

FOREVER FIELDS celebrates our precious lands

Thank you to Anthony Thompson, whose vision and backing orchestrated 'The Forever Fields Project' (www.foreverfields.co.uk) that culminated in an Art Exhibition. On 24th–26th November, more than 1,100 people visited the art exhibition held at Worton Hall by the Forever Fields project team. Professional and amateur artists created 160 works of art, including paintings, photography, sculpture, audio-visual work, poetry and prose – all celebrating our local green spaces, which are under direct threat from the Botley West power station proposal. Collectively, the artists spoke of their commitment to our fields, to our wild places, to our settlements and to the biodiversity of nature.

It became very clear during the exhibition that visitors were united with the artists in their rejection of the Botley West proposal. They could not see how the sacrifice of 11 miles of countryside – 75% of it on green belt land – to a single industrial development of 2.5 million ground-mounted solar panels can be justified, especially when alternatives, such as wind power, produce more electricity without harming vital food production. They saw financial greed, rather than a sustainable energy strategy being developed.

Anthony commissioned 'CONNECTED' a willow sculpture by Andy Goodwin of 'Willow Coppice' (www.willowcoppice.com). As the centre piece of the show, the two interlocking 3 metre willow circles expressed the interdependence of 'Humans' and 'Nature' and how we need to maintain the ecological balance forever.



A large scale video installation by Charlotte Holmes, also of 'Willow Coppice' had recorded the movements and sounds of wind in the crops and grasses, rainwater and birdsong and ran throughout the exhibition. 16 minutes long on repeat there was constant reminder of the exhibition focus, with a call of the cuckoo punctuating proceedings.

Before the exhibition opened, all the artworks were photographed and recorded for an archive. If Botley West goes ahead, it will last 40+ years before it is dismantled and the land relinquished. The archive will show how the landscape looked, felt and sounded, and what it meant to the people living, working and walking in it. It can be used to guide future custodians of the land as they help to repair the damage. The

Forever Fields team is working on the best way to retain the archive, and how make it freely and publicly accessible. Details will be shared in due course.

The exhibition was a resounding success – but there is work to be done yet; our fields remain at risk. Watch this space! We will let you know what we are planning next and how you can take part. You can contact us with any feedback or queries at: foreverfieldsproject@gmail.com



NEWS REPORTS ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

WITNEY RADIO

Listen to this interview given by Sally Thompson and Hannah Farncombe about Forever Fields.

<https://www.mixcloud.com/witneyradio/wrfm-community-matters-the-forever-fields-exhibition/>

MERIDIAN NEWS

Video and Interviews.

<https://www.itv.com/news/meridian/2023-11-26/oxfordshire-artists-fight-plans-for-europes-biggest-solar-farm>

Oxfordshire artists fight Botley West Solar Farm with country views

Reporter Tom Hughes

WITH sweeping views of fields and meadows, hedgerows and wildflowers, an exhibition of paintings going on show this weekend may appear to be just another display of local art.

But while the pictures of Oxfordshire rural life are beautiful, the show has a serious message – one which the artists insist could see the destruction of the very scenes on show.

The Forever Fields Project Team Open Art Exhibition is a celebration of the countryside that could be lost under solar panels if plans for the massive Botley West solar farm are built.

The show at Worton Hall, near Cassington, this Saturday and Sunday (November 25-26) features dozens of pictures, photographs and other works by local artists concerned about losing the very landscapes they love to a development which they say will eat up 3,400 acres of fields – equivalent to 2,571 football pitches or five square miles.

“It became important to capture images and feelings about these fields before they were lost to the solar panels and to create an archive of all the material generated,” organisers said.

“This would mean that, if this behemoth of a project is given the go ahead, that the developer (PVDP) and the Blenheim Estate, cannot try to avoid the responsibility to restore fields back to how they are now in 40 years’ time.

“The Forever Fields project was also designed to enable the affected individuals and communities to express our feelings about the scale of the threat we are all facing. Over the last few months, artists have submitted work to illustrate their love for the meadows and fields that will be lost

Artists, young and old – ranging in age from three to 90 – include novice, amateur and professional artists who have submitted watercolours, acrylics and oils, but also photography, sculpture, poetry, music and embroidery.

It also includes an immersive film ‘Pause Summer’ by Charlotte Holmes.

A willow coppice sculpture by Andy Goodwin is a focal piece for the exhibition

The result is an evocative body of work that provides a tangible expression of the community’s emotions and fear for what could be lost.

After this weekend’s exhibition, the work will form an archive of the landscape as a record for future generations.

Anthony Thompson, a driving force behind the project, says: “Forever Fields is reflecting how the community feels about the prospect of losing huge swathes of green countryside on its doorstep.

“The impact on mental health, amenity and community will be devastating. It shows how as human beings we need to be able to walk and breathe within green space. The importance to our health and wellbeing cannot be underestimated.

“The developer has not explained that the reality is that it will remove almost all the green space available in the parishes concerned. For example, in the parish of Hanborough, Botley West represents almost 30 per cent of all the space in the parish.

“Green Belt in particular should not be sacrificed in this way when there are clear alternatives. This project would set a terrible precedent for all the UK. It is disingenuous for the developer to say that this proposal will benefit the local community. Botley West is not a Community Solar Farm. It is a Utility Scale Power Station. It is the wrong proposal in the wrong place at the wrong time for the wrong reasons.

Blenheim should pull the plans.”

Artist Henrietta Batchelor said: "I painted a field just south of Bladon, which will be covered in solar panels if the Botley West project goes ahead.

"I was cycling by early on May morning and thought the view of hawthorn bushes covered in blossom, and the field beyond with growing wheat, would be gone forever if the project goes ahead."

Alice Walker, who has opened Mill Street Arts in Eynsham, contributed a painting which depicts one of the Wharf Stream Meadows near Eynsham Lock.

She says: "I wanted to show the beautiful biodiversity of plants and the delicate balance of the ecosystem which will be jeopardised and lost if it is dug up and replanted with solar panels.

"There is no research evidence to show that solar farms are a win for biodiversity. Like many others I walk daily in this area; the act of being out in nature connects me to the planet and to myself. We can use this awareness to guide our actions, to avoid further harm and instead work in harmony with the ecosystem."

Cumnor Churchyard, Barbara Payne

Barbara Payne from Cumnor painted the village churchyard. It was there she learned to ring the church bells across acres of beautiful woods, farmland and reservoir.

"If Botley West goes ahead, the church will instead overlook a power substation the size of five football pitches and the great swathe of the southern section of the solar farm, all fenced off from people and animals," she says.

"It's not just fields that are affected by the threat of a giant power station. It's villages and the heritage of communities."



Wildflowers by Hannah Farncombe

Hannah Farncombe painted a summer grass field at Denmans Farm, Cumnor. She said: "The intensity of nature's colour in the evening sun after a day of thundery rain will be lost under black glass and metal.

View by Ruth Atherstone

“This is a community project, and our exhibition shows how strongly people in the people feel about the power station being built here, the loss of access to walks in the green fields and meadows around us, and the impact on our mental health.”

Consultation starts on solar farm plans - but some fear it will 'ruin Christmas'

Developers PVDP and the Blenheim Estate, on which the solar farm will be partly built have defended the Botley West scheme. A Blenheim spokesman said: “The merits of this proposal remain clear and the case for us all to increase the number of sustainable energy initiatives is only getting stronger.”

PVDP said: “We remain committed to developing a scheme that could deliver approximately 840MW of renewable energy and make a significant contribution towards delivering energy security for the UK and achieving Net Zero targets.”

ITV MERIDIAN NEWS

Oxfordshire artists fight Botley West solar farm with Forever Fields exhibition

Reporter: Mike Pearce

Hundreds of people have been protesting against plans to build the largest solar farm in Europe in Oxfordshire.



The [Botley West Solar Farm](#) would be the size of 2,000 football pitches and provide much of the power needed for the county. The plan is for solar panels in three separate areas around Botley, Blenheim and Eynsham.

The area covered would be the size of Heathrow but developers say much of it would not be visible because of hedges planted and other measures.

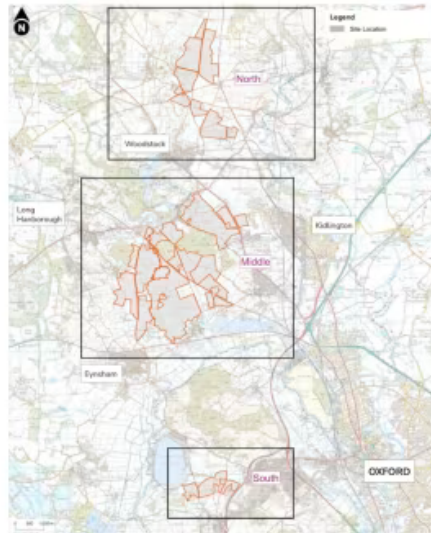
A major new consultation will be held next month with public events in key places affected in the areas it would be built around.

The solar farm would power 330,000 homes and if approved work will start in 2025 and be complete two years later. It will include between two to two and a half million solar panels.

Map showing the planned sites
Credit: PVDP

Local people have this weekend attended an art exhibition called Forever Fields at Worton Hall near Cassington, to show areas of beauty they say would be destroyed.

The organisers said it would showcase creative works from individuals and communities that wished to express their feelings about the potential loss of fields to solar panels.



Photovolt Development Partners said that during the community events residents would have opportunities to talk with the project team and submit feedback.