



## *Begbroke and Yarnton Green Belt Campaign (BYG)*

### **Deadline 5, BYG: Comment on the note provided by Withers LLP in D5**

The note provided by Withers LLP in REP5-065 on the Blenheim Palace 1984 Maintenance Fund is helpful. It finally provides some of the information requested from Blenheim Estates much earlier in the examination process. However, when taken together with all the information already provided, considerable doubt remains as to whether any funds resulting from the solar project will provide additional benefit to the World Heritage Site.

1. The latest financial statements of the Blenheim Palace Heritage Foundation for the year ended December 2024 include the following statement.

*Trustees and the management team have committed to spend £40m on vital restoration as part of the 10-year goals launched in 2017. This will be funded through profits of the visitor business and commercial operations, along with relevant grants and donations from related entities.*

2. In REP3-064 (page 10) the Applicant provided the additional information below in respect of the responsibilities of the Vanbrugh Unit Trust.

*The Vanbrugh Unit Trust (VUT) does not have an obligation to provide funds to the World Heritage Site. Outside of the 1984 Maintenance Fund obligations, any contributions to the Heritage Property are made on a discretionary basis to meet the demands of the World Heritage Site as outlined in the World Heritage Site Management Plan and Blenheim ten-year goals.*

3. In other words, a 10-year plan has been established including restoration; legally binding payments are made by the 1984 Maintenance fund towards the restoration; and part of the funding for the plan will come from discretionary contributions from VUT (the amount of current such contributions being unknown).

4. However, in the absence of any binding commitment or evidence to the contrary, it cannot be assumed that the planned discretionary payments made by VUT will not actually be reduced to the extent that the legally binding payments made by the 1984 Maintenance fund permit.

5. BYG therefore remains of the view that no firm evidence has been provided to the ExA demonstrating that the WHS will obtain any additional benefit from the solar project. There might simply be a change in the mix of the sources of funding which, in total, would remain the same.

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