

Planning and Strategic Housing

Reply to: Andrew Thomson

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By Email:

BotleyWestSolar@planninginspectorate.gov.uk

Your Ref: EN010147

Our Ref: 20055291

Date: 05 June 2025

Dear Sirs,

RE: WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL RESPONSE TO ACTION POINT 17 – ISSUE SPECIFIC HEARING 1 (ISH1)

1. The Examining Authority (ExA) has requested a response from Host Authorities to issues covered at the Issues Specific Hearing 1 held on 15 May 2025.
2. Action point 17 [EV5-010] requires: All Councils to provide a written response clarifying what input, if any, they had in the information the Applicant used to prepare the Environmental Statement. Were the Councils consulted upon and/ or agreed to the baseline, background data and the methodology that underpins the ES. This is for all relevant ES chapters.
3. West Oxfordshire District Council (WODC) responds as follows;
4. The Oxfordshire Host Authorities (OHA) have taken opportunities to meet with the applicant and their consultant team on a regular basis through the pre-application and pre-examination periods to discuss matters relating to the Botley West DCO, reflecting at regular intervals on the matters of most significant importance to determining the Botley West DCO application and the desirability of entering into Statements of Common Ground, to agree amongst other things, methodologies for ES assessments.
5. WODC has engaged with the applicant and their consultant team on specific matters during the pre-application and pre-examination stages, summarised as follows;

Landscape and Visual Matters

6. The applicant initially engaged with WODC 19 October 2022 seeking opinion on candidate viewpoint selection within the ZTV and particularly those locations that are within West Oxfordshire.
7. The applicant's consultant (RPS) approached WODC to draw on local knowledge. The opinion of WODC was requested on proposed candidate viewpoint selections within the Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV), particularly for locations within West Oxfordshire. A plan and schedule was submitted to WODC to review, but was stated by the consultant at the time that the precise location of representative viewpoints would be verified during site investigation.

8. WODC submitted an initial response to the consultant to explain that the scale of the proposal is such, that we would anticipate more viewpoints being identified than those indicated on the maps.
9. Looking at the Eynsham-Bladon area for example, WODC highlighted that there were not that many viewpoints compared to those that would usually be identified for more common projects. WODC considered that more viewpoints along the Eynsham to Bladon Road would be necessary, as there would be potential major visual impact over the entire wider landscape. This also applies to the Cassington to Bladon Road and potentially the area north of Woodstock also. Having said that, the viewpoints identified looked logical and picked up the majority of public rights of way, elevated positions and edge of settlement locations.
10. The consultant confirmed that for the assessment of visual effects, they would have to adopt an approach that was reasonable and proportional to the scale and nature of the development. In selecting viewpoint locations, they identified the most sensitive receptors, including walkers using local Public Rights of Way that are likely to have the potential to be significant. People in vehicles using the local road network are considered by the consultant to be low sensitivity receptors as their focus is on the road. The consultant confirmed that other visual receptors of medium and low sensitivity would be covered in the text, particularly those dynamic receptors (road users) along a route.
11. The consultant stated however, that the viewpoints are from representative locations and not intended to show every view. All receptor types will be covered in text but not necessarily by a photograph. For the visual assessment the consultant was particularly looking for receptors that are high or medium sensitivity and more likely to experience significant effects.
12. There may be other locations that are identified during fieldwork but all viewpoints must be:
 - From publicly accessible locations;
 - Generally high sensitivity – walkers and cyclists
13. WODC responded by suggesting approx. 17 additional viewpoints for consideration, identified in consultation with local Parish Councils.
14. In finalising the representative viewpoints, WODC were contacted on 11/04/2023 to comment on;
 - Representative Viewpoint location plan
 - Representative Viewpoint Panoramas
 - Representative Viewpoint log (sheet 1) and Candidate Photomontage locations (sheet 2)
 - Additional viewpoints proposed by LPAs.
15. In summary the applicant confirmed that the photographic coverage amounts to 55 No. Representative Viewpoints. They proposed 31 No. Candidate Photomontages selected from the 55 No Representative Viewpoints. on the basis of those receptors at locations most likely to experience significant effects.
16. WODC did not respond to this request for comment.
17. WODC were contacted by RPS on 30/07/2024 notifying the council that as part of the planning process they would be looking to complete a statement of common ground for the scheme, in relation to landscape and visual matters. They requested the contact details on the WODC landscape officer. West Oxfordshire District Council confirmed on 24/05/2024 that they do not currently have a specialist landscape and forestry officer in post. WODC confirmed that they had previously engaged with RPS about the identification of viewpoints, but that's as far as our landscape and visual impact assessment engagement had gone to date

18. The host authorities and RPS were scheduled to meet to discuss Landscape and Public Rights of Way matters on 30 August 2024 but the meeting was cancelled.
19. RPS shared a table summary of consultation responses received in relation to landscape and visual resources on 24/09/2024
20. A rescheduled meeting took place on 30/09/2024. The meeting primarily focused on how comments raised by the Oxfordshire Host Authorities through consultation had not been addressed by the applicant either through assessment methodology or project design.
21. A draft Statement of Common Ground for Landscape and Visual Resources was shared by RPS with the OHA on 09/09/2024, WODC have not signed a Statement of Common Ground on Landscape and Visual Matters with the applicant at the present time,

Ecology

22. Two meetings were held between OHA Ecology officers and the applicant's consultant team
23. Meeting on 1/04/2024 to provide an update on the project including timing of additional consultation on focussed changes to the project boundary. Consultant provided information on surveys which commenced in 2022 and continued through 2023 and 2024 covering range of habitats and species. The purpose of the meeting was mainly for information rather than any agreement, particularly with regard to mitigation proposals.
24. A follow up meeting was held between the applicant consultant team and OHA ecologists on 19/09/2024 to provide an update on the preparation of the Environmental Statement. There was significant focus on bat surveys and discussion of potential mitigation as well as proposals for Biodiversity Net Gain. Once again, the purpose of the meeting was mainly for information rather than any agreement, but consultant team did express wish to submit statement of common ground with the DCO application

Agricultural Land and PRow

25. A draft SoCG was provided 09 September 2024. The baseline, background data and the methodology that underpins the ES were not agreed in advance.

Flood risk

26. The applicant's consultant team requested contact details of the WODC flood risk manager on 19/09/2024 in order to collaborate on a statement of common ground for hydrology and flood risk. WODC provided contact details for the flood risk manager on 20/09/2024.
27. A draft SoCG for hydrology and flood risk was shared with WODC officers on 25/10/2024. The baseline, background data and the methodology that underpins the Environmental Statement were not agreed in advance. WODC flood risk manager requested to see correspondence with the Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA) and Environment Agency (EA) which had not been included with the SoCG. A statement of common ground has been agreed at this time.

Noise and vibration

28. The applicant's consultant team requested contact details of the WODC environmental protection officer on 19/09/2024 in order to collaborate on a statement of common ground for noise and vibration. WODC provided contact details for the environmental protection officer on 20/09/2024.

29. A draft Statement of Common Ground was shared with WODC officers on 4/10/2024. The baseline, background data and the methodology that underpins the Environmental Statement were not agreed in advance. A statement of common ground has been agreed at this time.
30. WODC trust that this submission will be helpful to the Examining Authority in addressing Action Point 17 for Issue Specific Hearing 1.

Yours Sincerely



Andrew Thomson