

# Miliband to rule on building Britain's biggest solar farm at Churchill's ancestral home

**Blenheim Estate faces renewables blitz after project passes crucial hurdle**

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If approved, the site will cover at least 2,471 acres of the 12,000-acre estate Credit: Loop Images/ Universal Images Group Editorial

[Luke Barr](#) Assistant business editor

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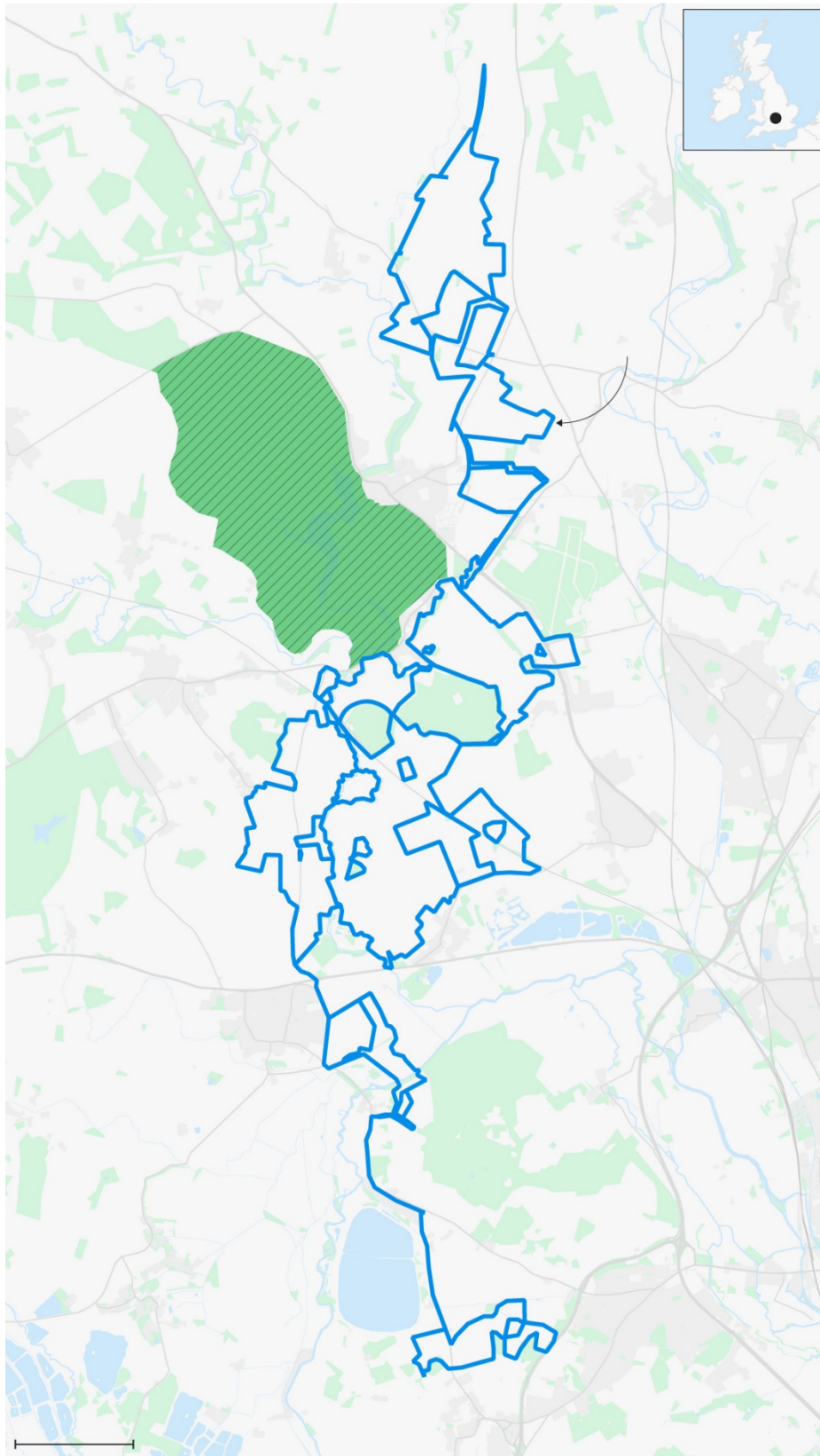
Ed Miliband will decide whether Britain's biggest solar farm can be built on Winston Churchill's ancestral estate after the renewables project cleared a key hurdle.

The Planning Inspectorate confirmed on Friday that the Botley West Solar Farm on Blenheim Estate had been accepted for examination.

Months of scrutiny will now follow to determine the project's feasibility before the Energy Secretary will decide next year whether it can proceed.

If approved, the site will cover at least 2,471 acres of the 12,000-acre estate and provide renewable energy to more than 300,000 homes in Oxfordshire.

However, concerns have been raised over [the project's impact on the local countryside](#), particularly given the prospect of thousands of panels being installed across farmland.



Botley West Solar Farm/Photovoltaic Development Partners

The estate's links to the former prime minister also make the project particularly high profile.

Churchill was born in Blenheim Palace, at the heart of the estate, in 1874 and his ties remained strong throughout his life. He proposed to his wife, Clementine Hozier, there in 1908, and he was also buried within sight of the estate in 1965.

The row over Botley West Solar Farm comes as the Government prepares to rip up planning rules to unleash green energy projects across Britain, including wind turbines and electricity pylons.

[The Energy Secretary's renewables blitz](#) has already sparked opposition from swathes of activists, including those opposed to the proposed Botley West Solar Farm in Oxfordshire.

However, the solar farm has already been classed as "Nationally Significant Infrastructure", meaning local residents and community groups do not have any powers to intervene.

Calum Miller, the Liberal Democrat MP for Bicester and Woodstock, said: "While I support the transition to renewable energy, I cannot back the current Botley West proposal.

"The developers have failed to engage meaningfully with local communities, ignoring concerns about its scale, impact on Blenheim Palace, and minimal community benefits. I am urging them to listen to residents and address these issues."



Winston Churchill's links to the Blenheim Palace estate make the project particularly high profile Credit: David Savill/Hulton archive

Concerns have also been raised about the project's backers, Photovolt Development Partners (PVDP), with local campaigners alleging that the project is "Russian-owned".

This relates to claims that Photovolt's main shareholder, Yulia Lezhen, was married to a Russian citizen.

Speculation led to Liberal Democrat MP Layla Moran using parliamentary privilege last year to question Photovolt's alleged Russian links.

Photovolt, which is registered in Germany, has consistently denied any inappropriate links to Russia.

However, Professor Alex Rogers, chairman of the Stop Botley West local campaign group, is urging regulators to scrutinise the project and its backers as part of the forthcoming examination process.

He said: "If it goes ahead, the Botley West solar power station proposal will transform a large area of rural Oxfordshire, including extensive areas of the city of Oxford's green belt, into a semi-industrial landscape with damaging consequences for the physical and mental health of residents and visitors.

"The proposed 3,200-acre development is in the wrong location as it will have damaging impacts on valuable heritage, including the Unesco World Heritage site of Blenheim itself, on productive agricultural land and on the local ecology."

Photovolt has claimed that visitors will not be able to see any solar panels from Blenheim Palace. It has also vowed to build new hedgerows to help hide large parts of the solar farm.

Mark Owen-Lloyd, a director of PhotoVolt, said: "We are pleased that the Planning Inspectorate has accepted Botley West Solar Farm for examination, which will now progress to the pre-examination phase.

"This project, once built, will make a huge contribution towards achieving net zero in the UK whilst providing the reliable, clean power Oxfordshire needs.

"These plans, which are now available for anyone to view on the Planning Inspectorate's Botley West website, are the result of years of extensive and rigorous work to build a detailed proposal for how the Botley West Solar Farm project will be constructed and delivered."