

Church Hanborough Residents' response to the Applicant's answer to ExQ2.5.5

Q2.5.5	Applicant West Oxfordshire District Council	<p>Land retention at Church Hanborough</p> <p>As noted above, the SoS needs to be satisfied that the land to be acquired is not more than is reasonably required of the purposes of development.</p> <p>Applicant - The ExA notes that land to the southeast of Church Hanborough, Field 2.116 and the northern section of Field 2.115 is contained within the Order limits and is, according to the landscape, ecology and amenity plan [AS-022], available for community food growing.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) What consultation has been undertaken to ensure that this area is the most appropriate for community food growing? 2) If it is not needed or essential to provide space for community food growing, is there a compelling case for compulsory acquisition? 3) What is the actual tangible benefit to the applicant of retaining this land in the Order limits as opposed to re-drawing the boundary to exclude such land entirely? 4) Would the land not be better served being kept in its current agricultural use? 	<p>The land referred to is Field 2.116 and Field 2.117. Panels were removed from these two fields after the Phase One consultation in November 2022 as a result of feedback from residents of Church Hanborough. The proposed permissive path was relocated from the northern to southern boundary of the fields. At the Phase 2 consultation the two fields were described on the masterplan as meadow grassland/opportunity for enhancement. They were not consulted on as specifically for community food growing, though the idea of having areas for food growing was part of the consultation. A group of potential food growers from the OxFarmToFork scheme was shown round the food growing sites and this field was of interest to a grower of organic onions selling via the Farm to Fork scheme. The fields are part of the BNG design and are, therefore, needed within the order limits. This is shown on Works Plan No 8 [APP-006].</p> <p>These fields will be used for organic crop production using agroecological methods. These methods nurture soil health, promote biodiversity, reduce emissions and food waste. The Farm to Fork scheme encourages small growers, provides them with funding and reduces dependence on imports from climate-vulnerable regions, enhancing food security.</p> <p>The land is covered by the option agreement with Blenheim Estate, so will be drawn down should the DCO be granted. There should be no need for compulsory acquisition.</p> <p>Given the organic methods that a potential food grower will use, involving no chemicals and fewer tractor movements, putting the fields to this use is a better use of the land than intensive commercial agriculture as is the current use.</p>
--------	--	---	--

Errors and Contradictions in the Applicant's answers

- The land in question is, as ExA states field, 2.116 and the northern part of field 2.115. The Applicant says it is fields 2.116 and 2.117. There is no field 2.117 (ref : APP-131 Appendix 7.1 Historic Environment Desk Based Assessment Figure 2b on page 70)
- The Applicant is wrong to say that *"Panels were removed from these two fields after the Phase One consultation in November 2022 as a result of feedback from residents of Church Hanborough."* In the Phase One Consultation booklet Nov 2022 on pages 12-13 the area of field 2.116 is labelled "Protection of Conservation Area with opportunities for landscape enhancement" there were never any panels planned in field 2.116 (because it is in a conservation area).
- The Applicant has not justified their statement that "Given the organic methods that a potential food grower will use, involving no chemicals and fewer tractor movements, putting the fields to this use is a better use of the land than intensive commercial agriculture as is the current use." What guarantee is there that the commercial food growers will use these methods? What evidence does the Applicant have methods currently being employed in field 2.116 are "intensive". This is untrue as confirmed by the farmer currently working the land.
- In an earlier answer to Examiner's first written questions (ExA1.16.8), the Applicant included these statements: *"It was decided to place the [food growing] areas close to settlements to reduce vehicle movements and to make access easy for villagers"* but, if they are no longer considering true local "community agriculture" ie allotments for villagers, this argument no longer applies. The local access is not needed and the commercial scheme will increase vehicle movements.
- Within their answer to the same question (ExQ1.16.8), the Applicant says they *"will fill all 30 hectares with food producers and expect this to have a significant effect on the volume of food the OxFarmtoFork system is able to deliver. Given the number of lives this could touch the Applicant would give this initiative moderate positive weight."* We would argue that, since this initiative has nothing to do with BWSF, it cannot be judged to have "moderate positive weight" for the proposal being examined. Incidentally, even if they reverted to offering "all 30 hectares" for local community agriculture (allotments) this would amount to 1200 full size allotments (traditionally 10 poles each) - far outstripping the need for whole BWSF site.

Consultation

The Applicant admits that the only group consulted about food growing were those interested in using the land for commercial use - OxFarmToFork.

Hanborough Parish Council have confirmed that they have not been consulted on food growing areas (commercial or community), that the parish already has allotments and that, although there is a waiting list, more allotments are already planned elsewhere in the Parish.

The Applicant's change in their description of the use and purpose of the fields for retention

1. At the time of the Statutory Consultation (Dec 2023) there was no indication that the area around field 2.116 was to be used for food growing of any sort. It was only after the DCO application was submitted in Dec 2024 that this changed - too late for the Statutory Consultation.
 - 1.1. In the PEIR, the key on the master plan described the "area shown in bright green" as "Meadow Grassland/Opportunities for enhancement"
 - 1.2. In the ES 2024 the masterplan key changed to "available for community food growing area"
2. From the BWSF Community Consultation Leaflet Nov 2023.
 - 2.1. "We are exploring areas for community food growing across the three sites, and we are seeking feedback on where the community would like these areas to be sited". This text was in the corner of the map for the Northern site only.
 - 2.2. PVDP's consultation report mentions receiving "some feedback" but no numbers or locations of responders were given.
3. The plan to use the land for a commercial enterprise (Farm2Fork initiative) has never been mentioned publicly until raised in the Examiners' questions. So never consulted on.

Church Hanborough Village Survey

In the absence of any consultation with the local Community, the village of Church Hanborough conducted their own survey.

The village contains an adult population of around 124 in 72 properties. An e-mail survey was carried out to 106 adults in 60 properties (others don't use email or the property is empty). Around 50% of those consulted responded. 53 responses from 30 properties.

The Applicant's plans for the land under discussion and Examiner's question 2.5.5 were explained. The questions asked and answers given were:

Question	Yes	No	Unsure
1. One of PVDP's plans is to install commercial companies through the OxFarmtoFork initiative to grow food which they would "sell directly to Oxford Colleges". Would you agree to this plan?	0	52	1
2. A possible alternative might be to convert the land into allotments for the community. If this happened, would you use one?	2	50	1
3. Would the land be better served by retaining its current agricultural use?	52	0	1
4. Should this field be removed from the BWSF site altogether?	52	1	
5. During the consultation stage of the project did you hear or read anything from PVDP about the possibility of food growing in this area?	1	50	2
6 Any further comment?			

A selection of comments received

1. This field is within a conservation area. It provides a setting for Church Hanborough, the village located at the top of the hill and St Peter's and St Paul Church Spire, which is one of the most beautiful church Spires in Oxfordshire. The field should stay as it is.
2. This field is totally unsuitable for commercial or community food growing. Both need polytunnels, sheds for machinery and tools for produce packaging and distribution. They need to be fenced, and they need access. All these are incompatible with the landscape that needs to 'frame' the conservation area village. As field 2.116 is within the conservation area, any buildings or structures would need special planning permission.
3. The proposal to retain Field 2.116 within the Botley West Solar Farm boundary for "community food growing" is neither necessary nor supported by the community. The concept appears to be a late-stage addition that was not raised during earlier consultations, which raises serious concerns about transparency in the engagement process. It is difficult to see this as anything other than an attempt to offset strong local opposition with a tokenised "benefit" that is unwanted and unviable.

4. The proposal is misaligned with local need – Our community has no shortage of nearby allotments or opportunities to grow food. What we do need is to preserve existing high-quality farmland, open green space, and vital wildlife habitat.
5. Loss of productive and biodiverse land – The field is not only agricultural but also an attractive, open landscape that supports local wildlife, including birds, insects, and small mammals. Its natural character contributes to the setting of the village and the rural approach along Church Road
6. Undermines trust – The absence of any mention of food growing in earlier stages of consultation suggests this is a reactive measure, not a planned benefit, which undermines confidence in the developer's stated intentions.
7. Scale and permanence – Even as a so-called "temporary" project, a 40-year lease represents a generational change to the landscape and land use. Once altered and industrialised, reversion to its current state — both agriculturally and ecologically — is far from guaranteed.
8. Field 2.116 is not just farmland — it is part of the village's rural character, a visually open and attractive green space that supports wildlife and biodiversity. Rebranding it as "community food growing" is a superficial re-packaging of an unnecessary land grab. The proposal delivers no genuine local benefit, was never part of the initial consultation, and risks permanently damaging both the beauty and the ecology of this area. The only credible and supported outcome is for this field to be excluded entirely from the Botley West scheme.

ExA Question 2.5.5 addressed to WODC

"Do you feel that community food growing would be an appropriate use of this land having regard to heritage objectives"

Church Hanborough residents fully endorse and support the answer provided by WODC in their response within OHA's Responses to ExQ2 (REP4-074) regarding the detrimental impact on the conservation area in particular and their statement that: *"food growing spaces are often characterised by different sized plots with storage sheds, water butts, polytunnels and paraphernalia associated with cultivation and growing of food. Such structures in the context of the Church Hanborough Conservation Area would likely be regarded as uncharacteristic and would likely conflict with heritage objectives of the Conservation Area"*

Land retention in other areas

1. **Long Hanborough.** Not mentioned in Examiners' questions, not consulted on and seemingly overlooked by everyone, PVDP are also proposing "community food growing" in field 2.34, also within the Parish of Hanborough, at the junction of Lower Rd (East side) with A4095. This field is also unsuitable as it floods regularly (so not suitable for panels either) and access would be a problem - even dangerous - near this congested junction. The same questions regarding need arise as for the Church Hanborough site.
2. **Bladon** (subject of question 2.5.4). According to PVDP in their answer to ExQ1 1.16.8 "the village of Bladon expressed interest in establishing an area for allotments, given current high demand and limited availability in the village'.

In her response (REP3-095) as a Bladon resident, Frances Stevenson (also a member of SBW Steering Group) wrote: "It is unclear who the Applicant is referring to as 'the village of Bladon'. Existing groups that might represent the village on this subject are Bladon Parish Council, Bladon Gardens Society and Bladon Allotments Association. I have spoken to each of these groups and all confirm that they have not been approached or consulted by or on behalf of the Applicant for their opinion on the community food growing proposal. The Chair of Bladon Allotments Association, which is responsible for managing the existing allotments site in Bladon, also explained that the provision of allotments in Bladon is roughly in balance with demand.

Occasionally there may be a waiting list of one or two people but usually for less than a year. The facts do not support the Applicant's claim that there is high unmet demand for allotments in Bladon."

Conclusion

The conclusion has to be that the idea was dreamed up by PVDP as a means of showing “added benefits” to the proposal, not consulted on, **not** providing any community benefit locally and imposed on villages who universally reject the idea. In the cases of Church Hanborough and Bladon, also impacting the setting of heritage assets.

ALL these areas should be removed from the Order Limits.

Illustrations

1. Fields 2.116 and 2.115 - this year's harvest being gathered in - hopefully not its last!



2. Rapeseed crop from a previous year in fields 2.115 and 2.116. St Peter & Paul Church Spire in distance.



3. Field 2.34 in Long Hanborough flooded in December in 2024



4. Allotments between Church and Long Hanborough (outside the conservation area) showing allotment paraphernalia.

