

I wish to register my objection to the Botley West planning application, at this point when the applicant has had the opportunity to respond to questions put by the Planning Inspectorate Examining Authority, but has not provided sufficient relevant information to justify the major changes to the landscape and lived activities of local residents that would result if approved. I write as a resident of Cumnor village and a regular walker on the footpaths of the Farmoor Valley. My objections relate to the proposals Farmoor Valley south section, which is 100% in Oxford Green Belt.

This area of the Oxford Green Belt is within easy walking distance of Cumnor village and Botley. It is actively farmed. The land is of sufficiently high grade to be productive and economically viable and in my opinion should remain in use for farming. The UK is nowhere near self-sufficient in food production, and the self-sufficiency rate has fallen significantly since the 1980s. The valley is used for several recreational amenity purposes, which are a key permitted use of Green Belt. Hill End residential activity centre, and sailing at the reservoir are well established, well used and highly valued. Their rural setting is key to their amenity value for local communities. Surrounding them with solar factories and power stations would be a major blow.

The Inspectors will have noted on their visit to Hill End that the Farmoor Valley is a shallow bowl, where the whole valley is visible from most locations within the valley. This is true for the views from the many footpaths, especially the Oxford Greenbelt Way. It is not possible to screen solar panels effectively within this valley because of this topography. Attempts to do so would destroy the openness and rural views and essential nature of this valley. (See VWHDC Core Policy 41-Renewable Energy, and Cumnor Neighbourhood Plan Important Views Policy DBC7). Installation of shipping containers, substations and other infrastructure runs counter to Cumnor Neighbourhood Plan Policy T13 and LPP1 Core Policy 41.

There is no possible way this land could be categorised as 'grey belt', which is green belt that is already so degraded that it could reasonably be rescheduled for housing or industrial uses for benefit, with minimal local objection.

Many are wondering how this huge 'Botley West' proposal came to rest on this particularly beautiful part England, on the edge of the Cotswolds, taking chunks out of the Green Belt of one of the world's most famous and beautiful cities, and emanating from one of Britain's foremost World Heritage sites. The funds required are apparently difficult to pin down. This remains a real concern for the viability of the project, to the extent that the MP for Bicester and Woodstock tabled written parliamentary questions on November 5<sup>th</sup>. Surely, for a proposal of this size and cost, the funding mechanism should be clear before any grant of planning permission is considered.

When I first heard about this planning application, I was shocked at the devastating effects such a development would surely have. I wrote to my local MP Leila Moran with my objections.

I also registered my objections to the Red House Farm solar factory application with VOWH Planning when invited to do so. That application involved land in the Farmoor Valley

contiguous with Botley West, and the issues with each application are essentially the same. The planning process treats each in isolation with no acknowledgement of the existence of the other, which obviously would understate their deleterious effects on the Farmoor Valley should both ultimately be approved.

As I write this, VOWH Planning Dept has just refused the Red House Farm application. The main reason for rejection is it 'would be an inappropriate development that would be harmful to the openness of the Oxford Green Belt in which it would be located. The Council considers that the benefits of the scheme are not such as would amount to very special circumstances sufficient to outweigh the harm to the Green Belt, even when the wider environmental benefits associated with the increased production of energy from renewable resources have been taken into consideration'.

This is a carefully considered decision by local planning officers who have local knowledge, and understand the importance of this part of the Oxford Green Belt to all who live in our locality. The solar panels, batteries, fencing, inverters, and surveillance cameras of the Botley West proposal would be equivalent in nature to those of the Red House Farm proposal. They would fill the other half of the valley, introducing yet more 'uncharacteristic built form'.

In addition to views within the valley on the footpaths and rights of way, the view of the valley itself from the valley rim would be comprehensively ruined. There is a spectacular viewpoint from OS grid reference SP 46068 04925, just a short and level walk to the north of Cumnor village. The whole valley of actively farmed land is laid out before you, with the reservoir in the middle distance and a long view to the Cotswold hills beyond. To the right, Wytham Wood, which is a Site of Special Scientific Interest and site of decades-long world-class ecology studies, cloaks the hillsides above the River Thames. There is a bench at this spot. If you sit on this bench you would surely conclude there is no reasonable justification for destroying this landscape for solar panels. You see the productive arable farmland laid out, as the typical English patchwork quilt of fields with their boundary fences and hedges. The applicant's assertion that their proposal would increase biodiversity in the valley can only be true as a narrow definition within a planning proposal. In the real world it makes little sense.

I agree with Cumnor Parish Council's response to the Planning Inspectorate's investigation to oppose this proposal to industrialise our Green Belt. Reasons include heritage, landscape and visual impacts, contravention of key components of the local Neighbourhood Plan.

The impact of the proposed National Grid substation will also be severe. This is not included in the Botley West application but it would add more industrial structures close to the reservoir, next to one of the main footpaths from Cumnor village down to the reservoir and on to Filchampstead. It is from this footpath that we saw and photographed a large herd of wild deer crossing the open fields as they move between the stands of woodland around the valley's edge. Significant habitat losses will occur if this huge power station complex is built.

We attended a consultation meeting held in the village by the applicants. We found the staff were insufficiently briefed on our locality. Their visual presentations showed insufficient detail to show the consequences clearly. The visual renderings of the proposed installation

on the landscape were in my opinion misleading in minimising the apparent visual impact. Ecological and other impacts were downplayed.

We have been waiting to see whether the evident deficiencies would be explained during the Examining Authority's enquiry process. The applicants appear to have added little clarification to the many pertinent matters raised during the Inspection. Many deleterious impacts continue to be denied or minimised. Cumnor Parish Council has noted that statements of impact on visual amenity remain inadequate and contain errors. It is essential that meaningful responses are provided by the applicants to the many remaining unanswered questions. It cannot be right to grant planning permission without more substantive responses. In any case, considering the protected, unspoilt and settled landscape proposed as the site, the bar for approval must surely be very high indeed. Therefore, my previously stated objections, as I have outlined above, still stand.