

The Times

German firm plans to build Britain's biggest solar farm

Photovolt's proposals for Botley West in Oxfordshire have angered some local residents



Emma Powell. Friday November 15 2024, 4.40pm

The decision on whether to grant planning permission for the site at Botley West ultimately lies with Ed Miliband, the energy secretary. ADRIAN SHERRATT FOR THE SUNDAY TIMES

The developers behind a controversial solar power project in Oxfordshire have submitted a planning application for what is thought will be the largest such scheme in western Europe.

The site in Botley West is being developed by Photovolt, a German company, and could generate 840 megawatts (MW) of electricity, enough to power about 330,000 homes.

However, the project has sparked a backlash among some local residents, who argue the scheme will blight



the landscape.

The government has set a target of trebling the amount of solar on Britain's energy system to about 40 gigawatts (GW) by the end of the decade in an effort to decarbonise the grid.

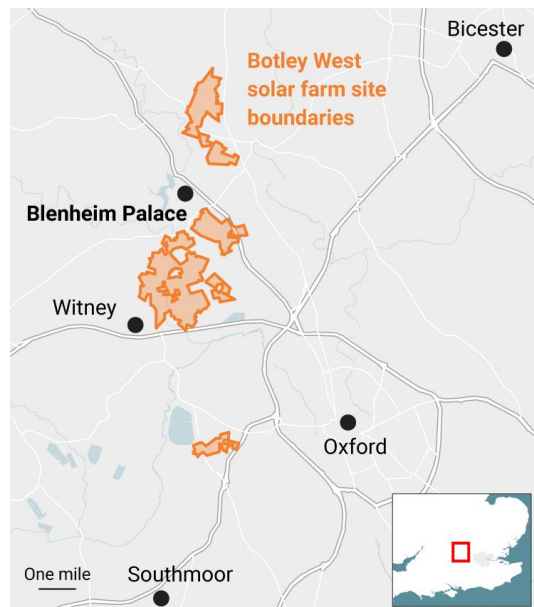
In 2019, Oxfordshire county council declared a climate emergency and the county's grid is one of the most carbon-intensive in the country.

The Botley West site will cover a total of about 3,200 acres and pass through 15 villages, although about 1,235 acres will not be covered with solar panels.

More than 70 per cent of the site will cover Oxfordshire [green belt land](#), mostly owned by the trust behind [Blenheim Palace](#), birthplace of Winston Churchill and family seat of the Duke of Marlborough.

Photovolt has said that as part of its planning submission, it has provided a statement setting out why the green belt development should be permitted with mitigation measures. There are large areas which will have no panels, with a minimum 25-metre buffer zone between panels and residences.

The decision over whether to grant planning permission will ultimately lie with [Ed Miliband](#), the energy



Graphic by The Times and Sunday Times

secretary, rather than at a local planning level, since the solar farm is designated a nationally significant infrastructure project.

This process has been described by John Orme, a member of the Stop Botley West campaign group, as a “deficit of democracy”. The campaign group also has concerns about the impact on what it says is productive arable land.

Mark Owen-Lloyd, Photovolt director, said: “These proposals follow extensive consultation with the local community and thorough, years-long environmental studies. This has resulted in the provision of new walking paths, increasing the distance between panels and residential areas and a commitment to a minimum 70 per cent biodiversity net gain.”

There are currently 85 solar farms operational in Cornwall, 42 in Wiltshire, 23 in Somerset and 21 in both Shropshire and Pembrokeshire. Last year more than 1,000 planning applications for solar panels were approved in the UK.

The Oxfordshire project is expected to receive a decision on planning approval at the start of 2026.