

PROPOSED BOTLEY WEST SOLAR FARM SHOULD BE TURNED DOWN BECAUSE OF EXCESSIVE FLOOD RISK, SAYS EXPERT

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A leading hydrology expert has recommended that the proposed Botley West mega power station should be turned down because of the increased flood risk to homes, businesses and public amenities that was highlighted by recent extensive Oxfordshire flooding.

Clive Carpenter, a senior hydrologist with more than 30 years of experience in strategic water management for large scale infrastructure projects, challenges developer Photovolt Development Partners (PVDP)'s claim that 'solar panels do not significantly increase (rain) run-off peak flow and volumes from solar developments.'

"Recent research in this technical area provides consistent conclusions that solar panels increase peak run-off, increase total flows and increase erosion compared to the pre-development situation," states Mr Carpenter in an independent report commissioned by the Stop Botley West community group.

He has reviewed "potential omissions, errors and inaccuracies in the documentation" on hydrology and flood risk provided by Botley West developer SolarFive/PVDP in its Preliminary Environmental Information Report (PEIR) that was the basis of three rounds of public consultation earlier this year. Mr Carpenter concludes that PVDP "fails to adequately consider storm water rainfall run-off from the solar panels".

He goes on to state that the proposed Botley West development would potentially require "such significant water management infrastructure as to question the feasibility and viability of the proposed development".

Mr Carpenter also says that PVDP "has not demonstrated that they will be able to adequately manage surface water run-off and sediment mobilisation during the construction phase." He adds that the size of the scheme and nature of the terrain present "challenges which could prevent delivering the proposed development".

He concludes: "Accordingly, the Development Consent Order (which PVDP has said it is due to apply for in November) should not be approved."

His independent flood risk report has been reviewed by a number of Oxfordshire county and district councillors, including Cllr. Sarah Veasey, West Oxford District councillor for North Leigh, who sits on WODC's Development Control committee.

She said: "I strongly oppose Botley West for a large number of reasons including for it being in the wrong place; for its overall size, for the loss of food security due to the use of the land, for the destruction of the landscape of West Oxfordshire especially around towns and villages with high heritage value and high tourist footfall, and for questions about the viability of grid transmission etc."

She added: "I believe solar panels should be installed on newbuilds as standard rather than taking up precious prime greenfield sites around rural Oxfordshire. This study by Mr Carpenter adds yet another reason to oppose the Botley West proposal."

Prof. Alex Rogers, chair of Stop Botley West, commented: "One of our main concerns is that PVDP is proposing to build a large part of the Botley West mega power station, with a footprint larger than

Heathrow Airport, on a complex catchment area dominated by three river valleys. Increased storm run-off leaving such a large site will cause flooding in these catchment areas.

“These three river valleys and their highly fertile flood meadows are precisely why there is such a rich mosaic of densely clustered homes, habitat and heritage in this area, stretching back to the Stone Age and beyond.

“This is exactly why we believe that the proposed Botley West development would be sited in the wrong place. That is why we support Mr Carpenter’s report concluding that the Botley West development should be turned down, and we urge PVDP and Blenheim Estate to consider alternative options such as a network of community-scale solar farms.”

Ends

Note to editors:

Mr Carpenter has a BSc (Hons) 2.1 in Geology, an MSc in Hydrogeology and Groundwater Resources and more than 30 years of post-graduate experience in water management and impact assessment projects in the UK and overseas, including technical leadership of flood risk assessments and flood alleviation strategies.

He is a fellow of the Geological Society, a Chartered Geologist and a Chartered Member of the Chartered Institute of the Water and Environmental Management. He is also an associate member of the Academy of Experts and a member of the International Association of Hydrogeologists.