

### 1. Scale and Location: Disproportionate Impact on the Countryside

Botley West Solar Farm will be one of the largest solar installations in Europe, spanning thousands of acres across West Oxfordshire and parts of the Blenheim Estate. While renewable energy is vital, the industrial scale of this project is deeply out of proportion with the rural landscape it would transform.

It would industrialise open countryside, disrupting scenic views, footpaths, and heritage settings that define the character of the area.

The site borders or overlaps with several Conservation Areas, ancient woodlands, and listed buildings, undermining the very principles of environmental stewardship.

The loss of agricultural land—much of it productive farmland—reduces the region's food security at a time when domestic food production is already under strain.

### 2. Poor Land Use Strategy: Solar Belongs on Roofs and Brownfield Sites

The UK government and the Climate Change Committee both advocate prioritising solar on rooftops, car parks, and brownfield land, not greenfield farmland.

There is enormous untapped solar potential on commercial roofs, logistics hubs, and urban spaces, which could deliver comparable output without sacrificing rural land.

Sprawling solar farms like Botley West lock up countryside for 40+ years, making future regenerative or mixed-use land management impossible.

### 3. Environmental and Biodiversity Risks

Despite claims of “biodiversity net gain,” the ecological disruption of fencing, panel shading, and construction traffic can be severe and long-lasting.

The site lies close to key wildlife corridors and water catchment areas (including the Thames Basin), risking habitat fragmentation and hydrological changes.

Solar panel runoff, soil compaction, and long-term exclusion of traditional farming can degrade local ecosystems.

Once lost, the complex biodiversity of active farmland and hedgerows takes decades to recover — far beyond the temporary lifespan of a solar lease.

### 4. Grid Connection and Infrastructure Concerns

Much of the disruption will come not from the panels themselves but from the massive infrastructure required: new substations, cabling routes, and access roads.

This infrastructure cuts through multiple communities, increasing noise, traffic, and landscape intrusion.

The project's grid connection efficiency has not been transparently assessed — with significant losses expected over long transmission distances.

### 5. Community and Democratic Deficit

Botley West is being advanced under Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP) rules, which largely bypass local planning control.

Local councils, residents, and parish groups have limited ability to influence outcomes, even though they bear the environmental and social cost.

Community benefit funds, while welcome, are not compensation for a permanent change in land character and local quality of life.

Genuine public consent requires local-scale renewables, not imposed mega-projects.

### 6. Better Alternatives Exist

The argument is not against solar — it's against poor planning and bad siting.

The UK can meet its solar targets through distributed generation (smaller local solar schemes, rooftop PV, and brownfield installations) that avoid harming the countryside.

Investment in energy efficiency, smart grids, and storage can deliver cleaner, more resilient systems without sacrificing heritage landscapes.

The Botley West Solar Farm represents an outdated model of “big solar” that prioritises developer scale over sustainability, local benefit, and landscape preservation. Oxfordshire deserves a smarter, fairer renewable future — one that supports net zero without destroying the very environment we are trying to protect.