

Botley West Solar Farm

Resident's Response to PVDP answers to Examiners' questions

BWSF is a massive intrusion on the local much-valued rural landscape which is an integral part of the citation for the World Heritage Site of Blenheim Palace. The applicant's answers to the Examiners' questions appear to be an attempt to obfuscate this by excessive jargonistic verbosity designed to discourage further response by objectors.

ExQ2.13.8 Landscape Mitigation and Decommissioning

Hedges and Footpaths

Hedges 3 m high on each side of footpaths will convert them into 'green lanes' which do occur in this area but are much less common than the open-aspect footpaths more normally found. The few existing green lanes have evolved over centuries and make an interesting but occasional variation in the landscape. The BWSF as planned would provide a network of artificial green lanes with enclosed metal fences through an industrialised landscape instead of the open-aspect footpaths in a rural landscape which we have at present. No mention is given of the time it will take for these hedges to grow, of the maintenance involved or of the effect on wildlife. From the recent experience of growing field hedges around Bladon it takes 5 years to grow a hedge 1m high during which time the solar panels would therefore be in full view from a path. Moreover, the treatment of these hedges after decommissioning has not been properly dealt with and no information is given as to the fate of hedges planted by villagers in the last few years to aid biodiversity.

EXA2.15.4 & 5 and 2.16.3

Education Facility

As a resident of Bladon I have only very recently become aware of this project. There does not appear to have been any consultation with local people and the need/desirability for such a project is doubtful, to say the least. The money available could be put to much better use to improve existing facilities.

The only access to what I presume to be the site of this proposed facility (School Lane) is totally unsuitable for motor vehicles. It is the pedestrian access route to the primary school, the primary school playing fields, the village recreation ground, the allotments, the church and the cemetery. Vehicular access is strictly limited.

ExQ 2.5.4 and 2.5.5

Land retention for food growing

There does not appear to have been any consultation with residents about the introduction of a commercial growing facility. If the land is now not in the plans for solar panels it should maintain its present use (presumably it is farmed) or be used for biodiversity.

ExQ2.13.5

Landscape and Visual Amenity

A buffer zone of 25 m for residential buildings is totally inadequate from the point of view of an overbearing visual outlook, potential noise disturbance (e.g. in heavy rain or high winds) and security precautions (obtrusive lighting at night) - not to mention possible danger if panels are damaged in storms - which are now more frequent. Moreover, the size of the buffer zone should take into account the noise and disruption during the construction phase as well as during the operation period. The proposed buffer zone should be increased at least 10-fold, if not more.

No information has been given (although requested many months ago from PVDP) on the location of the 156 large converter stations and 6 HV transformers which will be further large blots on the landscape for those residents unfortunate enough to live in close proximity to the solar farm.

ExQ2.11.12 and 13

Loss of Green Belt

The current and proposed loss of Green Belt in the area is alarming. The demands of Oxford City and the Oxford University Colleges for land for housing and laboratory facilities and Blenheim's ongoing house-building aspirations (albeit as "Pye Homes") mean that the Green Belt is rapidly diminishing and there will soon be a 'greater Oxford'. Moreover, Blenheim Palace will have lost the rural setting which contributes to its much vaunted World Heritage status. There is no need for solar panels to be built on Green Belt land - there are many roofs in the area where solar panels can be placed, including the roofs of the thousands of homes in Blenheim's future plans for the area. Loss of Green Belt also means loss of biodiversity.

Ex2.11.4.and 7

Loss of BMV Land

Given the current ideas on Climate Change, I consider that food security will be of even more importance than energy security in future. Whereas solar panels can be placed on roofs, as stated above, crops cannot. Should we jeopardising the country's food security by reducing the area of land available for food production by building a gigantic solar farm? Blenheim (or more exactly the Vanbrugh Unit Trust) will presumably make a great deal of money by renting out land for the solar farm but at what cost to food production security, biodiversity and the palace's World heritage status ? Among all the figures being bandied about I have yet to find a calculation on the cost to the environment for the manufacture, construction, transportation and demolition of this vast enterprise (panels, concrete, steel, etc.). It has been suggested that if all the waste material went into landfill after its useful life, it would fill the entire existing capacity.

ExQ2.5.2

Funding Availability

Funding for this project has been the source of much speculation in the press during the past year and the answer provided by PVDP does not give ground for confidence in the availability of suitable funding in future years.