

From Oxford Mail 22 October 2024 [By Miranda Norris@mirandajnorris](mailto:ByMirandaNorris@mirandajnorris) Senior reporter

Botley West Solar Farm objectors stage protest walk



Campaigners against plans to build one of Europe's largest solar farms have taken part in a protest walk. If approved the 1,400 hectare (3,500-acre) Botley West Solar Farm would cover sites near Botley, Kidlington and Woodstock mostly owned by the trust behind Blenheim Palace.

A formal application is expected to be submitted to the government 'in the next couple of weeks'.

Supporters of the Campaign for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE) Oxfordshire and the Stop Botley West (SBW) community group walked sections of Dornford Lane between Woodstock and the Bartons, which would be surrounded with panels.

Developers PhotoVolt Development Partners (PVDP) propose to use the lane which is crossed by Akeman Street, the Oxfordshire Way and a number of other public rights of way, for access by maintenance vehicles.



CPRE Oxfordshire and Stop Botley West campaigners staged a protest walk (*Image: Ed Nix*)

PVDP's most recent proposals state: "The project site boundary has been changed to include Dornford Lane to provide access for maintenance purposes during the operation of the solar farm (due to be up to 42 years). This access is not intended to be used during construction."

Lisa Warne, director of CPRE Oxfordshire, said: "There's no denying that the transition to renewable energy is urgent and vital, and we at CPRE fully support decarbonising our energy.

"Given that in Oxfordshire we are already halfway to our solar target for 2050, we can afford to be selective, meaning that local authorities can and must be more discerning about where solar is installed.

"We must protect valued landscapes such as those in the proposed Botley West Solar Farm area as well as agricultural land for growing much-needed food.

"Instead, we need to push for the installation of solar panels on roofs where it would not only save our countryside, but also be nearer to the point of use."

Biodiversity and ecology expert Dr Julian Parfitt joined the walk and explained Dornford Lane's history as a drovers' road when Anglo-Saxon kings stayed on the Barton estate and used Woodstock as a hunting ground.

He encouraged local people to identify ancient trees and record them with the Woodland Trust as part of efforts to protect the lane.

Alex Rogers, chair of the Stop Botley West community group, said: "It would be a betrayal of Dornford Lane's unique local heritage, loved and used by walkers and cyclists, to turn this historic green lane into a commercial access route to this unnecessary, misplaced industrial-scale power station for the next 40-plus years."

Project director Mark Owen-Lloyd said: "No trees will be removed or damaged as a result of the proposal, and the boundary of the site deliberately excludes all areas of ancient woodland.

"Not only will the project preserve trees and hedgerows, it will also introduce new ones in order to restore wildlife habitats and encourage pollinators. This is part of the minimum biodiversity net gain of 70 per cent the development will deliver.

"The project will also protect food production in the local area, as we are partnering with community agriculture projects and farmers to use parts of the site to grow produce.

"By resting other parts of the land which have been intensively farmed, we will restore the soil quality and make it viable for growing again.

"We absolutely support solar panels on rooftops, but this deployment alone will simply not be enough to meet our net zero targets, or the UK's national energy demand. Relying on rooftop solar alone is not a viable solution to the climate crisis in the UK."