

My primary objections to the Botley West Solar Farm focus on its massive scale and the impacts on the local landscape, biodiversity, and agricultural land. These harms outweigh the benefits of renewable energy, especially since the proposal is located in sensitive areas.

Before listing the specific concerns I would like to point out that at the Open Hearing PVDP's whole attitude made a mockery of the Planning system by failing to respond in a timely manner to or, in some cases completely ignoring, the Examiners' questions or requirements. Hence "This left a significant gap in the knowledge and data available on which the ExA was required to make a robust recommendation."

Put simply – the enquiry process was not carried out to the letter of the law and its conclusions are therefore invalid.

However to make it absolutely clear the extent of my objections I have listed them below.

Landscape and visual impact

- **Scale of development:** Spanning 3,450 acres across 15 parishes, the sheer size of the project is seen as "entirely inappropriate" for the region by groups like the Stop Botley West campaign.
- **Limited mitigation:** While the developer, Photovolt Development Partners (PVDP), proposes screening measures, opponents contend these will be insufficient to hide the development, especially given the area's hilly and undulating terrain.
- **Damage to character:** [West Oxfordshire District Council](#) has said the project would cause "very significant" landscape effects that would fundamentally change the visual character of the countryside.

Heritage concerns

- **Blenheim Palace:** A significant portion of the proposed site is within 100 meters of the boundary of Blenheim Palace, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Campaigners warn this proximity could damage the site's setting and historic significance.
- **Other heritage assets:** Local councils and Historic England have raised concerns about the potential impact on other nearby historical assets, conservation areas, and archaeological sites.

Agricultural land and food security

- **Loss of high-quality farmland:** Approximately 45% of the proposed site is on "Best and Most Versatile" agricultural land. The Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) and other critics argue that sacrificing this productive farmland risks UK food security.
- **Precedent for future use:** Opponents worry that land leased for 40 years for the solar farm may never be returned to productive agriculture.

Green Belt development

- **Threat to openness:** Much of the site is within the Oxford Green Belt. Campaigners claim that exploiting the Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP) process to build on the Green Belt constitutes an "abuse" and sets an unacceptable precedent.
- **"Very special circumstances":** Critics argue that the developer has not satisfactorily proven the "very special circumstances" needed to justify this "inappropriate development" in the Green Belt.

Environmental and ecological concerns

- **Impact on wildlife:** Natural England and the Berkshire, Buckinghamshire & Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust have raised concerns about the potential risks to local wildlife and habitats. Specific fears include insufficient protection for endangered bat populations and losses to ground-nesting birds like skylarks.
- **Flood risk:** The site is located in an area with complex river catchments, and campaigners believe the large-scale development would increase the risk of flooding.
- **Ecology claims questioned:** Critics challenge the developer's biodiversity net gain claims, suggesting that re-engineered habitats are not equivalent to the naturally existing ones.

Social and economic impacts

- **Limited community benefits:** Some councils have noted that the community benefits initially offered by the developer were inadequate for the project's scale, though negotiations are ongoing.
- **Potential property value decline:** Studies have suggested that large solar installations may have an adverse effect on local house values.
- **Traffic and infrastructure:** Concerns have been raised about the impact of noise, construction traffic, and the installation of connecting cables on local residents and the landscape.

I trust you will take this extensive information into consideration when arriving at your final informed decision.

Yours etc.

Dr Mark Selinger, DM FRCOG