

From: Tim Pottle [REDACTED]
Sent: 14 September 2026 17:48
To: Botley West Solar Farm
Subject: Objection to the Latest Submission for the Botley West Solar Farm (Power Station) (EN010147)

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Dear Secretary of State,

I write to object to the latest of the late submissions made by Photovolt Development Partners (PVDP) on behalf of SolarFive Ltd in relation to the proposed Botley West Solar Farm (Power Station).

At the outset, I wish to express concern that the applicant has repeatedly failed to provide information in a timely manner and has required further requests from the Planning Inspectorate before addressing important matters. For a project of this magnitude, such delays raise legitimate questions regarding project preparedness, governance and oversight. These concerns are amplified by the continuing submission of significant volumes of new material at a late stage in the process.

I am also concerned by the apparent disparity between the scale of Botley West and the projects identified within PVDP's published portfolio. PVDP states that its most ambitious project to date is the 480 MWp Ukujima solar project in Japan, whilst Botley West is proposed at up to 840 MW. Based on publicly available information, I have been unable to identify any completed PVDP project approaching the scale proposed for Botley West.

My objection is based on conflict with the principles of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the policies of the Cumnor Neighbourhood Plan, both of which place significant importance on protecting landscape character, valued views, biodiversity, heritage assets, local distinctiveness, rural character and environmental quality.

Scale and Democratic Accountability

The project extends across approximately 1,400 hectares spanning multiple local authority areas. In my view, its extraordinary geographical spread is evidence that a number of physically separate sites have been aggregated into a single Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project. Whilst I recognise that this approach may be permissible under the Planning Act framework, its practical effect is to reduce meaningful local democratic scrutiny of proposals affecting numerous communities with different landscapes, identities and planning priorities.

The scheme is clearly not a single coherent development site, but rather a collection of dispersed installations spread across a very wide area of Oxfordshire. Had many of these areas been promoted independently, they would ordinarily have been subject to more direct local assessment and accountability through the local planning process. By combining them into one uniquely large proposal, the ultimate decision is removed from locally elected authorities despite the impacts being experienced entirely at the local level.

This sits uneasily with the substantial effort invested by local communities in preparing neighbourhood plans, including the Cumnor Neighbourhood Plan, to guide development in accordance with local priorities and landscape character.

The continuing submission of large volumes of material late in the process compounds these concerns. When considered alongside the dispersed nature of the scheme, it risks undermining public confidence in both the examination process and the ability of affected communities to influence decisions that will fundamentally alter their surroundings for decades.

Unresolved Red-Line Boundary

The applicant has acknowledged that approximately 300 hectares of land within the Order Limits will no longer be used for solar panels. Despite this, that land remains within the red-line boundary.

There appears to be no compelling planning justification for retaining powers over land that is no longer required for the proposed development. The boundary should therefore be amended and the land returned to unrestricted agricultural use.

Heritage and Landscape Harm

The Cumnor Neighbourhood Plan places considerable emphasis on protecting valued landscapes, rural views and the distinctive countryside setting of the parish.

Concerns raised by ICOMOS regarding the effects on heritage assets and their settings remain unresolved. The Landscape Character Assessment requested during the examination process has not been completed. Without such an assessment, it is difficult to conclude that the full impact of the proposal on heritage assets, landscape character and important views has been properly understood.

The NPPF requires decision-makers to conserve and enhance the historic environment and to give great weight to heritage conservation. In my view, that test has not yet been satisfied.

Flood Risk Concerns Affecting Cumnor Parish

Flood risk remains a serious concern, particularly in light of the submissions made by Cumnor Parish Council, Cassington Parish Council and independent hydrology experts.

The applicant has declined to provide further panel pull-backs despite detailed technical evidence regarding drainage and surface water impacts. Given increasing concerns regarding extreme weather events and flooding, a precautionary approach should be adopted.

The NPPF requires development to avoid increasing flood risk elsewhere and to ensure that communities are adequately protected. I do not believe it has been demonstrated that these requirements have been met.

Ecology and Biodiversity

The absence of a completed arboricultural impact assessment remains concerning. There also continue to be significant doubts regarding the practicality and effectiveness of the proposed skylark compensation strategy.

Furthermore, the potential designation of a substantial section of the central area as part of the proposed Three Rivers SSSI significantly increases the environmental sensitivity of the affected landscape and warrants careful consideration before any decision is taken.

Given these outstanding issues, I do not consider that the claimed biodiversity benefits have been adequately demonstrated or secured.

National Grid Connection Uncertainty

Significant uncertainty remains regarding the grid connection infrastructure upon which the entire development depends.

The location of the National Grid substation has not been finalised, no planning application has been submitted by National Grid, and it has been indicated that the earliest connection date may be Winter 2031. In these circumstances, there should be no prospect of substantial construction works commencing before all essential connection infrastructure has received the necessary consents and is demonstrably deliverable.

Lack of Financial Security for Restoration

Let us not forget that the Botley West Solar Power Station will have about 110km of security fencing surrounding it and upwards of 350,000 concrete driven into good agricultural land. I estimate the cost of removing the piles alone to be in the region of £50m+.

The Examining Authority reportedly recommended that a decommissioning fund be secured *before* construction commences. I remain concerned that this safeguard has not been adequately secured. Local communities should not bear any future risk associated with restoration, removal of infrastructure or site remediation at the end of the project's operational life.

Viability

The applicant has not adequately justified its contention that a development on this scale represents the minimum economically viable scheme.

Alternative proposals involving a smaller footprint appear to have been rejected without sufficient justification. Given the substantial environmental, landscape and community impacts, a more proportionate alternative should have been rigorously evaluated before concluding that an 840 MW installation is necessary.

Additional Outstanding Matters

A number of further issues remain unresolved, including:

- The continuing disagreement with Oxfordshire County Council regarding minerals and waste matters.
- The ongoing disagreement concerning the acquisition of roadside verges.
- Outstanding concerns relating to aviation safety for trainee pilots.
- The continued appearance of the Lower Road cycle route within project documentation despite indications that it would be removed.
- The absence of meaningful progress regarding community food-growing proposals.

Collectively, these matters reinforce the conclusion that key elements of the proposal remain uncertain and insufficiently justified.

Funding and Deliverability

Questions also remain regarding the long-term financial structure and deliverability of the project. Given the scale of the proposal and the outstanding uncertainties regarding grid connection infrastructure, it is important that the Secretary of State is fully satisfied that the scheme can be delivered, operated and ultimately decommissioned without imposing unacceptable risks on local communities or the public purse.

Conclusion

The NPPF requires decision-makers to weigh the benefits of development against its adverse impacts. Whilst I acknowledge the importance of renewable energy generation, I do not believe that the applicant has demonstrated that the significant impacts on landscape, heritage, biodiversity, flood risk and local communities have been adequately addressed.

The proposal conflicts with key objectives of the Cumnor Neighbourhood Plan relating to the protection of rural character, valued landscapes, environmental quality and local distinctiveness. It also leaves substantial uncertainty regarding deliverability, mitigation, restoration and long-term stewardship.

For these reasons, and having regard to the cumulative weight of the unresolved issues identified above, I respectfully request that development consent be refused.

It is time to say a straight "no" to Botley West Solar Farm. Let's put solar power in other places.

Yours faithfully,

Mr T M Pottle

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