

## **Closing Submission on Behalf of Blenheim Palace**

**By [REDACTED], Chief Executive Officer, Blenheim Palace (inc. Blenheim Palace 1984 Maintenance Fund and Vanbrugh Unit Trust)**

Dear Members of the Examining Authority,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide these closing submissions on behalf of the Blenheim Palace 1984 Maintenance Fund and the Vanbrugh Unit Trust, the landowning trusts for the site proposed for the Botley West Solar Farm. I also lead the Blenheim Palace Heritage Foundation, a separate charity with its own trustees, responsible for the care and conservation of the Blenheim Palace World Heritage Site.

Mindful not to repeat what has already been addressed in our earlier submissions, I want to begin by thanking the Examining Authority for the diligence, fairness, and rigour with which you have approached this Examination. This has been a complex process, and we have appreciated the professionalism and care with which evidence and perspectives have been considered.

Blenheim's decision to participate in this project has not been taken lightly. As a landed estate with over 300 years of continuous history, it would be far easier for us to "stay in our lane" and continue with traditional land uses. But the reality is that climate change is already reshaping our landscape. We are experiencing more extreme rainfall, hotter summers, and declining farming returns. The land in question is among the least productive on our estate, unable to viably produce crops in a post-subsidy world. From our experience managing the 7MW solar scheme north of Woodstock, we have already witnessed how carefully designed projects can regenerate soils, enhance biodiversity, and produce clean energy - all while maintaining livestock grazing beneath the panels.

Throughout the Examination, we have been supportive of the design changes and it was great to hear, during the open sessions, Historic England indicate that any harm to the World Heritage Site has been removed. We also welcome the modifications that have addressed air safety concerns in the flight path.

Importantly, we have clarified how rents from land owned by the 1984 Maintenance Fund will flow directly to the Blenheim Palace Heritage Foundation, ensuring tangible heritage benefit. We are also pleased that the proposed Community Fund has been strengthened to £525 per MW per year - a structure that, when responsibly delivered in partnership with the County and local groups, will bring meaningful and lasting benefits to the surrounding communities.

We remain deeply respectful of the views of local residents, both supportive and opposed, many of whom spoke with sincerity and conviction during the Examination. As a business contributing over £207 million annually to the local economy and supporting around 4,300 jobs directly and indirectly, we recognise that we are part of these

communities and will continue to live and work alongside them throughout the lifetime of the project and beyond.

This is a nationally significant proposal which is badly needed and particularly in places like this where grid connections are available. It embodies our belief that environmental responsibility and heritage protection can go hand in hand. It reconciles our duty to the past with our responsibility to the future - restoring the land, protecting our shared heritage, generating renewable energy, and delivering sustained community and environmental benefits.

We are confident that, alongside PVDP, we can make this project an exemplar for Oxfordshire - one that future generations will regard as a responsible and forward-thinking step in Blenheim's continuing story, one which contributes to national energy priorities and one which will restore land to productive and biodiverse use over four decades while making a material carbon difference in the meantime.

Thank you once again for your consideration and for the balanced approach taken during this Examination.

Yours faithfully,

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**Chief Executive Officer, Blenheim Palace**