

CPRE Oxfordshire Oral Statement – Closing Hearing – 10/10/25

Registration identification number is: 20055135

My name is Lisa Warne, and I'm the Director of CPRE Oxfordshire.

Today, I wish to raise three key areas of concern regarding this application, Best and Most Versatile (BMV) Land, the Green Belt, and the missed opportunity for proper public engagement — each of which is undermined by serious gaps in the evidence, despite repeated requests for further information. These omissions make it impossible to reach a fully informed and robust decision at this stage.

1. Best and Most Versatile Agricultural Land – and Food Security

Food security is a growing national issue, particularly in light of global instability such as the war in Ukraine. CPRE Oxfordshire strongly believes that the use of productive farmland – especially BMV land grades 1&2, should not be used for solar panels and instead farmed to feed the nation.

The applicant has not demonstrated compliance with the requirements of *National Policy Statement for renewable energy infrastructure* (NPS) EN-3, which clearly states that developers must justify:

“Why the use of BMV land is necessary, and whether it is feasible to locate the scheme on lower-grade agricultural land.”

Despite repeated requests, the applicant has still not provided adequate soil sampling or evidence to support their claim that the land is degraded or of low productivity. In fact, the proportion of BMV land has increased– from 38 to 42%. This is deeply concerning and contradicts the applicant's claim that lower-grade land has been prioritised.

I refer you to my letter dated 11th September of which we asked for detailed data on soil quality. These requests have not been met. We also referenced DEFRA standards stating that land with a phosphorus level of 2 cannot be classified as degraded.

The partial data presented does not provide a complete or accurate picture. This is a crucial evidence gap and makes it impossible for the examining authority to make a fully informed decision. At worst, it appears deliberately misleading.

Worse still, this selective presentation of data downplays the land's true value. We believe that any degradation of the land is due NOT to underlying geology, but to poor land management practices. Neighbouring tenant farmers have demonstrated strong yields well above the national average. Describing this land as "low productivity" is simply inaccurate and misleading.

With appropriate regenerative farming methods, this land could be restored to full productivity and continue playing a role in feeding the nation.

It's also worth noting that growing political concern around the loss of BMV land is emerging. In my letter dated 11th September, I attached a letter from 30 Ministers and Lords, sent to the Prime Minister in July 2025, calling for a ban on large-scale solar installations on BMV land.

2. Green Belt – A Major Encroachment

Another fundamental concern is that 75% of the proposed site lies within the Oxford Green Belt. This represents the largest single loss of Oxford's Green Belt.

To date, no existing solar development has been permitted on this scale within the Green Belt. This proposal sets a dangerous precedent, undermining a core principle of planning policy that has protected Oxford's setting and surrounding countryside for generations.

The applicant has yet to justify why this site is suitable for a solar development of this scale, especially given the significant loss of Green Belt and BMV land — both strong reasons to conclude that Very Special Circumstances do not apply.

3. Public Engagement – A Missed Opportunity

Finally, I want to address the serious lack of meaningful public consultation.

This project had the potential to be a positive example of how the UK can transition to renewable energy in a way that respects local communities and landscapes. Unfortunately, that opportunity has been squandered.

From the outset, local residents have felt excluded and ignored. The large number of change requests are clear evidence of this. As one senior member of the Blenheim Estate once told me:

“It’s amazing how quickly a community can turn on you.”

Sadly this is so true.

Instead of considering land more sensitively — prioritising areas with lower landscape and community impact — the applicant has pursued a “land grab” approach, backed by unscrupulous foreign investment, rather than by strategic, community led planning.

Yes, some small improvements have been made – such as the removal of panels at Bladon and Begbroke – but these are not enough. To make this scheme even remotely palatable, a far more significant reduction in scale is needed, particularly in respect to BMV and Green Belt Land.

In Closing

I would like to end this statement as I have all my previous ones on this proposal:

Can it really be viable to build a solar farm of this size on productive agricultural land, within the Green Belt, between a world-renowned historic city and a World Heritage Site, directly affecting the amenity of thousands of residents?

We at CPRE Oxfordshire – and many across this community – believe that, in any reasonable judgement, this is perhaps one of the last places in the world you would choose to build a solar farm of this scale.

Thank you.



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Campaigning to protect our rural county