

I am a Woodstock resident and Interested Party, and I'm writing in relation to the ExQ2 questions relating to Air Traffic and Aviation Safety (2.16.7, 2.16.8 and 2.16.9).

There are two related matters that I wish to bring to the ExA's attention:

1. The Oxford Mail (August 18, 2025) has just reported that a British Airways' pilot training provider is opening up a new base at Oxford Airport within a couple of months.

"FTEJerez will begin operating at London Oxford Airport in late summer of this year having signed the contracts. FTEJerez is currently an official training provider for British Airways and Jet2.

This new base is designed to strengthen its ability to support both its UK airline cadets and self-sponsored students pursuing a UK licence or dual UK/EASA licence, providing access to "high-quality flight training" under the UK regulatory framework.

FTE adds that the site has also been selected with scalability in mind, allowing for future expansion should demand increase.

London Oxford Airport historically has been a popular site for budding pilots, with well over 40,000 starting their career at the airfield and joining more than 100 airlines globally. According to the airport, at one point its runway was the busiest in the world with over 235,000 movements a year (a take-off or landing) and up to 1,100 flights in a single day."

Given this immediate increase in flight training capacity, with the potential for significant expansion in the future, I propose that the ExA may wish to approach FTEJerez, British Airways and Jet2 as highly relevant new consultees to establish their views on the proposed Botley West development, given the many concerns already expressed about pilot safety and the emergency services' response capability.

2. The July and August editions of the Woodstock and Bladon News (WOBL) carried relevant letters (attached) relating to pilot safety around Oxford Airport that I would like to bring to the ExA's attention. They bring additional clarity and perspective to the significant safety concerns of local residents.

- The first is from [REDACTED] a renowned heart surgeon who lives in Bladon and was the first medical responder at two fatal air crashes in fields that would be on the proposed Botley West site.

- The second is from a flying instructor who is familiar with training pilots from Oxford Airport, and who also has emergency services' experience. (For professional reasons, he wrote anonymously, but his identity as a local resident was validated by the WOBL editor).

Woodstock and Bladon News, August 2025

Dear Editor,

London Kidlington Airport close to Solar Panels

I am a Flying Instructor who has taught trainee pilots from Oxford Airport at Kidlington - an excellent training centre for novice pilots, many of whom go on to careers in commercial aviation. During my time instructing there, I was in no doubt that it is one of the safest learning environments for many reasons, not least the surrounding countryside that offers a reassuring choice of emergency landing areas in the event of any technical issues.

With safety in mind, I am dismayed to see that the Botley West developer proposes to install thousands of solar panels so close to an exceptionally active airfield with mixed traffic, from learner pilots in single engine aircraft to helicopters and the largest of private jets.

In response to a recent engine-related emergency landing in a field just beyond the end of the southerly runway, the developers have removed a 'wedge' of the proposed solar panels roughly in the direction that an aircraft would be pointing, with the aim of making any engine failure after take-off safer. While this is obviously a positive move, it unfortunately assumes that all such engine failure incidents happen in the textbook fashion, which unfortunately they don't.

The standard departure procedure for single-engined light aircraft is to climb to 1000 feet above sea level before a right turn along the railway line and continuing to climb to no higher than 2000 feet until the aircraft is at least 5 miles from the airport. During this take-off phase the pilot has to be aware of potential engine failure and be prepared to take very decisive action.

Most training aircraft can glide without the engine with a descent rate of approximately 500 feet per minute, giving a maximum time of approximately 3.5 minutes for the pilot to identify a suitable field, manoeuvre the aircraft safely towards the field, carry out essential security drills, potentially deal with passengers, and make Air Traffic Control aware of the situation.

This routine is practiced many times during training until it becomes instinctive, however the one thing the pilot has no control over, no matter how good the training, is the choice of available landing sites.

To cover so many fields close to the airport and the pilot training area with solar panels would severely restrict the options available in this situation.

I don't wish to overstate the risks of an engine failure as it is fortunately a rare event. However, options need to be available and should the unthinkable happen, I have always been satisfied as a Flying Instructor that those options exist at Oxford Airport.

Another important consideration - the physical effects of large numbers of solar panels close to the landing/take-off areas cannot be understated. In hot weather they can create serious turbulence and glare which can very easily upset the approach of a light aircraft, particularly for a student or low-hours pilot. I have instructed at other airfields close to solar farms, much smaller than the proposed Botley West plans, and have had to take emergency control from a student pilot as the invisible thermals suddenly disrupt a nice approach.

One final point: I have previously worked as a member of the emergency services and the thought of a rescue operation to retrieve injured people from the midst of a solar farm fills me with dread. I struggle to think of how it could be achieved without severe risk to all concerned, including the emergency responders.

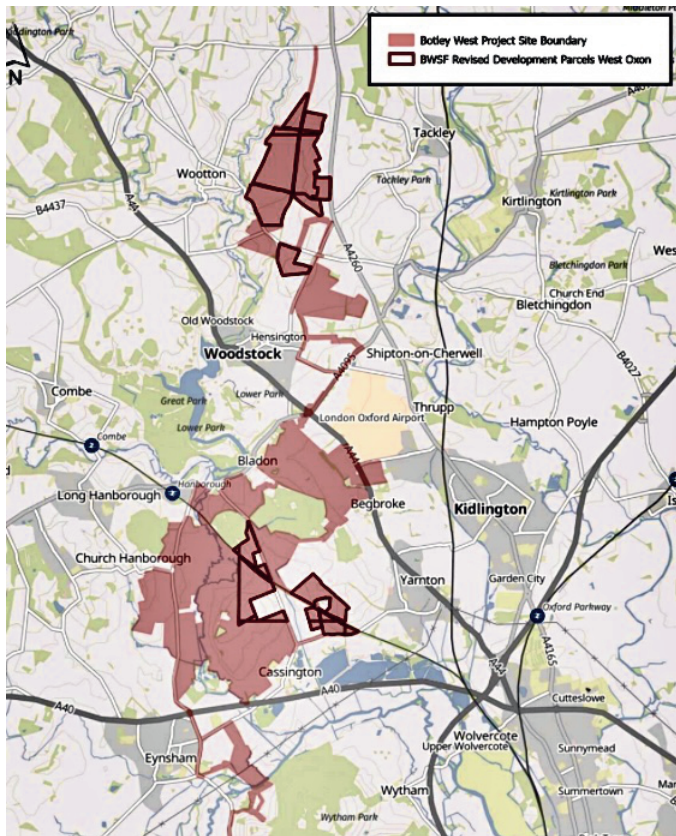
Anonymous

Editor's Note: The identity of the anonymous letter, from a local resident who wishes to remain anonymous, has been validated by the Editor

Oxford Airport versus Botley West

Lives before Loot

In April, I published a letter in the Woodstock and Bladon News outlining the dangers of a planned solar industrial complex to the safety of Oxford Airport. I decided to write this article on the day that Air India Flight 171 crashed into the city of Ahmedabad with huge loss of life. Since both engines in a commercial airliner failed suddenly a bird strike was considered. Sadly, this has greater relevance for our own community than you might think. In the context of aviation safety, avoidance of risk is common sense and not rocket science. So as a frequent flyer who has fixed upon the vacant stare of shattered corpses following a crash on Bladon Heath, I felt compelled to share my thoughts on this issue.



Proposed layout for the Botley West development around the airport and radical changes proposed by West Oxfordshire District Council (with bold boundaries)

Should a geography teacher quiz his class at Marlborough School "Would you choose to cover terrain between a busy flight training school and a major RAF base with metal, glass and high wire fences?", I anticipate a stony silence. Common sense would prevail in innocent minds that daily register air traffic circling above. Regrettably, if you posed the same question to the Government in distant Westminster, you may well get a different answer.

At a village public consultation event an eminent professor reportedly asked the Photovoltaic

Development Partners representative "why cover thousands of acres of Oxfordshire green belt and agricultural land with solar panels given that there are abundant sites elsewhere?" The response was brief. "Because that's what Blenheim gave us!" Honest but depressing. These meetings were generally perceived as a tick box exercise where those who chose to speak out were immediately labelled NIMBYs. But the NIMBYs had many legitimate concerns. One of mine as a medical man was that countryside recreation plays an economically important part in both physical and mental health. Walking the dogs between high wire fences and security cameras just doesn't cut it. Botley West's claim that the panels would not be visible behind green hedges was met with derision.

As one Buckinghamshire MP stated with regard to a proposal in his own constituency "solar is inefficient technology that trashes the countryside and damages our food security." Moreover our diminutive UK green agenda is wholly redundant given the carbon generation by the US, Russia and China. Even the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change is fully apprised of solar inefficiency. That's why he announced an immediate £14.2 billion investment into new nuclear power in parallel with Donald Trump's flurry of orders to quadruple nuclear energy by 2050. In Britain fewer than 10 nuclear reactors would eliminate fossil fuels from the grid without sacrificing any further agricultural land upon which our food security depends.

It is likely that there were months if not years of 'under the radar' negotiations between Botley West and Blenheim before any degree of public awareness. Photovoltaic Development Partners submitted their proposals to the Government's Planning Inspectorate (PINs) in November 2024 following local negotiations with the relevant district councils. The extent of the development is well known. This sea of metal and glass will involve two million solar panels and 110 kilometres of high wire security fencing. Setting aside the Government's slave labour and security concerns surrounding Chinese technology, panel construction alone will generate vast quantities of carbon. Currently 75% of the site is on green belt land, whilst 45% of the soil is classified 'best and most versatile quality', particularly behind Bladon in proximity to the airport.

The application was accepted for consideration in December 2024 and three months later West Oxfordshire District Council published their 'Local Impact Report'. This provided a forensic examination of the proposal by experts stretching to 180 pages. Negative impacts on the landscape, green belt, local ecology, historic significance, agriculture land and public rights of way were described. More worryingly the Council declared "there has been no meaningful

engagement by the applicant to seek to address problems as they have arisen." They then launch into a catalogue of failures on important issues worsened by lack of dialogue.

Now to the main point of this article. Oxford Airport, which closely abuts onto Woodstock, Bladon, Begbroke and Kidlington, made critical representation to both Botley West and West Oxfordshire District Council. This was well in advance of the PINS process but again it was claimed Botley West did not respond in those preliminary stages. Evidence against the deployment of solar panels close to airports is growing but the risk factors can only be accrued in the light of experience. As stated in my letter, even the Dutch commercial airport Schiphol has been forced to close a runway at certain times of the day through intense glare. But commercial jets are not the main concern locally.

Around Oxford Airport we have continuous traffic from a thousand trainee pilots flying single engine aircraft and practicing engine failure. Added to that there are new helicopters circling under test conditions, a vintage Spitfire and the Children's Air Ambulance crossing terrain over surrounding villages. Birds are already a problem for the Airport. Together, the lakes on the Blenheim Estate and the woods and fields of West Oxfordshire provide an abundance of large species including geese, ducks, gulls, pigeons, rooks and crows. Huge Kites and Buzzards circle the fields searching for prey. Birds that land on water are attracted by acres of glass panels through the so called 'lake effect' described in US academic literature. Just drive north towards Banbury on the A4260 and you will see a shimmering lake away on the left; not water but acres of solar panels.

Our environment is progressively being covered by these industrial developments because they make more money than crops for the land owner. But birds won't land on them. With an ambient temperature of 25 degrees centigrade the panels often register 50 degrees. The dark surfaces absorb most of the sunlight and heat though only 15% is converted into electricity. The rest is returned to the atmosphere as heat. And because the structures are darker than surrounding vegetation, large swathes of solar panels will absorb and emit heat at higher rates producing air turbulence. According to research ecologist Jeffrey Lovich of the US Geological Survey, the heat generated can incinerate insects and burn the feathers of birds that fly above. Such effects are likely to exacerbate Britain's proliferating wild fire problem. So much for the improved biodiversity that solar site developers profess. Instead wildlife could be decimated on an industrial scale by their scheme. Birds will fly over the panels to the safety of airport land and that poses a huge problem.

As the Managing Director Mr William Curtis explains, "we constantly need to clear birds away from our runway. I think it is inevitable that work going on around the solar site will increase the density of birds on the Airport's surface". Residents of Bladon know that flocks of wild geese congregate on the lakes of Blenheim in Autumn before migrating for the winter. They then land and group in the field next to Churchill's grave before heading off over the Airport. Swans do this too. Civil Aviation data documented 1432 episodes of bird strike in the UK in 2022. Remember Captain Sullenberger ditching his Airbus 320 into the Hudson River in 2009 after a flock of birds disabled both engines?

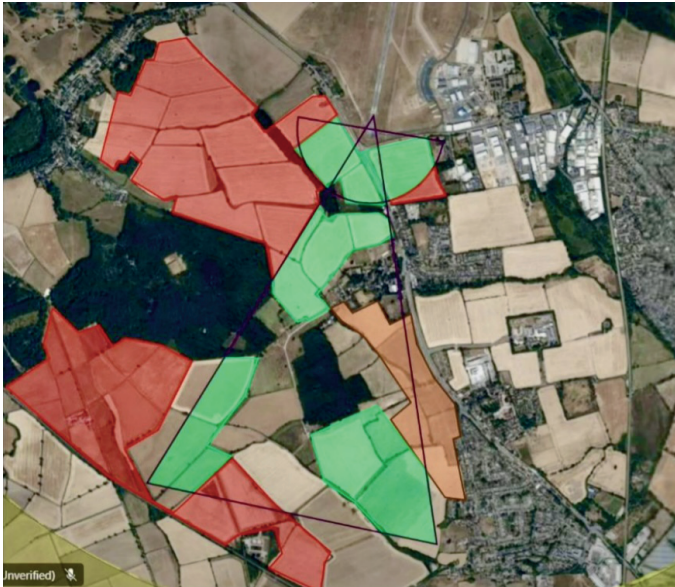
This very problem was aired at the PINS meeting in May when Mr Curtis said "I don't think it's unreasonable to suggest that if you make a crash landing into a solar display your chances of survival are probably nil." He elaborated further. "Last year we had an engine failure after take off and the instructor took control to land in a field. I'm pleased to say everyone got out unscathed and the aircraft was undamaged. I can also say that had solar panels been in place neither of the crew would have survived." Were these problems raised with Botley West before the PINS meeting? Apparently so, but allegedly Botley West did not provide a response. The subsequent statements from Mr Curtis were no more reassuring. "The difficulty for the Airport fire and rescue service is to get to the casualty. Say someone has survived to extinguish a fire, they are now surrounded by live electric panels."

Curtis went on to say "we do have other concerns. We don't consider the (BW) ecology reports have covered the removal of 2,500 acres of countryside and we are the next green area! We think it will encourage more birds. We also believe that on a summer's evening the panels will act as a heat store and the heat will be released as a 'thermal plume'. Questions have been raised by Brize Norton regarding radar performance in these circumstances. We also think that the heat coming off the panels could present turbulence problems for light single engine aircraft with inexperienced pilots on approach or departure."

So back to the school geography class. Why make a deliberate choice to create issues that convey a risk to life both for pilots and the local community. Trainee pilots with little experience are likely to panic and react instinctively when threatened by impending demise. They seek damage limitation and "the scary thing is that could mean heading towards built up areas rather than solar panels". This implies main roads or the grounds of Marlborough School and as Curtis emphasises, "it's not if, but when?"

A face to face meeting between Botley West and the Airport authorities took place the week after the PINS

debacle. Then on 5th June came a BBC News item entitled "Land near airport removed from solar farm plans." In fact just 10 hectares of the full 1000 were withdrawn in a wedge beyond the western end of the runway near Begbroke's Spring Hill. (see figure). Who engaged the press is not clear but Botley West stated "we have agreed to remove panels from areas identified as particularly sensitive in response to local concerns". At the same time they announced that the much criticised community benefit fund would be doubled. One wonders why that might be?



10 hectare segment at the western end of the runway near Begbroke allegedly relinquished by Botley West in case of incidents on takeoff or landing from this direction

The modest revision provides an area for emergency landings beyond the runway but if my recollection is correct, the second crash I experienced was further than that territory. Neither does the concession address bird displacement or bird strike, glare, thermal plume nor Brize Norton's radar issue. This clearly heralds a battle between safety and profit.

As a surgeon with considerable trauma experience together with a doctorate of bioengineering, I would request push back of the panels for at least a mile from the whole periphery of the Airport. Why risk anything in this context? I have no wish to attend a third aviation catastrophe in walking distance from my home. As I see it, laying acres of metal and glass around an airport and expecting it to stay safe is akin to installing a pig sty in my operating theatre and hoping for it to stay clean.

I conclude by emphasising that I love historic Blenheim and have stated that in my books. The chief executive Dominic Hare has done a fantastic job in developing the World Heritage Site, even installing gold toilets. Yet this industrial scheme simply does not sit well with the countryside and community. An increasing number of dignitaries and MP's including


have joined public demonstrations against the random decimation of the countryside to line the pockets of landowners. What's more there is now a direct alternative for our area.

The Oxford Energy Network (with whom I have no connection) is creating a citywide 'heat network' to cut emissions and fossil fuels. This emerges through the University and the Zero Carbon Oxfordshire Partnership who have already secured £21 million in Government funding. This alongside an initial £100 million of private investment that will enable work to begin in 2026. The total funding is expected to exceed £500 million and will reduce carbon emissions from connected buildings by as much as 80%. It equates with 15,000 tonnes of carbon per year. The credibility of this University project is not contested and there will be no negative impact on Oxfordshire's countryside, health, food chain or aviation.

Finally, and even more exciting for Oxfordshire, the Chancellor's Spending Review on June 18th announced a £2.5 billion investment into fusion energy, the power that lights up the stars. A substantial part of that is destined for Oxford's Culham Laboratories where the nuclear fusion reactor was recently shut down. The Energy Secretary announced that "fusion has the potential to provide an abundant clean energy source whilst attracting new technologies, investment and economic growth for Oxfordshire through our Plan for Change. This will deliver net zero and provide the clean energy of the future." So why would you cover huge swathes of agricultural land with more metal and glass for another 40 years? Why would you create unpredictable hazard around a regional airport and World Heritage Site? Others are tackling climate change with a future oriented scientific approach so inevitably the battle continues.

Botley West versus Stop Botley West, a controversy that should never have happened.





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