



## Hearing Transcript

<b>Project:</b>	Botley West Solar Farm
<b>Hearing:</b>	Open Floor Hearing 3 (OFH3) Part 2
<b>Date:</b>	10 October 2025

**Please note:** This document is intended to assist Interested Parties.

It is not a verbatim text of what was said at the above hearing. The content was produced using artificial intelligence voice to text software. It may, therefore, include errors and should be assumed to be unedited.

The video recording published on the Planning Inspectorate project page is the primary record of the hearing.

## Simon Says

Transcript Export

<https://www.simonsaysai.com>

### Project 10-10-25 12:31 pm

Created on: 2025-10-10 11:31:27

Project Length: 00:26:59

Account Holder: Ryan Ross

File Name: BWSF\_1010\_OFH3\_PT2.mp4

File Length: 00:26:59

### FULL TRANSCRIPT (with timecode)

00:00:04:00 - 00:00:16:26

Welcome back everyone. It's now 11:15 and this open floor hearing is resumed. And the next individual I had on my list to speak is Mr. Miles Tulley.

00:00:20:18 - 00:00:26:05

Okay. Um, the a representative from Oxfordshire Ramblers.

00:00:32:29 - 00:00:39:02

Have we have we exhausted them during the break? Um, councillor Dan Levy.

00:00:41:27 - 00:00:43:10

Ah, good. Someone said.

00:00:46:02 - 00:00:48:02

I think the Rambler may have gone for a walk.

00:00:53:11 - 00:01:38:24

Thank you for the opportunity to speak. Uh, I'm Dan Levy. I'm the county councillor and district councillor for Ntcham and Kensington. And the places I represent include. Castleton, the southern end of Lower Road, which includes the area of the new Salt Cross Garden Village, which will overlook the solar farm area in the evening, Lode Valley and the northern bank of the Thames. Siemens are the largest employer in the patch. I represent the approach of the applicant, despite your robust and persistent pressing, has been to argue that the importance of the project means they are justified in causing substantial harm to residents and businesses, and that they can sort out the details after the Secretary of State gives consent for the project.

00:01:39:02 - 00:02:10:14

Mr. Yates was quite explicit about this on the first point. Yes, the country needs solar energy. The national policy doesn't give carte blanche for that production to happen wherever an applicant chooses. Let's be clear, the application for this area is primarily because there is only one landowner

to square off. National policy also doesn't shield the applicant from having to minimize harms and make sure that the harms are outweighed by the benefits. I don't think that has yet been achieved.

00:02:10:22 - 00:02:43:11

As an aside, the idea that there might be compulsory acquisition of this landowner's land doesn't really pass the sniff test. If the benefits of the solar farm can't be secured by a contract between Blenheim and the applicant. What is going on? The applicant has failed to do the things required of it by you and by the community. We've seen a casual approach to minimising flood damage in Kensington because of the assumption, the assumption that solar panels can't make things worse.

00:02:43:14 - 00:03:18:09

The scientific evidence provided by the Casterton hydrology expert yesterday demonstrate that this is not a proven assumption. Mr. Wallace, you pointed out a straight line on a hydrology map with the assumption that water would stop at a straight line. It won't. We've heard that the applicant has failed to deliver soil samples from around the various sites as requested. They haven't proven the assertion that they aren't taking productive land out of food production. And we heard just now from the cpre that much of the land is in fact, a very good agricultural quality.

00:03:18:28 - 00:04:01:15

We have failed to be informed by the applicant of how they intend to route cables through Newham and over the River Thames, through the various sites of scientific and ecological interest. This is a key part of the plans and we don't yet know about it. We heard from Siemens for the closure of their access through Wharf Way would cost millions of pounds, and a failure for them to be able to deliver life saving equipment. We have said that they chose a few sites to demonstrate a reduction in visual impact. Three I believe I heard yesterday, though I might have been flagging by that point a little bit, but they ignored whole areas, including the parts of Castleton that will be within very close proximity to solar panels on rising land.

00:04:02:08 - 00:04:46:25

We've heard about the lack of impact on views from inside the walled area of the heritage site. We have not heard from the applicant about the huge impact from views from the wider area towards the heritage site. The views from church amber or from white and woods cannot be anything but damaged. We have heard from the applicant that and I paraphrase their representative, the community isn't to be trusted to come up with good projects for any community grants that were given. As a member of two councils and as cabinet member for finance at the County Council, and in regular discussions with community groups and parish councils, and seeing the crying need for investments in local infrastructure like bike paths and light local energy plans.

00:04:46:27 - 00:05:19:13

The applicant's approach is shameful. It's shameful both in its scale and in the structure they are proposed. I could go on, but I won't. Finally, we heard on Wednesday that the funding for this project is normal. In a previous life I used to work in project finance for an investment bank. What's been proposed is not normal. If you built an oil platform or a railway, you know who the client is, who is going to benefit and who is going to operate the project. And in the case of an oil facility, who will be around to decommission it at the end of its use.

00:05:19:25 - 00:05:44:06

We know none of that. In this case. Nobody is against solar energy by county council. Division already has four major sites built or with planning consent. As a county council, we are committed to decarbonizing the county. But I trust this examination to ensure that this application demonstrates substantially more care than has been taken to date, or else is recommended for rejection. Thank you.

00:05:46:10 - 00:05:48:04

Thank you very much, sir. Thank you.

00:05:52:21 - 00:05:55:08

Next, Oxfordshire County council.

00:06:00:20 - 00:06:30:24

Very much. I hope we don't disagree with the council. That'd be embarrassing. Um, so, yeah, I, uh, I'm George gainey. I'm today speaker on behalf of Oxfordshire County Council, not on behalf of the host authorities, although I think they do broadly share the views that I'm about to elaborate on. Uh, so we heard from stop Botley West on the, uh, reliance the applicant is putting on the national policy statements. But of course, the Secretary of State and yourselves have to have due regard to the local impact report produced by the host authorities.

00:06:30:26 - 00:07:02:24

And I think it's worth outlining at this point that, uh, several of the impacts that have been raised, uh, in the Local impact report are still very much outstanding and haven't been addressed to the satisfaction of the House authorities and Oxfordshire County Council. Um, I'm going to list through a few of those, the significant ones, but they is and this is not by any way chance an exhaustive list. You know, there are still many issues which are outstanding. I think the key issue is the impact on local landscape character and the impact on local residential amenity as a result of that.

00:07:03:03 - 00:07:37:26

And we discussed that I learned yesterday. So I'm not going to go into detail, um, the significant impacts on heritage assets, both built heritage and below ground heritage assets, there are still several issues outstanding. And again, we discussed those yesterday, um, the lack of clarity around ecological impacts and concerns around the adequacy of the proposed mitigation on ecological assets, um, insufficient mitigation to public rights of way, including both on site and off site improvements, um, sterilization of minerals resource.

00:07:37:28 - 00:08:08:08

And this is one which is the county council is quite important to us, but seems to have, uh, not fallen by the wayside but hasn't been a priority in recent submissions from the applicant. We very much consider that issue to be unresolved. Um, likewise, the disposal of waste or decommissioning we also consider to be unresolved. Um, there are also several amendments to the DCO which we proposed and we'll be listing those in detail in our submissions. But there are several amendments to the DCA we still require and rethink are unresolved.

00:08:08:27 - 00:08:42:06

And the final point again was discussed yesterday is the lack of clarity on the National Grid substation and the delivery of that substation. Um, and we appreciate the suggestions that the examining authority has suggested as amendments to the DCO, and we think they are cutting to the heart of some of our issues that we have raised, and will be commenting those in more detail, um, at the next deadline. But yeah, we just want to say we are grateful for the proposed changes you put forward. And likewise, we are actually grateful to the applicant for the changes they have made so far.

00:08:42:08 - 00:09:03:14

You know, the removal of panels around Bladen and Oxford Airport are welcomed. We just don't think they go far enough. And I think we've made it clear in our submissions. And in fact, we've provided a map which shows where for the impacts on landscape and visual. Anyway, uh, we've proposed where panels should be removed in order to reduce the impacts down to an acceptable level.

00:09:05:07 - 00:09:40:05

Um, but I think, yeah, it's worth pointing out, and I think it's how Councillor Levy just ended his speech. Also, your county council has recognized there is a climate emergency. We are, in principle, support of green energy. We just think that this scheme and the impacts that would result from it would be too significant to be supported. And finally, I'd just like to mention a position on community benefit. Oxford County Council has put considerable effort into working with the affected parishes and negotiating with the applicant to achieve the level of community benefit that has already been negotiated, and we've outlined what the that that level is in our deadline for submissions.

00:09:40:24 - 00:10:14:27

Um, nothing has been agreed yet. There's been no agreement signed with the applicant on community benefits. So just for the benefit of, uh, members of the public who are listening, there is still very much in negotiation. Um, and we are looking into the examples that have been recently sent us from Sustainable Woodstock of, uh, other schemes which have received community benefit for solar. So we are taking those representations seriously and we are taking them away when we are negotiating with the applicant. And I think that is it. I think that was all I wanted to say today, and obviously we will be following this with far more detailed submissions at deadline six.

00:10:16:02 - 00:10:16:23

Yes, indeed.

00:10:16:25 - 00:10:41:19

And excuse me. And on that I noticed that on on the previous submission should go to table of all those issues with the DCO that you had obviously some carried through into our proposed schedule of changes. Some didn't, don't think they were just going to sort of ignore them as such. But yes, if you could provide more information about those that haven't made it in, if you like, then that would be really useful. Yeah. Thank you for coming.

00:10:41:21 - 00:10:42:21

We will do. We'll follow that up.

00:10:42:24 - 00:10:43:12

Thank you.

00:10:47:18 - 00:10:49:25

Next I have Mr. Anthony Brown.

00:11:16:00 - 00:11:17:06

Good morning everyone.

00:11:18:23 - 00:11:19:11

My name is.

00:11:19:13 - 00:11:20:06

Tony Brown.

00:11:20:08 - 00:11:34:23

And I own the 50 hectare block of land called Sandford Brake Farm, surrounding the Thames Water sewage treatment plant at Worton, near Cossington. I have farmed the land this land since April 2011.

00:11:36:09 - 00:11:59:13

As a farmer, I consider global warming to be the greatest threat to my business because it disrupts every part of crop production. Rising temperatures, unpredictable rainfall and extreme weather events are damaging yields, eroding soil, impending, impeding crop establishment, and making planning harder each year.

00:12:01:18 - 00:12:23:26

To build resilience. I am hoping to use a portion of my poorer farmland for solar production. This will give my business a steady, reliable source of income, offsetting variable crop yields and reduced income as government support is removed from food production. This will allow me to support my business, family and workforce.

00:12:26:06 - 00:12:44:12

Solar will cut my farm's carbon footprint, helping to tackle the very problem of contributing to global warming by generating clean energy. I can then grow food and more productive land, protecting my business and contributing to the UK's net zero goals.

00:12:46:01 - 00:13:18:07

I have listened to the debate that suggests farmland should not be lost to solar panels. I would agree that this would apply to productive ground, but that this land is not. It is heavy clay requiring considerable mechanical effort to produce arable crops. Oh, year olds at Samford Break are poor. Wheat is our primary crop. The average UK wheat yield across 50 hectares would be 380 tonnes a year 20, 25, 24 and 22.

00:13:18:09 - 00:13:29:17

We produced 57 tonnes, 163 and 226 tonnes respectively. The words spoken by CBRE

00:13:31:02 - 00:14:07:18

um, I find staggering. Um, I don't think I'm a particularly bad farmer. Uh, yet the yields they suggest that are available for this ground I find quite staggering. I would therefore advocate the proposed system of capturing green energy whilst establishing grazing below. The panels must be one of the most resilient forms of energy capture and farming combined. I believe this will improve wildlife habitats whilst the ground and the panels will continue to sequester carbon over the duration of the scheme.

00:14:09:01 - 00:14:31:06

I appreciate, I hope to benefit financially from this project, but I also believe that my children and their children are at serious risk from climate change. This project will, on its own, not resolve global warming, but it is perhaps one small building block in the construction of a greener and more resilient world.

00:14:31:16 - 00:14:35:18

Thank you. Thank you very much. Thank you.

00:14:41:09 - 00:14:45:12

And then the last name I have on my list is Mr. Tim Sumner.

00:15:02:03 - 00:15:46:03

Thank you so much for this opportunity. Um, I appreciate it. Um, and really, very briefly, I would just like to address the balance of harm over this project. Um, I have submitted concerns over the project, particularly heritage. Um, and I just really want to remind everyone of the wonderful commitments made by Blenheim in their estate management plan to preserve the surrounding countryside and setting. And I'm just confused. And I want to ask, how can they change and now not honour the plan presented to Unesco and therefore the UK government? A signatory and executive member of Unesco, who are therefore surely bound to uphold Blenheim original commitments.

00:15:46:07 - 00:16:03:12

And that's really all I wanted to say. I have a I have a brief overview of those commitments if necessary, but I'll be led by you whether it's necessary to outline them. I think we have those in the examination, but. Yeah. Thank you very much. Thank you so much.

00:16:05:11 - 00:16:15:06

Okay, so that was the list that I know we passed by earlier, Mr. Dryden, wasn't it? Did you want to come back in on on that?

00:16:19:06 - 00:16:53:10

Thank you very much, Mr. Wallace. Um, Karen Williams, I'm going to have to put the additional points for Mr. Dryden in writing, but may I ask, actually, to take this last opportunity to bring a voice into the room who has not been heard is neurodivergent, and he was one of the first people to ever speak to the. At the time, it was Mr. Marco and Lloyd, the first public consultation, uh, because this little boy was very interested to know what was the plan for his environment.

00:16:53:12 - 00:17:25:04

And having spoken to Mr. Owen, Lloyd didn't feel that he understood it well enough. So we took him along with those who were starting up the Stockpot West campaign, to a small solar installation so that he could understand what this meant for his future, because it is everyone else's children's future that we're talking about here. And I'd like this to be seen in the context. It's less prescriptive. It's not lawyer speak. It's not expert speak. I'd like it to be seen in the context of the balance of harm.

00:17:25:06 - 00:17:55:06

So we took him to a solar farm. He said, I don't like it, I prefer trees. He said, I like going for walks. And I have previously asked a question about whether some of the, um, pathways and hedges have been assessed from a neurodivergent perspective. It's important. He said, I don't like how shiny they are. I don't like how hard they are. Many in this room will think, this is not technical. This is emotive nonsense. But this is actually, um, his future. And people like him's future.

00:17:55:08 - 00:18:29:10

And I would urge, um, the examining authority to to remember the harms done by those voices that can't be in this room because they are children, but it will be them who have to live with it. Either benefit from it if it turns out to be the right answer for climate change for their environment, or who pay the price by having to look at the decommissioning disaster if it ends up that way, not 40 years. Not that just that is the next 400 years even that's what next zero is about.

00:18:29:12 - 00:18:57:17

It's about adding a zero. It's not just 40 years for a great plan for a stopgap. 1% here, 1% there. He wants to keep an environment where he can go for walks comfortably without wires and hedges. He is horrified at the prospect. He does understand what 92dB sounds like. We've given him a comparison. He is horrified that he will have to be surrounded by that for 5 or 6 days a week. As a neurodivergent person, he won't be able to cope with that.

00:19:00:04 - 00:19:32:08

Yes, indeed. Thank you for that. And indeed thank you to all of you who have taken the time, not just today, but over the course of the last sort of five months or so of this examination. I know you've been living with this before, that as such. But, um, you know, on behalf of the panel here and I'm sure on behalf of the applicant and on behalf of the county council as well, you know, you've conducted yourselves well, you've made some really good points here. It's not been forgive the phrase. It's not been an angry mob mentality.

00:19:32:12 - 00:19:57:17

You have, you know, really, um, give us some challenging things to think about. And I appreciate the manner in which you've conducted yourselves. It's been really, really a breath of fresh air. So thank you very much for that. Um, I read for a list of people earlier, there are a number of names who were, um, not here in the building. Has anyone come in who expected to speak but has not yet had the chance?

00:20:00:11 - 00:20:24:26

Okay. Thank you very much. And to those people who. Who couldn't be with us again. Deadline six the 20th of October. By all means, put in your representations to us. Um, as per introduction. So I'd now like to ask the applicant, um, to come forward and to declare if there's any points you wish to



make now, anything you want to respond to or whether you'll keep your comments for written submissions.

00:20:31:17 - 00:20:33:28

Good afternoon. So do intend.

00:20:34:00 - 00:20:34:15

Just.

00:20:34:17 - 00:20:35:14

To give a brief response.

00:20:35:16 - 00:20:36:10

Here, but then primarily it.

00:20:36:12 - 00:20:37:10

Will be in writing.

00:20:38:27 - 00:20:42:00

So afternoon panel and everyone on morning. I think we're not.

00:20:42:02 - 00:20:42:17

Quite there.

00:20:42:19 - 00:20:45:18

Yet. Um, many will be aware of who I am from this week, but.

00:20:45:20 - 00:20:46:12

For the purposes of this.

00:20:46:14 - 00:20:52:24

Recording. My name is Toby Yates. I'm an associate at Pinsent Masons. I'm speaking on behalf of the applicant as its.

00:20:52:26 - 00:20:53:11

Legal.

00:20:53:13 - 00:20:58:28

Advisor. Before I mention some more specific points, I just want to echo absolutely what the examiner.

00:20:59:00 - 00:21:00:11

Authority has said there.

00:21:00:15 - 00:21:13:04

We thank everyone for engaging, but more importantly, the manner in which everyone has engaged in using your words, the lack of mob mentality. It's been constructive engagement and we absolutely welcome that from the applicant side. So thank you. We also.

00:21:13:06 - 00:21:13:21

Appreciate.

00:21:13:23 - 00:21:16:28

Everyone's attendance here today because as an open floor hearing.

00:21:17:03 - 00:21:17:18

It's a.

00:21:17:20 - 00:21:26:00

Helpful opportunity for interested parties more so than the applicant to make their representations known orally. And we've heard a wide range.

00:21:26:04 - 00:21:26:19

Of.

00:21:26:21 - 00:21:27:08

Topics.

00:21:27:10 - 00:21:27:25

Here.

00:21:27:27 - 00:21:54:06

Today and some specific technical points as well. And the applicant recognises the importance of all of these. And these are rightfully being picked up by the examiner authority at the hearings this week. And in written submissions, the applicant is already considering these, including, of course, the residential amenity points which we've heard from various interested parties, but obviously not limited to that. And our submissions will be made available at deadline six on the 20th of November.

00:21:56:16 - 00:22:11:23

It's also important to note, I think, obviously as applicant, that we welcome the support that has been mentioned for the scheme today. I think it's often forgotten through this process, but we welcome the support for the scheme and the recognition of the substantial, substantial benefits that it will offer.

00:22:13:12 - 00:22:14:00

But as I say.

00:22:14:02 - 00:22:24:00

Today is very much about the applicant listening to what interested parties have to say and not necessarily putting forward our case as the main focus. And whilst the process is fairly.

00:22:24:02 - 00:22:24:20

Rigid.

00:22:24:22 - 00:23:03:23

And limits the opportunity for the applicant to implement changes once the application is being submitted, we want to reassure that the ongoing engagement has helped shape the design, both as part of the consultation process and pre submission. So it's gone into the embedded design as well as the mitigation that's built into the proposals at the time of submission. But then most recently, as we've discussed, it's helped shape change request to for example change. One of that change request is you'll be well aware has been made to agree a no harm scenario following engagement with Historic England as the relevant statutory body for the historic environment.

00:23:03:29 - 00:23:34:18

And as Mr. Mohammed helped point out yesterday as well, it's eradicated almost half of the residential viewpoint concerns following. Change one and then change two, for example, is for the removal of panels. And that was to address the core safety concerns that Oxford Airport had previously raised. So it's in response to that. Another example is change ten, where the applicant had proactively offered the educational facility as part of its submission. But then following feedback from local authorities where we understood that that wasn't wanted.

00:23:34:21 - 00:23:37:15

We've then responded to that by removing it as part of the proposal

00:23:39:00 - 00:24:11:28

and again, conscious it's brought up. So whilst not a planning matter, I want to respond that the Community Benefit Fund, as you've heard, is on interested parties agenda and is a commitment that the applicant continues to engage with and and consider. And as was flagged, this has been substantially increased since the start of the process in recognition of of the feedback received. And I think there's a sort of live update interim update before deadline six. There's a couple of points that might be useful for the panel and and others in this room. We use the opportunity on Wednesday afternoon with the time available to discuss with Siemens, for example.

00:24:12:00 - 00:24:42:03

That issue was mentioned previously, and we've agreed a way forward there, the detail of which will follow at deadline six and also in response to comments made by Oxfordshire County Council here today on the draft development consent order. We've met with the lawyer advising the council and will be updating the detail at deadline six to implement various changes that go some way. It's not not meeting all of their requests, but that does update the DCO to align with some of the requests that OCC have made.

00:24:44:06 - 00:25:17:04

Also, just wanted to use this opportunity to make the general point clear that the changes I've just referred to in all of the other changes that have been made is no indication that the application at the time of submission did not appropriately follow the tests in national policy. It's simply a demonstration of the continued application of that policy. As I say, there was various matters that were

built into the proposals at the time of submission. And the changes that have then followed are a demonstration of how the relevant tests have continued to be applied.

00:25:17:06 - 00:25:33:24

Post submission. But having said that, we of course recognise the requests that the examiner authority and interested parties have made this week, and in writing to give more clear evidence of how we reach that position. Obviously we'll look to supplement that ahead of deadline six so everyone's aware,

00:25:35:16 - 00:26:00:14

but I'm not know. I just want to finish by making it clear that the applicant is still here. I know there's only a month left in examination, but we're still here. We're still engaging and listening to the continued submissions that are being well made by interested parties and being tested by the examiners authority. And I just want to thank everyone again for continuing to contribute to the project as we seek to deliver this critical national priority piece of infrastructure.

00:26:02:18 - 00:26:05:25

Thank you very much. Thank you very much, Mr. Yates. Thank you for that.

00:26:09:25 - 00:26:43:03

So that just leads me to bring this, um, open for hearing towards a close. Just a reminder that anyone who has made an oral submission to put a summary of that in writing at the next deadline, and yes, we've got deadline six on the 20th of October. It's just my memory now, deadline seven on the 10th of November and then the final deadline on the 13th of November. So if there is any documents or anything you wish us to take into account on all sides, um, please do get them in for the forthcoming deadlines.

00:26:43:05 - 00:26:49:20

But thank you again everyone. The time is now. 1142 and this open floor hearing is closed. Thank you.