

Submission to Planning Inspectorate regarding proposed Botley West Solar Farm

Ref: EN010147 from Dr Annie Haight

12 September 2025

I am writing as a longstanding resident of Cumnor village – forty-plus years a community member, tax-payer, property-owner and former parent governor of Cumnor Primary School – to urge the Examining Authority to recommend the rejection of the proposed Botley West Solar Farm (BWSF) Project. I live in the area that would be extremely adversely affected by the proposed South Site. My husband and I routinely use the Public Rights of Way (PRoW) 184/15/30, 184/15/20, 184/22/20 and 184/16/10 on average 4 to 5 times weekly. From our experience of these footpaths and the Important Views they provide, and from driving the narrow rural roads (such as the B4017) that serve the village and surrounding area, I can anticipate all too well the negative impact that the construction, operation and ongoing maintenance the South Site would entail for my community's safety and well-being in both the short and long-term. I wholeheartedly support the position of Cumnor Parish Council (CPC), the Vale of the White Horse District Council (VWHDC) and MP Layla Moran, that the South Site should be completely removed from the proposed project.

I am dismayed by the applicant's repeated failures to adequately address detailed questions brought by Cumnor Parish Council about the impact of its proposed changes 3 and 6 on public amenities such as rural views and noise levels (see **Cumnor Parish Council consultation (23rd July 2025-22nd August 2025) on proposed changes**, dated 22 August 2025).

In addition, I am particularly concerned that, as the CPC notes in various communications to the Planning Inspectorate, there has been no cumulative assessment of the impact of the proposed South Site taken together with the proposed Red House Farm solar power station immediately adjacent. If these were to go ahead, as CPC's submission dated 22 August states, 'the cumulative impact . . . would be to create a canyon for the PRoW surrounded by industrial scale equipment, fencing and CCTV, in what is currently open Green Belt farmland.'

So far my comments have focussed on the adverse impact of the proposed BWSF on my immediate neighbourhood, but I also want to comment more broadly on the unacceptability of the entire proposed project. I acknowledge the compelling arguments for renewable energy to replace fossil fuels and recognise the need for well-designed renewable energy projects. However, In the British climate, other, more reliable carbon-neutral solutions such as wind and tidal power have much more potential to provide sustainable, ecologically-friendly solutions to our energy needs. Solar power has a place in this, of course, but as the Campaign for Rural England has indicated, solar panels can be sited on existing rooftops without the need for the despoliation of precious rural eco-systems, biodiversity, heritage, food security and local human well-being.

The list of arguments against this proposal is long and goes far beyond nimbyism. (For the record, I don't want the proposed solar farm in my back yard, nor do I want it in anyone else's back yard: there are other ways of achieving the same ends that don't destroy the quality of local people's lives to this extent.) The planning application process and the EA's inquiry to date have uncovered a long list of arguments against this proposal, including issues related to:

- food security and the inadvisability of covering Best and Most Versatile agricultural land with solar panels (42% of the proposed project by the applicant's own admission)
- Heritage issues: historical, architectural, archaeological
- ecology and biodiversity, including destructive effects on wildlife and several Sites of Special Scientific Interest (Wytham Woods and others)
- the despoliation of the Green Belt, Public Rights of Way, and generally the character of rural landscapes and open vistas

- possible flood risk in low-lying areas covered by the proposed solar farm
- economic damage to the tourism and hospitality sectors
- the costs to human health, both physical and mental, of imposing a buzzing, reflective, industrial landscape – essentially an open-air factory - on tranquil rural environments
- questions about the future maintenance and replacement of solar panels over the life-time of the proposed project and beyond
- and, last but not least, the opacity and possibly dubious nature and sustainability of the underlying financing of the proposed project.

On the face of it, and indeed on ever closer inspection, the inappropriateness of siting such an enormous industrial development so close to a busy, historic and culturally significant city while comparable projects have been sited in deserted landscapes or in actual deserts, is staggering.

That the communities in the area affected by this proposal, and their elected representatives such as West Oxford District Council, the Vale of the White Horse, Cumnor (and other) Parish Councils, and Layla Moran MP, have joined forces with national bodies concerned to protect heritage and history, to marshal a concerted protest against this proposal, ought to communicate to the Examining Authority what a damaging and ill-advised project it represents. As an independent adjudicator, The Planning Inspectorate weighs the public benefits of massive infrastructure proposals against their public costs. For many reasons, the Botley West Solar Farm proposal is far too costly, now and in the future, for benefits which can be obtained in other ways. I urge you to protect the endangered rural landscapes, eco-systems, heritage and communities that would be ruined by the Botley West Solar Farm proposal and to advise the Secretary of State for the Environment to reject this ill-conceived development.

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