

# Calls for reduced size of Botley West solar farm plans

3rd June

By [Esme Kenney](#) Local Democracy Reporter

**[West Oxfordshire District Council](#) have called for a significantly reduced scale of plans for Europe's biggest solar farm, which would span across 15 rural villages in the district.**

Botley West Solar Farm would cover 3,450 acres of land near Botley, Woodstock and Kidlington, which is mostly owned by Blenheim, under the existing plans.

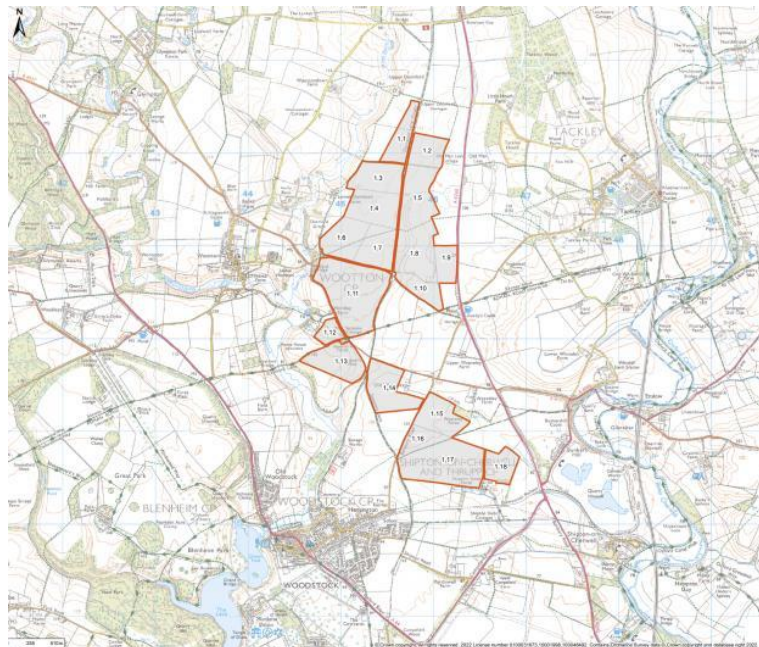
Developers Photovolt Development Partners (PVDP) say the solar farm will generate 840 megawatts (MW) of renewable energy to approximately 330,000 homes in the county.

The scheme has caused a great deal of controversy regarding the impact it would have on heritage, the green belt, and RAF Brize Norton and London Oxford Airport in Kidlington.

The sheer size of the project means it will go to Energy and Net Zero Secretary Ed Miliband, rather than the district council, for decision.

The council will send their written representation and local impact report, which details their views on the plans, to the planning inspectorate as the scheme undergoes the examination stage.

The Development Control Committee discussed their response at their meeting yesterday, (Monday, June 2).



**(Image: WODC)**

Their written response highlights while the council “supports the development of appropriate renewable energy schemes” in West Oxfordshire and has a good record of doing so, it “cannot be to the significant detriment of historic, built and environmental assets and West Oxfordshire’s communities, especially where impacts could be mitigated”.

The response sets out that the council objects to the scheme in its current form and calls for certain areas of the proposed development should be removed in order to reduce damage to the landscape, heritage and soil.

It says that the current form of the scheme “would be transformative to the detriment of many of the special and protected characteristics that make West Oxfordshire such a special place to live in”.

It adds: “It is with some regret that the council is not able to be more supportive, but the scheme as proposed will result in major harm lasting for a generation.”

Speaking at the meeting, the leader of the council Andy Graham said he was “disappointed” that the developer had not incorporated the council’s previous suggestions into their proposal.

He added that the council felt “short-changed” by the decision being sent to the planning inspectorate rather than the decision being made by them.

Councillors voted unanimously to send the written representation with some amendments and the local impact report to the planning inspectorate.



**(Image: Ed Nix)**

Speaking after the meeting, Professor Alex Rogers, chair of the Stop Botley West community group, said: “Our supporters are highly impressed by [council] officers’ forensic assessment of the likely impact of the proposed industrial-scale solar power station.

“We fully agree with WODC that ‘there are concerns that the impact on the Green Belt, upon Blenheim Palace’s World Heritage Site status, upon a number of heritage assets in the form of archaeology, listed buildings and conservation areas, upon the quality of the landscape and rights of way network and upon wildlife and habitats, mean that the scale and extent of the scheme are not acceptable’.

“This is supported by their recommendation that the footprint of the proposed solar farm in their district should be slashed by about 70 per cent, from more than 2,500 acres to just over 740 acres.”

However, member of the public Jonathan Ford said at the meeting: “Every field that is being removed from Botley West is like beds being removed from the John Radcliffe.

“Botley West is a once in a lifetime opportunity.

"Climate change is the issue of our time. We need to think big, act fast, and make the most of our limited finances.

"The proposed development does all three."

Mark Owen-Lloyd director at Photovolt, said: "We do not recognise the suggestion that we have not engaged.

"We have met with the planning officers at West Oxfordshire District Council on a monthly basis for the past two years.

"Furthermore, we have made significant changes to the project following engagement with and feedback from local communities.

"These changes include increasing the number of fields with no panels to approximately one-third of the site, significantly increasing the size of the community benefit fund and increasing the buffer zone between panels and residences.

"It should be pointed out that if Botley West is approved, it would still only represent one-fifth of the total renewables capacity Oxfordshire requires, as determined by West Oxfordshire District Council alongside the county's other local authorities when they declared a climate emergency in 2019."

The official examination stage, which involves written representations, roundtable discussions, informal hearings and formal hearings, began on May 13 and will continue for six months.

After this stage, the Planning Inspectorate will make a recommendation on the plans, which will be considered by the secretary of state.