

From: Steve Westaby [REDACTED]
Sent: 23 September 2025 15:31
To: NI Enquiries
Subject: Botley West.
Attachments: Letters Ver2.pdf

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My reference number is 20054287.

I have previously sent to you an article outlining the dangers of solar sites to the aviation industry as published in the Woodstock and Bladon News. This outlined serious issues in relation to a solar site in proximity to Amsterdam's Schiphol Airport that caused frequent air traffic disruption. The article below in follow up explains the consequences including a court order to remove the panels with huge financial penalties for delay. The court described the site (one tenth the size of the BW proposal) as a substantial danger to air traffic. The BW site sits between Oxford Airport and the important RAF base Brize Norton. Multiple dangers will result from solar panels, high wire fences etc between these airports as specified in my articles. The modifications suggested by BW simply do not improve the safety of the development or risks to the local community. I am a surgeon, not an aviation expert but write from the perspective of having personally witnessed two fatal crashes on Bladon Heath. I was first on site for one and certified the three occupants dead for the ambulance service. I hope this information is helpful and suggest that there should be National regulations to help with planning in proximity to airports. In short solar panels must be kept away from them by miles not metres.

Professor Stephen Westaby, Bladon, Oxford .

Sent from my iPhone

Letters to the Editor

Dear Editor,

Clear and present danger: A sequel to 'Lives before loot.'

I am grateful to the veteran flight instructor for sharing his personal experiences of the danger of solar panels in proximity to airports. At the same time a 'battle royal' has erupted in the Dutch aviation industry which has clear implications for West Oxfordshire. The controversy is even more relevant now that British Airways will soon relocate their pilot training to Oxford Airport.

In spring this year Amsterdam's Schiphol Airport was forced to close two of its main runways between 10am and noon through intense glare from nearby solar panels. As you will see from the illustration the 100 hectare site is some distance from the airport perimeter and diminutive in comparison with the proposed 1000 hectare Botley West development. Yet it has created havoc. As well as causing severe air traffic disruption it has impacted the local community through noise pollution when aircraft are diverted over residential areas. When the costs to Schiphol exceeded €330 million and further closures were predicted for the autumn, the solar developer was taken to court.

It transpired that the local municipality Haarlemmermeer had been warned in advance that glare posed risks for both pilots and control tower before planning permission was granted. So now they were also in the firing line. The court's judgement was that the developer, De Groene Energie Corridor had caused a situation that, to quote, "is a severe threat to flight safety". Accordingly the judge ordered the company to immediately remove 78,000 of the offending panels by September 1st. A penalty of €1 million will be inflicted if the work is not completed by that time with a further €500,000 for each day that the panels remain afterwards. The developer made clear that this would bankrupt them but the National airline KLM entered the debate stating that the disruption had cost them many millions so they would sue if all the panels were not dismantled immediately. The Dutch Airline Authority is now overseeing the deconstruction of the whole site and insisting that the original permit be revoked.

Whether our own Government Planning Inspectorate wants to take the same risks remains to be seen. West Oxfordshire District Council clearly don't. The Schiphol experience now sets an important legal precedent. Discarding the warnings has been financially catastrophic for both airport and developer. So are we on the same planet? What are the differences between Amsterdam and Oxford?

Firstly the Dutch site is a fraction of the size of the

Botley West proposal. We are anticipating 1000 hectares of metal, glass and high wire fences between Oxford Airport and Brize Norton, one of the UK's principle RAF bases. Second, the pilots flying commercial jets into Schiphol are experienced and assisted by co-pilots. In stark contrast, Oxford Airport is an exceptionally busy training school with novices flying small, and in some cases, aging, single engine aircraft on the same runway day and night. The flight instructor outlined the multiple dangers including blinding glare, bird displacement from Bladon Heath with the risk of engine strike, thermal currents from hot panels and potential disruption of radar systems at the RAF base. And it goes without saying, the vast expanse of panels would severely restrict emergency landing options and access for the emergency services.

In April 2024 well in advance of the Photovolt Development Partners submission for government approval, an article entitled 'Balancing solar energy generation and pilot safety at airports' was published in the scientific press. This contains the statement "solar reflections can impact pilots and cause safety concerns through glint and glare". The research employed a Solar Glare Hazard Analysis Tool (SGHAT) widely used in the air industry and formally endorsed by the US Federal Aviation Administration. Given that the Botley West site abuts closely upon Oxford Airport should these important issues not have been shared by Photovolt Development Partners with interested parties? Similarly the World Health Organisation has advised a 1.2 mile (2 km) gap between residential buildings and solar panels.

As a result of the airport's concerns a derisory 10 hectare wedge of panels was removed at the end of the runway. The purpose was to mitigate against emergency landings in the event of engine failure but this fails to address the multitude of other potential hazards. The 'Schiphol precedent' would see all panels removed from proximity to both Oxford Airport and Brize Norton which probably means the development in its entirety.

It's time to 'get real.' The UK contributes just 1% to global emissions so what does the widespread decimation of rural Britain achieve? Solar sites are proliferating rapidly in an unregulated manner driven by the uncertain future for farmers. For sub-50-megawatt developments (less than 100 hectares) national planning permission is not required. Landowners benefit from £1,200/acre/year whilst the operator sells electricity at prices indexed to gas generation irrespective of solar's negligible input costs. A 100 hectare, 50 megawatt site can generate £3 million annually with profit over 40 years reaching £120 million. Multiply that by 10 for Botley West's earnings and you will have little doubt about their motivation. In the meantime

consumers see their energy bills rise not fall. The National Grid warns of oversupply where producers have to be paid not to generate power so this is not about 'saving the planet'. Only this week, Nikkei Asia reported that major Chinese solar panel makers have posted huge losses in the first half of the year due to production overcapacity so the industry faces mounting pressure to cut output.

The time to address these issues is now, not when solar panels already cover West Oxfordshire. One solar related aviation event could have huge financial implications given the Schiphol experience. Should you consider these to be singular and radical views I can tell you that there are four other Professors of Medicine or Surgery in Bladon, all of whom share the same concerns.

Professor Stephen Westaby



The solar site at the heart of the controversy. Schiphol Airport is in the distance on the right.
