the new developments outlined above.

The areas of all developments within the green belt were calculated by a Geographical Information system (ESRI's ArcGIS), restricted to three different limits a) the entire green belt (top map), b) areas within 2kms of the built-up areas shown in grey on the maps (middle map) and c) areas within 1km of the built-up areas (lower map). For b) and c) the limits of the 2 or 1km buffers around the urban areas are shown by the green and purple 'bubbles' respectively. The areas of development are expressed as percentages of the total area involved in the small tables next to the maps.



If all the developments go ahead, by 2050 Oxford will have lost 15.5% of its entire 349sq. kms green belt. That total is made up of Local Plan sites (3.5%), Oxon 2050 sites (8.9%) and BWSF (3.1%) (upper map).

Within 2kms of urban areas, the land loss rises to 23.2% (middle map on the last page here) and within 1km to 25.9% (lower map).

Since the areas closest to urban sites are those most likely to be visited by walkers and cyclists from the city, the loss of over a quarter of green belt land by 2050 should be a matter of major concern. BWSF would contribute significantly to these cumulative losses – just under 20% of the total loss in the 1km case but almost 30% in the 2km case.

Use of the green belt for housing is controversial and often justified on the grounds that it provides building sites close to the city where nurses, teachers, fire personnel etc, can live less expensively than in the city itself. This is something of a myth in Oxford where many green belt sites are being used for executive housing for London commuters (easy access to London was a major selling point for houses in the Barton Park development to the east of the city).

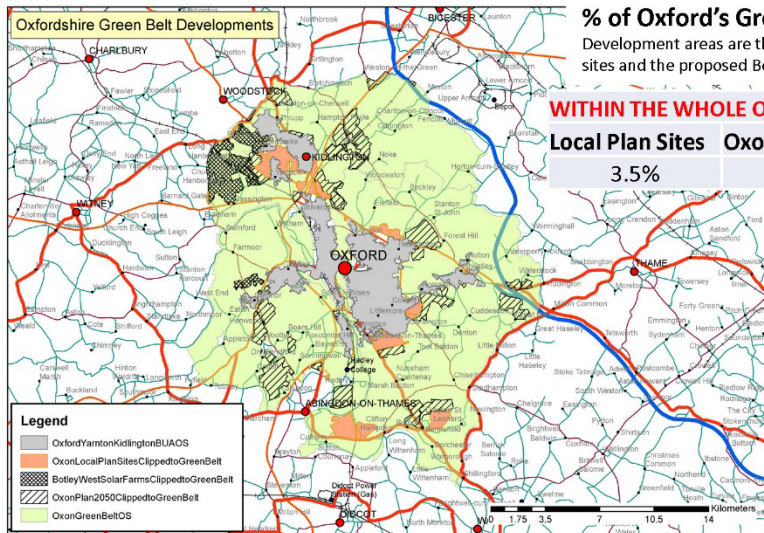
Whether or not green belt houses are affordable they provide accommodation that is in very short supply in the city. Exploitation of the green belt by a solar PV installation cannot be similarly justified.

76% of BWSF's entire area is within Oxford's green belt. This is an un-necessary use of a scarce resource that should be for the health and welfare of all of the city's inhabitants. The health benefits of green spaces are now well-established⁵. There is certainly no health gain in taking away a large portion of the city's green belt for a solar installation.

Professor David J. Rogers MA, D.Phil. (Oxon)

04/06/25

⁵ <https://iris.who.int/bitstream/handle/10665/345751/WHO-EURO-2016-3352-43111-60341-eng.pdf?sequence=3&isAllowed=y>

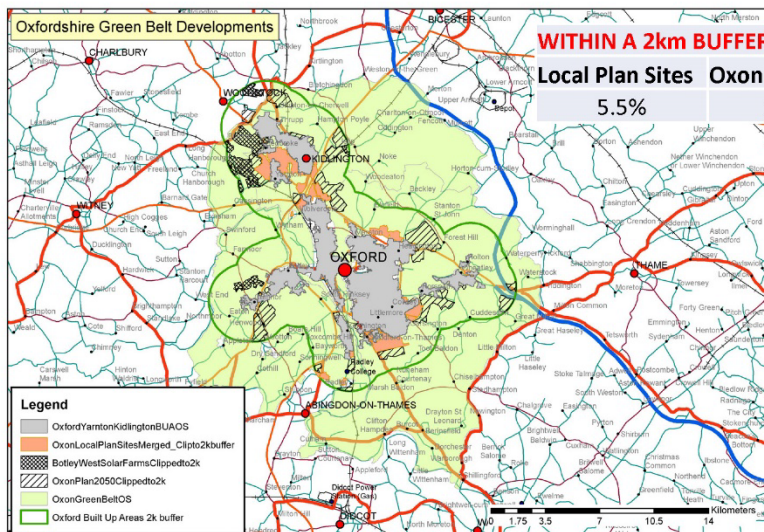


% of Oxford's Green Belt given over to development

Development areas are those of current Local Plan sites, proposed Oxford 2050 sites and the proposed Botley West Solar Farm sites (see figure legends)

WITHIN THE WHOLE OF THE GREEN BELT, total area 349 sq.kms			
Local Plan Sites	Oxon 2050 sites	Botley West SF	TOTAL
3.5%	8.9%	3.1%	15.5%

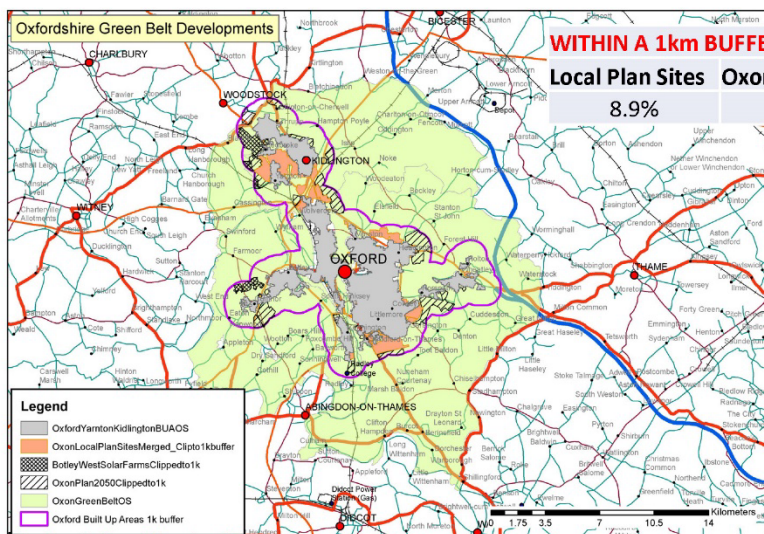
Only development sites within the green belt area (shown in green) are shown on this map. Presently built-up areas are shown in grey.



WITHIN A 2km BUFFER OF URBAN AREAS, total area 166 sq.kms

Local Plan Sites	Oxon 2050 sites	Botley West SF	TOTAL
5.5%	10.8%	6.9%	23.2%

The 2km buffer around Oxford's built-up area (in grey) is shown as a green line. Development sites have been 'clipped' to this boundary line.



WITHIN A 1km BUFFER OF URBAN AREAS, total area 95 sq.kms

Local Plan Sites	Oxon 2050 sites	Botley West SF	TOTAL
8.9%	12.3%	4.7%	25.9%

The 1km buffer around Oxford's built-up area (in grey) is shown as a violet line. Again, development sites have been 'clipped' to this boundary line.

Conclusion. If all proposed developments go ahead, Oxford will lose **15.5%** of its entire green belt by 2050. This figure rises to **25.9%** for green belt areas within 1 km of the current built-up areas.