

Planning application for Botley West Solar Farm postponed Oxford Mail 25 June 2024

By Miranda Norris Senior reporter

The developers of a giant solar farm on 2,471 acres of countryside have postponed applying for planning permission.

The proposed Botley West Solar Farm would cover the equivalent of 1,400 football pitches at three sites near Botley, Kidlington and Woodstock owned by Blenheim.

It is classified as a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIPs) and to gain permission to build and operate it, a Development Consent Order (DCO) application will be submitted to the Planning Inspectorate (PINS).

The Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy will then decide whether to grant consent.

Photovoltaic Development Partners (PVDP) planned to submit the DCO application in July but has announced this has now been postponed until the autumn. Instead the developer is running a third public consultation.

The first consultation ran between November and December 2022 and more than 1,000 people expressed their views in the second consultation between November 2023 and February 2024.

PVDP said the further consultation will 'focus on specific changes across the site'.

Project director Mark Owen-Lloyd said: "We now expect to submit our DCO application in the autumn so that we can comprehensively review community feedback and continue to use it in the careful refinement of the project's design.

"This will include feedback submitted in the further targeted consultation which is now running until late July.

"This further consultation has been made available to all in our community and all stakeholders.

"24,000 notices outlining how locals can have their say have been distributed, information has been made available at publicly accessible locations, and specific notices have been sent to those who asked for them.

"We are absolutely committed to delivering the best design possible for this project, and we are proud of our genuine and constructive approach to seeking the views of our community."

Professor Alex Rogers, chair of Stop Botley West community group, said: "Concerned local residents were informed by PVDP a week ago with no prior notice about the start of a new very limited 'targeted consultation' that is due to finish on July 28.

"There were many failings in the previous round of consultation that we have documented in our Adequacy of Consultation response that has been sent to West Oxfordshire District Council and the Planning Inspectorate.

"That is why we urge everyone who is worried about the proposed mega-sized solar power station on 3,200 acres of Blenheim's mainly productive Green Belt land to keep contacting PVDP, the prospective Parliamentary candidates and relevant local authorities with details of their concerns."

PVDP has said its previous consultation was "completely in line with all relevant planning regulations and principles as set out by the Planning Act 2008".