

Botley West Solar Farm DCO Application

Comments on information provided in response to the information request of 14 April 2026

9 July 2026

I write as a resident of Bladon with regard to the Applicant's proposal for community food growing on 30 ha of land in Bladon. My IP ref. no. is [REDACTED].

On 14 April, the Department of Energy Security and Net Zero made the following request for further information on Community Food Growing (EN010147):

50. The Applicant is requested to provide an update on the interest in community food growing, further to [REP5-005], (noting that two areas up to 30 ha are proposed). The Applicant is requested to also provide details of the location of the sites, together with how, if taken forward, they would be allocated, managed and maintained, including the mechanism to secure appropriate controls for the erection of any structures and other associated paraphernalia in these areas, notwithstanding that monitoring details are to be further set out in the Operational Management Plan [REP6-032].

I wish to make the following comments on the Applicant's response to that request.

1. Update on the interest in community food growing

The Applicant responded that it has signed MOUs with two groups ('Cherwell Collective' and 'Plot 4') and is in discussions with a third ('Oxford Farm to Fork'); and that it 'will work with bodies such as the parish councils to attract growers from local villages'.

The proposal for community food growing was presumably included in the DCO application as a planning benefit. Having mentioned the idea of providing allotments for local residents in Bladon in their informal consultation in November 2022, more than three and a half years later, the Applicant is yet to discuss the proposal with relevant local bodies such as Bladon Parish Council, Bladon Allotment Society or Bladon Garden Society. Neither has it consulted with the local community on the location or any other aspects of the plan for the 'community' food growing area except in the vaguest of terms. The information provided at the statutory consultation was too minimal to enable adequate and meaningful consultation.¹

¹ The total information provided for public consultation was as follows:

If the Applicant does eventually consult the local community and local bodies in Bladon, it will learn that the existing allotments in Bladon already meet local demand. The facts do not support the Applicant's assumption that there is unmet demand for allotments in Bladon.

Moreover this cannot be regarded as a proposal for local community food growing. None of the three food growers the Applicant has engaged with is local to Bladon, nor would the food produced be for the local community.

'Cherwell Collective' is a small social enterprise based in Kidlington and serving Banbury and Bicester. One of its activities is to promote small domestic-scale community gardens. Large-scale food growing is not within its competency.

Plot 4 does not appear to exist as a legal entity; it is not registered with Companies House. Chris Goodall is not a local politician, as stated by the Applicant. (He was an unsuccessful candidate in elections other areas of Oxfordshire (Oxford West and Abingdon in the 2024 general election and Jericho and Osney wards in Oxford City in the 2025 local elections.) He is described on his Wikipedia page as a businessman, author and expert on new energy technologies.

'Oxford Farm to Fork' is a commercial food grower, producing food that it sells to institutional buyers, primarily Oxford Colleges. The land earmarked for community food growing in Bladon is already a commercial food growing area: it is productively farmed, as it has been for generations, forming part of the traditional agricultural setting of Blenheim Palace described in the Blenheim Palace World Heritage Site Management Plan (2017). As such it contributes to national food security. It is hard to see what the rationale could be for stopping the existing form of food production in order to replace it with a new form of commercial food production.

Having decided to provide community food growing areas, the Applicant's has failed to consult with Bladon groups and residents on the matter and the selection of partners in the enterprise is inappropriate and smacks of last-minute desperation.

It is hard to understand how the community food growing proposal could be seen as a planning benefit.

Phase 2 community consultation leaflet, page 9: We are exploring areas for community food growing across the three sites, and we are seeking feedback on where the community would like these areas to be located.

PEIR non-technical summary, 5.3.3: The Project site is also capable of providing areas suitable for sheep farming and small-scale food production, although these areas are not yet defined.

PEIR, 6.1.1.6: The Project site is also capable of providing areas suitable for sheep farming and small-scale food production, although these areas are not yet defined within the illustrative masterplan.

2. Details of the location of the sites

In its response, the Applicant states 'all the sites are in the central section, adjacent to public roads and easily accessible'.

As is clear in the Applicant's maps, the land earmarked for community food growing in Bladon is not adjacent to a public road. The land is some way away from the A4095 and even further from the A44. The only other public access comprises two narrow lanes that are very obviously not suitable for public and commercial vehicles to access the earmarked land. (This was explained in some detail in local residents' responses to an earlier proposal by the Applicant to construct a building on the site to house an 'educational centre'. The proposal was eventually withdrawn.)

Suitable access arrangements for the proposed food growing site in Bladon remain unexplained.

3. Details on how the sites would be managed and maintained, including controlling structures and other associated paraphernalia

The solar installations, fences, maintenance roads and gates that were originally intended for the community food growing site in Bladon were removed from the plan in order to preserve the visual setting of the Blenheim Palace World Heritage Site, following the advice of Historic England.

The Applicant's response to the information request indicates there will be a plan for licensing growers, stipulating operating rules and for withdrawing a licence in case of non-compliance. How this would be monitored and managed in practice was not explained. The Applicant says it will be set out in a future Operational Management Plan that is yet to be provided.

Given the national and international importance of the Blenheim World Heritage Site and its setting and the advice of Historic England, clarity is essential on how the Applicant (and whoever it sells the solar farm project on to) would ensure the food growing site would be protected from inappropriate structures and other paraphernalia and that compliance would be guaranteed. So far it remains unexplained.

Frances Stevenson
IP ref. no. [REDACTED]