

## **Final Summary Comments from 'Forever Fields'**

### **Background**

The project involved over 100 local artists, 1200 visitors to an Art Exhibition in November 2023, and the publishing of a 150 page book in February 2025, now available digitally on the PINS website (REP1-101).

A unique project, Forever Fields has two objectives:

1. To invite local people to express their feelings about the prospect of losing so much green space; through art, photography, film, pottery and other mediums.
2. To create an art archive in the form of a book to be used as a reference point, and support the return of the fields to open space in 42 years time, if the application is given approval.

### **With this in mind we focused on three areas during the examination process itself:**

1. Mental Health and Well Being
2. Heritage and Landscape
3. Decommissioning and Re-instatement.

It is very disappointing that the applicant and the major landowner have both failed to address these three areas in a satisfactory manner. The potential impact on local people, landscape and heritage, and the long term future of this location is extremely negative and profound.

There have been many opportunities during the Examination for the applicant to listen to local people, local authorities, expert counsel and the ExA themselves and make in some cases modest adjustments to the proposal, that could materially reduce the negative impacts. They have repeatedly chosen not to do so.

Examples are:

- a refusal to materially reduce the scale of the proposal.
- a refusal to increase buffer zone distances; from housing, from PRow's, from heritage assets.
- a refusal to reduce the number of solar panels in particularly sensitive areas.
- a refusal to increase the width of PRow's from 5m to 15m.

The applicant has taken the position that they are correct in their initial assessment of impact in respect of mental health, well being, heritage and landscape, and that the assessment of all other parties is subjective and of less value. To validate their position they have relied heavily on technical and legal excuses rather than trying to understand other opinion or offering alternative solutions.

In terms of Forever Fields, if the applicant had genuinely engaged with visitors to the Forever Fields Exhibition as was suggested (REP 5-086 and REP3-093/14.3) they would know that the impact of this proposal on local people is devastating. If the applicant had read the Forever Fields book with an open mind, they would also appreciate the material impact on heritage and landscape. The reality is that PVDP and Blenheim have not taken Forever Fields seriously despite the unique nature of the project and the fact that the community supported the objectives of Forever Fields so strongly.

However, their refusal to listen and directly respond has been most evident in terms of our third area of focus; Decommissioning and Re-instatement of the Fields in 42 years time. This has perhaps been the most instructive, because it has exposed their single motivation for the application.

The applicant and the landowner appear disinterested in building and running solar farms or owning land. Neither are they seeking approval in order to satisfy their interest in civic duty. In refusing to write a comprehensive decommissioning and re-instatement plan or to commit to a

process that ensures such a plan will be funded appropriately, they demonstrate that their single motivation is to bank windfall profits. They are not interested in the future of the scheme once it is approved. They have decided that agreeing to a plan that will fund decommissioning and re-instatement will dilute their return on investment when they sell the planning approval. They have assessed that financial transparency on this and other issues would not be helpful in achieving maximum financial yield. This is why they have not responded to Forever Fields recent submission (REP 5- 086) and this is why they have hidden behind invalid 'precedent' arguments.

The most recent argument by PVDP (PC002 Doc APP/17.7 Applicants Response to the ExA's schedule of changes and DCO) is weak and cynical. In this document they refer to a decision not to insist on financial instruments and planning to cover decommissioning and reinstatement costs at a recently approved NSIP approved project. However, At 400 acres, Oakland Solar Park is a fraction of the size of Botley West and a tiny fraction of its complexity. It can not be used as a precedent to shield PVDP from their responsibility to accept as a condition of planning approval, a financial plan which ensures decommissioning and reinstatement of the fields as proposed by the ExA (Ref. PC002 dDCO)

Each NSIP is different and whilst some common lessons will be learnt as more of these large scale solar parks are built, Botley West is unique in size and complexity. As such it is wholly appropriate that it is considered separately and if approved, be approved with conditions that are fit for purpose.

Finally it is also worth reminding ourselves that approval for Botley West is approval to build on a 'temporary' basis for a period of 42 years only. Botley West cannot reasonably be described as 'temporary' if there is no plan and no money clearly identified to re-instate the landscape when the solar farm has fulfilled its role and the costs to do so will be measured in triple digit millions.

**It is wrong to leave future generations to fund the fixing a broken landscape that has been broken by greed.**

Forever Fields therefore remains opposed to this proposal for the following reasons:

1. In its current form it will have multiple material impact on mental health, well being, heritage and landscape. The design remains ill conceived.
2. In the absence of a fully detailed, fully costed decommissioning and re-instatement plan it cannot be described as temporary.
3. The applicant and landowner have shown significant resistance to amending the proposal to a more appropriate scale and form that could mitigate impact.
4. The financial aspects of the proposal; in particular the sources and uses of the funds necessary to build and maintain the scheme, remain unclear.

Botley West remains the wrong proposal, in the wrong place, motivated by the wrong reasons.

The credibility of the NSIP process and UK Government renewable energy strategy will be compromised and brought into question if Botley West is given approval.

On the other hand, refusing the application will very likely speed up the process of designing and building solar farms that do meet the needs of the country, by demonstrating the difference between good and bad.

**The application for Botley West should be refused.**