

Final submission to Planning Inspectorate regarding proposed Botley West Solar Farm

Ref: EN010147 from Dr Annie Haight

10 November 2025

As a long-standing resident of Cumnor Parish in Oxfordshire, I have followed the proposals for Botley West Solar Farm for the past three years, attending public information exhibitions from Photovolt Development Partners, trying to make sense of their materials, and attending updates from West Oxfordshire District Council, Stop Botley West and Cumnor Parish Council. Most recently I have followed the formal assessment of this proposal (EN010147) by the Planning Inspectorate's Examination Authority. I would like to emphasise that I have been able to devote the time for this - in what has long felt like the applicant's war of attrition on the time and energy of the local community, their elected representatives, and other interested parties - because I am retired. I outlined a number of my concerns about this proposal in my submission to the ExA of 25 September 2025. I am sure that many of my fellow citizens living in the communities affected by the proposal, including working parents with young families, share my profound concerns about it, and would raise similar objections in a formal context such as this planning inquiry, if they simply had the time and energy to do so.

Over the past three years, I have been struck by the obfuscatory way the applicant has provided information to the local residents whose lives would be permanently affected by their plans, and the condescending and dismissive way it has responded to their questions and objections. I know that many detailed, evidence-based objections have been raised by interested parties in the course of the examination process, and that the applicant has offered dismissive, evasive or, in some cases, misleading or factually inaccurate responses to many legitimate questions raised (see, for example, Cumnor Parish Council's 'Comments on submissions received at D5 for D6'). It appears as though the applicant were, in the words of the CPC's oral submission at the Open Floor Hearing of 10 October 2025, 'just going through the motions before the inevitable, in their mind, approval by the Secretary of State'.

In contrast, I feel the community's interests have been well-served by elected officials at all levels, who have enumerated and evidenced repeatedly and in detail the many reasons why the Botley West Solar Farm proposal is indefensible and should be rejected. The fact that the local parish councils, all of the Oxfordshire Host Authorities and the local MPs Layla Moran and Callum Miller have united in opposition with community groups and other interested parties defending heritage and environmental issues, indicates the extremely deleterious effect this proposal would have on the local area and wider constituencies.

My own position, as articulated in my submission of 25 September 2025, is that the climate crisis is real and prompts a serious need for **sustainable** renewable energy sources, but that this particular proposal, if accepted and operationalised, may well not be sustainable and would in any case be too harmful to the local environment and communities to be justified. It contains many serious unanswered questions and would precipitate more problems, on a wider-reaching basis, than it solves.

I would like to thank the Examination Authority and the Botley West Solar Farm Case Team for their professional and forensic examination of this application. I welcome and endorse the ExA's most recent requirements and restrictions stipulating greater distance between solar arrays and residential dwellings; independent evaluation by relevant planning authorities of the adequacy of fencing; the need for compliance with local District and County Council development consent obligations and for approval of a decommissioning fund; and especially the invocation of the Grampian Condition that BWSF may not begin construction until the National Grid application to the Vale of the White Horse for a power substation at the foot of Tumbledown Hill in Cumnor Parish has been approved (if ever). However, I remain convinced that these mitigations and improvements are insufficient to make this proposal viable (or democratic, given the extremely heavy load of disadvantages to the local environment and communities it would entail). I concur with the Oxfordshire Host Authorities' request that the southern site of the proposal be removed entirely from the application. In short, this proposal is the wrong solution to the problem of providing renewable energy sources and must be rejected.

The definition of a drastic solution is one that causes greater harm than the problem it seeks to address. As I wrote in my submission of 12 September 2025, there is a comprehensive catalogue of reasons why this proposal represents a drastic and indefensible solution to the problem of renewable energy needs, including issues related to:

- food security and the inadvisability of covering Best and Most Versatile agricultural land with solar panels (42% of the proposed project by the applicant's own admission)
- Heritage issues: historical, architectural, archaeological
- ecology and biodiversity, including destructive effects on wildlife and several Sites of Special Scientific Interest (Wytham Woods and others)
- the despoliation of the Green Belt, Public Rights of Way, and generally the character of rural landscapes and open vistas
- flood risk in low-lying areas covered by the proposed solar farm
- economic damage to the tourism and hospitality sectors
- the costs to human health, both physical and mental, of imposing a buzzing, reflective, industrial landscape – essentially an open-air factory - on tranquil rural environments
- questions about the future maintenance and replacement of solar panels over the life-time of the proposed project and beyond
- and, last but not least, the opacity and possibly dubious nature and sustainability of the underlying financing of the proposed project.

On the last point, on 5 November 2025 Callum Miller, MP for Bicester and Woodstock, tabled a series of Parliamentary Questions that have arisen specifically from the Botley West Solar Farm proposal, and that also have wider ramifications for similar projects in future. Several of these questions relate to the processes currently in place for the Planning Inspectorate and Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project evaluators to assess the viability of the financing for projects of this magnitude. They ask whether these processes adequately safeguard the public from (i) the risks of insufficient funding on the part of the applicant and (ii) the security risks (and possible violation of UK sanctions) from finance originating from inappropriate sources or hostile powers. Another of Mr Miller's questions relates to the governance arrangements of the major landowner willing to sell or lease the majority of land needed for the proposed solar farm, Blenheim Estates

and the Blenheim Charitable Foundation. As I interpret it, this question alludes to possible violations of the Nolan Principle of avoidance of conflict of interest on the part of some of the Blenheim management who are also involved with the boards of the BWSF applicant. Clear, truthful answers to these questions must inform the evaluation of this proposal. The stakes are far too high to allow them to remain unanswered.

My educational background is in American History and I know that every serious crisis attracts carpetbaggers offering specious solutions that enrich themselves at the expense of the local community. Of course the Botley West Solar Farm proposal must be decided on the careful, evidenced and comprehensive evaluation of its own merits, but it is also a test case. Among many other issues, it raises the question of how high a price should be undemocratically imposed on an unwilling local community, its precious environment and globally significant heritage assets, to pay for unsubstantiated claims of energy security made in a proposal with so many omissions, errors and unanswered questions. I implore you, for all of the above reasons, to recommend that the Secretary of State for Energy and Net Zero reject this proposal.

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