

Multiple alternative uses of the site proposed for Botley West Solar Farm

The proposed Botley West Solar Farm covers 1,400 hectares in all. Coincidentally, this is exactly the same size as the Knepp Wildland in West Sussex. I am not suggesting that Botley West should become another Knepp, but proposing that a substantial proportion of the land in question could become part of West Oxfordshire's, and Oxfordshire's, Nature Recovery Network. It could connect with the excellent work that Blenheim has done in preserving the High Park, creating a contiguous arc of rich biodiversity and a wildlife legacy of incomparable value in this part of England.

Elsewhere on the site, in places where the soil is poorer, energy crops such as miscanthus (which is claimed to improve the soil), and crops that capture carbon and store it in the soil, could be grown. Areas of grassland with wildflowers could be grown as source material for biogas, and for livestock. Richer soils would be reserved for nature-friendly arable farming or horticulture.

Given that Oxfordshire already has over 800MW of solar energy capacity in place, or approved, there is no need for more ground-mounted solar on greenfield sites. Instead, extra capacity should be directed to rooftop solar, especially on all new buildings and existing business premises and large car parks (including the large one at Blenheim Palace). Meanwhile, there is certainly space for a number of wind turbines, sensitively placed away from residential areas. There may even be opportunities for more local hydro capacity.

These suggestions fall within a larger recommendation that the Local Authorities in the county together produce a collective and coherent land use strategy, which would necessarily include an allocation for new affordable housing in the most suitable and sustainable locations -- chosen by the Councils and local residents, rather than dictated by landowners and developers.

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