

CALUM MILLER MP



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

The Rt Hon [REDACTED] MP
Secretary of State for Energy, Security and Net Zero
Department for Energy, Security and Net Zero
55 Whitehall
London SW1A 2HP

16 July 2026

Dear [REDACTED],

Response to the Secretary of State's Request for Information

I welcome the opportunity to respond to the further information submitted in relation to Botley West Solar Farm.

In my joint letter with [REDACTED] MP on 12 February, I set out a series of serious concerns about the scale of the proposal, its impact on nearby communities and the Blenheim Palace World Heritage Site, the uncertainty surrounding its grid connection and the lack of clarity over who will ultimately finance, own and operate it.

Having considered the Applicant's latest response, I am not convinced that those concerns have been resolved.

I strongly support the rapid expansion of renewable energy, including solar power. But supporting renewable energy does not mean accepting every proposal, whatever its scale, location or impact. Botley West would be one of the largest solar developments in the country. It would cover a vast area close to established communities and one of our most important heritage sites. The evidence supporting it must therefore be exceptionally robust.

Instead, too many important decisions remain unanswered or are being deferred until after consent has been granted.

The most immediate example is the impact on people living close to the development. The Secretary of State asked whether homes within 250 metres could be assessed individually. That work has not been completed. Instead, the Applicant has proposed that the distance between homes and the development should be decided through a plan produced after consent.

That does not provide residents with the certainty they deserve. People should know before a decision is made how close panels and associated infrastructure could come to their homes and what effect the development could have on their daily lives.

The Oxfordshire Host Authorities have also said that affected homes should be assessed individually before consent, including through site visits. I agree. These are not minor details which can safely be settled later but are central to deciding whether the proposal is acceptable in the first place.

The further information also reinforces my concern that the scheme has been driven primarily by the availability of a grid connection and sufficiently large landholdings, rather than by a proper assessment of what this landscape and the surrounding communities can reasonably accommodate.

The Applicant argues that reducing the scheme further could make it financially unviable. That may be relevant to the developer, but it cannot be the deciding factor. If the changes necessary to make a development acceptable would also make it unviable, that may indicate that it is simply too large or in the wrong place.

There remains considerable uncertainty about the grid connection itself. National Grid's proposed Farmoor substation is still at an early stage and its indicative timetable suggests that connection may not be completed until late 2031. That appears difficult to reconcile with parts of the Applicant's case which assume the solar farm will be operational in 2029 or 2030.

Local communities should not be expected to endure years of construction and disruption without confidence that the project has a clear, deliverable and properly assessed route to the electricity network.

There also continue to be unresolved questions concerning flood risk, aviation safety, land rights and the ownership and financing of the scheme. For a project estimated to cost around £800 million and seeking extensive statutory powers, the public deserves much greater clarity about who will be responsible for delivering and operating it over its lifetime.

The central issue is straightforward: despite the additional information provided, too much remains uncertain and too many important decisions would be left until after consent.

I therefore ask the Secretary of State to refuse the application in its current form.

If the Secretary of State believes that these problems can be addressed, the necessary assessments and agreements should be completed before any decision is made. The relevant local and statutory authorities must then be given a proper opportunity to consider them, alongside a fair further consultation with the communities affected.

The transition away from fossil fuels is urgent and necessary. But it will only retain public confidence if major renewable energy projects are well designed, transparent and developed with proper regard for the people and places expected to host them.

The further information submitted has not persuaded me that this Botley West proposal meets that test.

Yours sincerely,



Calum Miller MP

Member of Parliament for Bicester and Woodstock



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Our ref: MCB2026/09996
Your ref:

August 2026

Dear Calum Miller,

Thank you for your letter of 17 July to the Rt Hon [REDACTED] regarding the Botley West Solar Farm. I am responding as this matter falls under my Ministerial portfolio.

Your letter will be treated as a post-examination representation and will be carefully considered alongside all matters that are relevant to the decision-making on the application for development consent in accordance with the Planning Act 2008.

Given the Secretary of State's quasi-judicial role in taking decisions on applications for development consent for energy infrastructure proposals, it would not be appropriate for the Secretary of State or Minister in this department to comment on specific matters related to the proposals, as this could be seen as prejudicing the decision-making process.

The decision letter, alongside the Examining Authority's Report, will be published on the Planning Inspectorate's website once a decision has been made. In taking a decision on any application for development consent, the Secretary of State will follow the relevant requirements of the Planning Act 2008 and have regard to all matters that are relevant to the decision.

Best wishes,

MICHAEL SHANKS MP
Minister of State for Energy