Response to statements on the quality of the farmland earmarked for Botley West Solar Farm

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RR: [redacted]

At the Open Hearing 1 on Tuesday 13 May 2025, Dominic Hare (DH), chief executive officer of Blenheim (sic) repeatedly stated that The Estate achieves '**poor yields from poor soils**' and reiterated this in response to a question from The Chair "DH… **the soil (*for Botley West Solar Farm (BWSF)*) is massively degraded in nutritional and organic matter**".

The results from the soil survey data, carried out on behalf of Blenheim, comprehensively refutes these claims (see Appendix). The Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) Scheme also does not support this contention where even the Applicant's response the ExA 2nd written question (Q2.11.4) under the justification for land use by ALC produced data on the area for BWSF as being 42.5 per cent ALC Grade 3a or better.

Other issues

Land lying fallow

In their answer to Ex2.11.6 the Applicant claimed that leaving land to lie fallow is part of a normal crop rotation. It is not and has not been the case since Turnip Townnsend's replaced this practice when he proposed the Norfolk four course rotation in the 18th Century. Even if the land under BWSF was 'fallow' for the lifetime of the solar farm then the likelihood is that the soil chemistry analysis would not be very different from what it is now. The levels of organic matter in the soil as shown in the soil survey results are already higher than that might be expected under arable farming conditions.

Low light conditions

There will be low light conditions underneath solar panels so that the vegetation that is able to grow there will be weed species such as brambles, thistles, nettles, elder and blackthorn.

Grazing sheep

To maintain the area between the panels will require a large number of sheep which will require staff, buildings, barns, and machinery and the ability to market several thousand lambs per annum. The grazing sheep will also destroy the nests of ground nesting birds, like skylarks.

UK Food security

Assuming a yield of wheat of 6t per hectare on the 1400ha of land committed to BWSF then over a period of 42 years, the proposed life of the project, this will amount to a loss of 350,000 tonnes of grain. The country will need to source this from elsewhere, either by more intensive farming on the arable land that remains or from overseas. Because of global warming it is possible to that other countries may not have the grain to export. Clearly this a National issue and not an issue for this project but clearly Government should address this in the context of the proliferation of solar farms throughout the UK in 2025.

Appendix

Soil Sampling Summary – Blenheim Estate

The data are from pdf files submitted in response to a request by the Examiners in Item 17, Issue Specific Hearing, 9th October 2025 and submitted by email and distributed as follows :-

From: [redacted]
Sent: *17 October 2025 12:20*
To: [redacted]
Cc: *info@botleywest.co.uk*; [redacted]
Subject: *Item 17, Issue Specific Hearing - 9th October 2025*

The table below shows representative fields in each of the 13 sampling groups of fields surveyed at the time of this soil sampling survey in May 2024.
Client: *RA Campbell and Partners*
Location: *Swell Buildings Farm, Lower Swell, Stow-on-the-Wold, GL54 1HG*
Laboratory: *NRM, Cawood Group*

Notes on the files provided

1. In the May 2024 reports provided to Blenheim Estate by the consultants tasked with carrying out the soil surveys show no cropping details or fertilizer recommendations.
2. The field numbers shown on the accompanying map of the sites surveyed bear no relation to any field numbering shown on the Applicant's maps and indeed may not be even within the redline boundary of the proposed Botley West Solar Farm.
3. The data shown in the Table are a random sample of field results from each of the files submitted.

Card	*Field*	*P*	*K*	*Mg*	*SOM*	*Comments*
67810/24	7656	2	3	2	High	Strong soil fertility
67812/24	4065	2	2-	2	High	Soil fertility moderate to high
67813/24	5434	2	2+	2	High	Overall soil fertility is good
67822/24	9888	1	2-	3	High	Soil fertility is good
67824/24	5815	4	3	2	High	Good soil fertility
67825/24	7595	4	4	2	V.High	SOM very high for arable land
67826/24	2397	3	3	2	High	Nutrient rich, excellent SOM
67827/24	6558	2	2-	2	High	P may be limiting in some samples
67828/24	2002	2	2-	1	High	Some fields in this group may need targeted management
67829/24	3459	2	2+	2	High	Strong soil fertility
67832/24	9756	1	2-	1	High	Some fields in this group require P supplementation
67833/24	9064	2	2-	1	High	Satisfactory soil fertility
67834/24	7403	3	2-	2	High	Well managed, good nutrient availability

Key:
P = Phosphorus
K = Potassium
Mg = Magnesium
SOM = Soil Organic Matter
All soil chemistry analysis shows an average pH of 7 (alkaline)

A score of 2 indicates a satisfactory level of P, K and Mg
Soil sampling map provided by ‘Blenheim Palace’ showing field numbers