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Plans for Botley West Solar Farm submitted to government

Controversial plans for one of Europe's biggest solar farms set to stretch across three Oxfordshire districts have been submitted to the government.

Photovolt Development Partners (PVDP) on behalf of SolarFive Ltd Solar sent its proposals to the Planning Inspectorate on Friday November 8. [should say Nov 15 - an error by Mark Owen-Lloyd]

Under UK planning rules, solar developments larger than 50 MW are deemed to be "nationally significant infrastructure projects" and need permission to be granted at a national government level.

This is through Development Consent Orders, rather than applying through local authorities.

Fields near Dornford Lane in Tackley will be covered with panels (Image: NQ staff)

The 840-MW solar farm is approximately 1,400-hectares (3,459 acres) in size and would cover sites near Botley, Kidlington and Woodstock mostly owned by Blenheim. The application will first have to receive consent from the Planning Inspectorate before being examined in depth over six months.

If approved, the site would start delivering enough renewable energy to power more than 330,000 homes from the end of 2026.

In February Oxfordshire County Council said the plans need "considerable improvements". West Oxfordshire District Council has also said there were "multiple areas of concern" with the proposal, including the impact it would have on the landscape.

The council has previously expressed its disappointment that the proposal would bypass the local planning process.

There have been three public consultations since the proposals were first put forward in 2022.

Professor Alex Rogers, Chair of Stop Botley West community group, said: "We remain deeply concerned about the impact of this proposed mega-sized solar power station on 3,200 acres of Blenheim's mainly productive arable land, also a significant proportion of Oxford's green belt."

"As a community group, we are united by genuine fears about the impacts of this massive, untested, profit-driven technological experiment that threatens to significantly damage our local farming community, local villages, environment, biodiversity and heritage.

"We welcome the fact that the Planning Inspectorate's process finally gives all interested parties the opportunity to review, and challenge where necessary, critical information that PVDP has failed to provide despite the series of inadequate public consultations earlier this year."

PVDP has said its consultation was agreed in full with the relevant local planning authorities "and completely in line with all relevant planning regulations".

"The design of Botley West Solar Farm is being developed sensitively with landscape, visual impact, biodiversity and ecology a key part of the extensive technical and environmental assessments being undertaken," it said.

Project director Mark Owen-Lloyd said of the application process "ourselves and those who disagree with us will be able to sit in front of a planning inspector and present hard evidence".