

Thursday, 22 May 2025

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## DEVELOPMENT CONTROL COMMITTEE

You are summoned to a meeting of the Development Control Committee which will be held at the Council Offices, Woodgreen, Witney, Oxfordshire OX28 1NB on **Monday, 2 June 2025 at 2.00 pm.**



Giles Hughes  
Chief Executive

To: Members of the Development Control Committee

Councillors: Andy Goodwin (Chair), Michael Brooker (Vice-Chair), Julian Cooper, Lidia Arciszewska, Mike Baggaley, Andrew Beaney, Steve Cosier, Adam Clements, Rachel Crouch, Roger Faulkner, Phil Godfrey, David Jackson, Nick Leverton, Andrew Lyon, Michele Mead, David Melvin, Elizabeth Poskitt, Andrew Prosser, Geoff Saul, Sarah Veasey, Mark Walker, Adrian Walsh, Alistair Wray and Genny Early

Recording of Proceedings – The law allows the public proceedings of Council, Executive, and Committee Meetings to be recorded, which includes filming as well as audio-recording. Photography is also permitted. By participating in this meeting, you are consenting to be filmed.

As a matter of courtesy, if you intend to record any part of the proceedings please let the Democratic Services officers know prior to the start of the meeting.

# AGENDA

1. **Apologies for Absence**  
To receive any apologies for absence from members of the Committee. The quorum for the Committee is 6 members.
2. **Declarations of Interest**  
To receive any declarations from Members of the Committee on any items to be considered at the meeting
3. **Minutes of Previous Meeting (Pages 5 - 8)**  
To approve the minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 21 May 2025.
4. **Botley West Examination - Submission of Written Representation and Local Impact Report (Pages 9 - 36)**  
Purpose:  
To present an overview of the draft Local Impact Report prior to submission to the Examining Authority and to agree the Written Representation also to be submitted to the Examining Authority by 4 June 2025.

## Recommendation:

That Development Control Committee resolves to:

- 1) Note the executive summary of the Draft Joint Local Impact Report
- 2) Endorse the draft Written Representation, subject to any amendments as may be agreed at the Development Control Committee,
- 3) Delegate authority to the Planning Policy Manager, in consultation with the Chair of the Committee and the Executive Member for Planning, to make any necessary amendments to the Written Representation and Joint Local Impact Report prior to submission to the Examining Authority
- 4) Delegate authority to the Planning Policy Manager to issue the Written Representation and full Local Impact Report (as may be amended) to the Examining Authority, before the deadline for response.

## **Public Engagement**

In accordance with the Council's public speaking rules, any members of the public wishing to make a representation on any of the applications in this agenda must contact [democratic.services@westoxon.gov.uk](mailto:democratic.services@westoxon.gov.uk) or telephone customer services on 01993 861000 by 12 noon the Friday before the meeting.

Six minutes is allocated for each of the following groups to address the committee:

- Those objecting to the application
- The relevant parish or town council
- Those supporting the application, including the applicant
- The ward member(s)

For item 4, Botley West Examination, the Chair has agreed in principle to extend the time allowed to six minutes per group and to allow any Councillors who are not members of the Committee to speak under the ward member slot.

(END)

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## WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

### Minutes of the meeting of the **Development Control Committee**

Held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Woodgreen, Witney, Oxfordshire OX28 1NB  
at 2.01 pm on **Wednesday, 21 May 2025**

#### PRESENT

Councillors: Julian Cooper (Chair) Andy Goodwin, Michael Brooker (Vice-Chair), Lidia Arciszewska, Mike Baggaley, Andrew Beaney, Steve Cosier, Adam Clements, Rachel Crouch, Roger Faulkner, Phil Godfrey, Andy Goodwin, David Jackson, Nick Leverton, Andrew Lyon, David Melvin, Rosie Pearson, Elizabeth Poskitt, Andrew Prosser, Geoff Saul, Sarah Veasey, Alistair Wray, Thomas Ashby and Jane Doughty

Officers: Giles Hughes (Chief Executive Officer), Andrea McCaskie (Director of Governance), Frank Wilson (Group Finance Director - Publica), Phil Martin (Director of Place), Andrew Brown (Head of Democratic and Electoral Services), Ana Prelici (Senior Democratic Services Officer), Anne Learmonth (Democratic Services Officer) and Mathew Taylor (Democratic Services Officer).

#### **I Election of Chair**

The Chair of the Council, Councillor Andrew Coles, opened the meeting

The Committee would be comprised off the following members:

- Lidia Arciszewska
- Mike Baggaley
- Andrew Beaney
- Michael Brooker
- Adam Clements
- Julian Cooper
- Steve Cosier
- Rachel Crouch
- Genny Early
- Roger Faulkner
- Phil Godfrey
- Andy Goodwin
- David Jackson
- Nick Leverton
- Andrew Lyon
- Michele Mead
- David Melvin
- Elizabeth Poskitt
- Andrew Prosser
- Geoff Saul
- Sarah Veasey
- Mark Walker

## Development Control Committee

21/May2025

- Adrian Walsh
- Alistair Wray

The Chair of the Council, Andrew Coles, requested nominations for the position of the Chair of Development Control Committee for the municipal year of 2025-2026. Councillor Mike Brooker nominated Councillor Andy Goodwin for the position of Chair of Development Control, Councillor David Jackson seconded the nomination and the vote was carried.

Council **Resolved** to:

- I. Appoint Councillor Andy Goodwin to the position of Chair of Development Control Committee for the municipal year of 2025-2026.

### 2 Appointment of Vice Chair

The Chair of the Development Control Committee, Councillor Andy Goodwin, requested nominations for the position of the Vice Chair for Development Control Committee for the municipal year of 2025-2026. Councillor Adam Clements nominated Councillor Mike Brooker for the position of Vice Chair of Development Control, Councillor Julian Cooper seconded the nomination and the vote was carried

Council **Resolved** to:

- I. Appoint Councillor Mike Brooker to the position of Vice Chair of the Development Control Committee for the municipal year of 2025-2026.

### 3 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from:

Councillors Mark Walker, Adrian Walsh and Michele Mead.

Councillor Jane Doughty substituted for Councillor Mead.

Councillor Thomas Ashby substituted for Councillor Walsh.

### 4 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest received.

### 5 Minutes of Previous Meeting

Councillor Brooker proposed that the minutes of the meeting held on Monday 24 February 2025 be approved by the Committee. This was seconded by Councillor Rachel Crouch was put to the Vote and agreed.

The Development Control Committee **Resolved** to:

- I. Agree the minutes of the previous meeting held on Monday 24 February 2025.

### **Appointment of Sub Committees Lowlands and Uplands**

The Chair for the Development Control Committee, Councillor Goodwin proposed that Development Control Committee agree to appointment of Sub Committees Lowlands and Upland. Councillor Julian Cooper proposed the appointment of Sub Committees Uplands and Lowlands, this was seconded by Councillor Andrew Beaney was put to the vote and agreed.

The Development Control Committee **resolved** to:

1. Agree that seats on the Lowlands Sub-Committee and the Uplands Sub-Committee will be allocated based on ward rather than political balance, in accordance with Section 17 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989;
2. Appoint the Chair of the Development Control Committee Councillor Andy Goodwin to the Lowlands Sub-Committee and the Uplands Sub-Committee;
3. Appoint Members of the Development Control Committee who represent wards in the Lowlands area of the district to the Lowlands Sub-Committee as set out in the full Council supplement;
4. Appoint Members of the Development Control Committee who represent wards in the Uplands area of the district to the Uplands Sub-Committee as set out in the full Council supplement; Page 17 Agenda Item 6;
5. Agree that the Vice Chair of the Development Control Committee Councillor Mike Brooker will attend meetings of the Sub-Committee they are not appointed to as a non-voting member;
6. Note that any Member of a Member's political group, having undertaken planning training, is permitted to substitute for a Member of a Planning Sub-Committee, in accordance with the wishes of the Member being substituted;
7. Note that the provisions for substitutions on planning committees and sub-committees will be considered by the Constitution Working Group, including specifically whether substitutions should be allowed from outside of a Member's political group.

The following Councillors were appointed to the Uplands Area Planning Sub – Committee:

- Julian Cooper
- Lidia Arciszewska
- David Jackson
- Adam Clements
- Elizabeth Poskitt
- Mike Baggaley
- Roger Faulkner
- Andrew Beaney
- Mark Walker
- Geoff Saul

## Development Control Committee

21/May2025

- Genny Early
- Andy Goodwin (Chair of Development Control).


The following Councillors were appointed to the Lowlands Area Planning Sub - Committee:

- Andy Goodwin
- Phil Godfrey
- Alistair Wray
- David Melvin
- Steve Cosier
- Michele Mead
- Nick Leverton
- Adrian Walsh
- Sarah Veasey
- Michael Brooker
- Andrew Lyon
- Andrew Prosser

The Meeting closed at 2.36 pm

CHAIR



 <p><b>WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL</b></p>	<p><b>WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL</b></p>
<p>Name and date of Committee</p>	<p><b>DEVELOPMENT CONTROL COMMITTEE - 2 JUNE 2025</b></p>
<p>Subject</p>	<p><b>BOTLEY WEST EXAMINATION-SUBMISSION OF WRITTEN REPRESENTATION AND LOCAL IMPACT REPORT</b></p>
<p>Wards affected</p>	<p>All</p>
<p>Accountable member</p>	<p>Councillor Andy Goodwin – Chair of Development Control Committee  Email: <a href="mailto:andy.goodwin@westoxon.gov.uk">andy.goodwin@westoxon.gov.uk</a>  Councillor Hugo Ashton - Executive Member for Planning and Sustainable Development  Email: <a href="mailto:hugo.ashton@westoxon.gov.uk">hugo.ashton@westoxon.gov.uk</a></p>
<p>Accountable officer</p>	<p>Andrea McCaskie - Director of Governance  Email: <a href="mailto:democratic.services@westoxon.gov.uk">democratic.services@westoxon.gov.uk</a></p>
<p>Report author</p>	<p>Andrew Thomson – Planning Policy Manager  Email: <a href="mailto:andrew.thomson@westoxon.gov.uk">andrew.thomson@westoxon.gov.uk</a></p>
<p>Summary/Purpose</p>	<p>To present an overview of the draft Local Impact Report prior to submission to the Examining Authority and to agree the Written Representation also to be submitted to the Examining Authority by 4 June 2025.</p>
<p>Annexes</p>	<p>Annex A – Written Representation  Annex B – Executive summary of Draft Joint Local Impact Report</p>
<p>Recommendation(s)</p>	<p>That Development Control Committee resolves to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Note the executive summary of the Draft Joint Local Impact Report</li> <li>2) Endorse the draft Written Representation, subject to any amendments as may be agreed at the Development Control Committee,</li> </ol>

	<p>3) Delegate authority to the Planning Policy Manager, in consultation with the Chair of the Committee and the Executive Member for Planning, to make any necessary amendments to the Written Representation and Joint Local Impact Report prior to submission to the Examining Authority</p> <p>4) Delegate authority to the Planning Policy Manager to issue the Written Representation and full Local Impact Report (as may be amended) to the Examining Authority, before the deadline for response.</p>
Corporate priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Putting Residents First</li> <li>• A Good Quality of Life for All</li> <li>• A Better Environment for People and Wildlife</li> <li>• Responding to the Climate and Ecological Emergency</li> <li>• Working Together for West Oxfordshire</li> </ul>
Exempt	NO
Consultees/ Consultation	<p>This is a proposal where the Government through PINS is the determining authority and WODC are a consultee. Notwithstanding that Officers have been in extensive engagement with local communities, technical consultees and specialist advisors in reaching the conclusions outlined in the above documents</p>

## **I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- I.1** West Oxfordshire District Council have been invited by the Examining Authority (ExA) to make representations about the Botley West Solar Farm proposals by 4 June 2025.
- I.2** West Oxfordshire District Council have previously made representations about the proposals through two previous rounds of consultation, at the pre-application stage (February 2024 – response to PEIR) and at the pre-examination stage (February 2025 – submission of Relevant Representation).
- I.3** Development Control Committee have endorsed previous representations made about the Botley West Solar Farm proposals (The Proposed Development) prior to submission of the developer's application for Development Consent. It is not clear how previous representations have been taken by the applicant to influence the proposed development, which is now subject to examination by the Planning Inspectorate.
- I.4** Examination of the Botley West proposed development commenced on 13 May 2025.
- I.5** West Oxfordshire District Council have been invited to submit two key documents for consideration by the ExA;
  - The Local Impact Report and;
  - Written Representation
- I.6** The Written Representation and Local Impact Report (LIR) are distinct documents allowing the Council to express information differently. The Local Impact Report (LIR) is a technical document setting out an evidence-based assessment of all the impacts of the proposal, prepared jointly with other local authorities. The Written Representation reflects the Council's view on the application.

### **The Local Impact Report**

- I.7** The Local Impact Report is a written report, giving details of the likely impact of the proposed development on the area. We are encouraged to cover any topics in the LIR that are considered relevant to the impact of the proposed development. It is the means by which our existing body of local knowledge and evidence on local issues can be fully and robustly reported to the Examining Authority.
- I.8** There is no need for the LIR to replicate the applicant's environmental information report or to replicate any assessment already produced in respect of the site, but should draw on existing local knowledge and experience.
- I.9** Importantly, the LIR must be taken into account by the Examining Authority and the Secretary of State in making a decision on whether to grant Development Consent.
- I.10** The report consists of a statement of positive, neutral and negative local impacts, but does not seek to balance the positive and negative impacts. It is the role of the Examining Authority to balance the relevant impacts in making their recommendation.

- I.11 West Oxfordshire District Council is preparing a Joint Local Impact Report in conjunction with the other Oxfordshire Host Authorities (Cherwell District Council, Vale of White Horse District Council and Oxfordshire County Council) affected by the proposed development.
- I.12 The draft Local Impact Report sets out the degree of compliance of the proposed development with the Local Development Plan including the West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2031 and any made Neighbourhood Development Plans relevant to the area. It also provides views on DCO articles, requirements and DCO obligations where relevant.
- I.13 The full LIR remains in draft form at the current time and so an executive summary of the LIR has been appended to this report for the consideration of Development Control Committee.
- I.14 The LIR is structured in the same order and covers the same topics as the applicant's Environmental Statement, with additional chapters covering impacts on minerals resources, public rights of way and aviation activities.
- I.15 The appended LIR summary provides an overview of the topics and impacts considered by the LIR as well as an initial overview as to whether impacts are considered Positive, Negative or Neutral.
- I.16 The intention of the Host Authorities is to continue developing the Local Impact Report during the week up to the proposed submission date of 4 June, to ensure that it is robust and comprehensive and adequately assesses all impacts that are recognised as being relevant to the proposed development.
- I.17 At present, the assessment of impacts indicates the predominantly negative impacts that are likely to arise from the proposed development as submitted for examination.

### **The Written Representation**

- I.18 The Written Representation provides an opportunity for the Council to elaborate on the merits of the application. Although the assessment of impacts set out in the LIR provides useful context and an understanding of the location and significance of impacts relating to the proposed development, the Written Representation goes further, in that it definitively sets out the Council's conclusion on the merits of the proposal and its view on the suitability of the proposed development.
- I.19 West Oxfordshire District Council have maintained a consistent approach in responding to the proposed development throughout the DCO process, emphasising support for the development of renewable energy in West Oxfordshire, but not at any cost to the environment, landscape and heritage of the area. The Council has sought to highlight areas of particular concern, with a view that the scheme could potentially be amended to minimise harms and mitigate impacts of the proposed development.
- I.20 The Written Representation focuses on the parts of the proposed development within the administrative area of West Oxfordshire alone. It takes a map-based approach to identify

specific land parcels where in the view of the council, the most significant, spatial impacts are likely to arise in terms of heritage, landscape, ecology, flood risk and agricultural land.

## **2. Background**

- 2.1** Photovolt Development Partners (PVDP) are proposing a new solar farm in the west of Oxfordshire called Botley West Solar Farm. It is proposed that Botley West Solar Farm could deliver 840 Megawatts (MW) of clean affordable power to the National Grid.
- 2.2** The proposed Botley West Solar Farm will connect into a new National Grid substation, to be built and located west of Botley, hence the name Botley West.
- 2.3** Proposals are for a site area of approximately 1,300 hectares, excluding connecting cable routes, within the administrative areas of West Oxfordshire, Cherwell and Vale of White Horse. Within the site, proposals are for installation of solar panels and other infrastructure on approximately 890 hectares, leaving areas for mitigation and enhancements for the local landscape, wildlife and recreational use.
- 2.4** The proposed solar farm falls within the definition of a 'nationally significant infrastructure project' (NSIP) under Section 14(1)(a) and 15(2) of the Planning Act 2008 ('the Act') as the construction of a generating station with a capacity of more than 50 MW.
- 2.5** As the proposed NSIP is located within West Oxfordshire, WODC is regarded as a host authority for the purpose of the Development Consent Order process.
- 2.6** The DCO process comprises six stages, with requirements for stakeholder engagement and assessment, as well as the preparation of supporting documentation at each stage.
- 2.7** The application is currently at the Examination Stage, which commenced on 13 May 2025
- 2.8** The Examining Authority in their 'Rule 6' Letter, set out a draft Examination Timetable with a series of deadlines for the submission Written Representations and the Local Impact Report. Deadline 1 for the submission of Local Impact Reports from relevant Local Authorities and Written Representations is set for 4 June 2025.
- 2.9** Coordination of the responses over a wide range of issues and multiple authorities has been a complex and time-consuming issue. However this point in the process is where WODC sets out its formal position to the scheme as will be examined by PINS.
- 2.10** Officers have concerns that despite making a series of suggestions as to how the scheme could be improved, where additional information was required to enable a full assessment and where mitigation was either inadequate or inappropriate, that the developer has not taken on board many of these suggestions. The scheme design has seemingly been dictated more by land ownership and maximisation of site area aims rather than on reducing the severity of impacts, potential to provide betterment, legacy post the development etc.
- 2.11** As a consequence of the lack of meaningful amendments your officers, alongside those of the other authorities, consider that the impacts of the scheme as currently framed are excessive and unduly harmful even when applying the generally positive policy framework. In

particular, there are concerns that the impact on the Green Belt, upon Blenheim Palace WHS, 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 individually and cumulatively the scale and extent of the scheme is not acceptable.

- 2.12** Mitigation in terms of “block screening” will of itself reduce landscape quality and fails to offer a legacy post the development. There remain issues of noise, drainage, mineral sterilisation etc. that are not sufficiently clear for an informed judgement to be made. In order to reduce the impacts to a level where an appropriate balance between energy production and the harms arising it is considered that the scheme needs to be reduced and a map has been produced to aid PINS in assessing /agreeing that, as framed, the scheme should not be supported

### **3. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

- 3.1** None- the process requires the host authorities to provide comments to aid the Examiners in assessing the merits of the case and this has a fixed deadline. Members could however decide that some of the assessments within the matrix or the wording of the representations should be varied.

### **4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1** Can be met from existing budgets and the PPA negotiated with the developer.

### **5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1** The Council is not the determining authority but as with all planning matters is bound to act reasonably.

### **6. RISK ASSESSMENT**

- 7.** N/A

### **8. EQUALITIES IMPACT**

- N/A

### **9. CLIMATE AND ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCIES IMPLICATIONS**

- The proposals would, if approved by PINS, offer substantial benefits in terms of reducing carbon emissions but as currently framed these benefits are considered to be outweighed by other ecological, heritage, policy and landscape harms

### **10. BACKGROUND PAPER**

(END)

**Planning and Strategic Housing**

Reply to: Andrew Thomson

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E-mail: [andrew.thomson@westoxon.gov.uk](mailto:andrew.thomson@westoxon.gov.uk)



**Your Ref: EN010147-000009**

**Our Ref:**

**Date: 22 May 2025**

Dear Sirs,

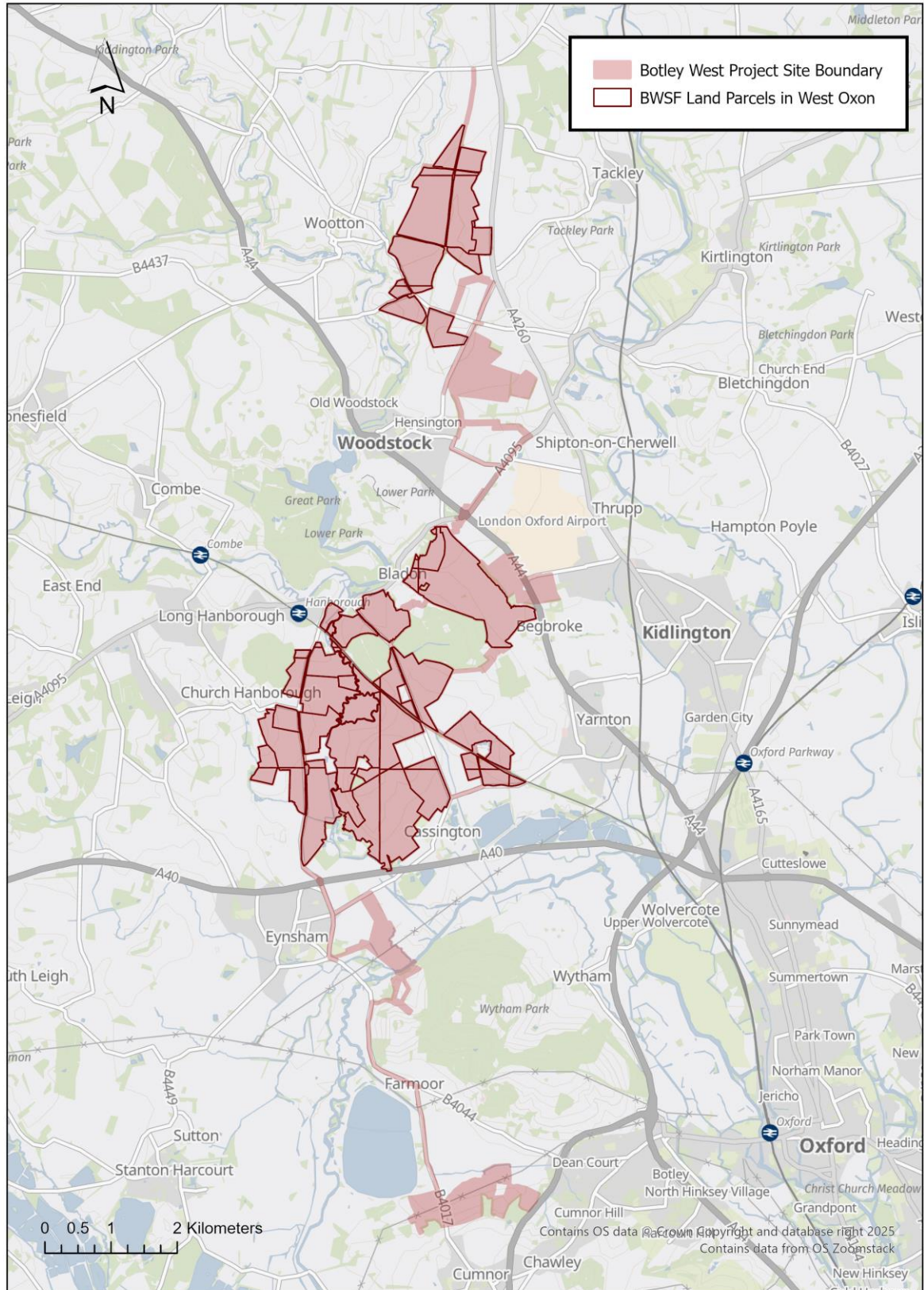
**RE: WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL WRITTEN REPRESENTATION TO BOTLEY WEST SOLAR FARM PROPOSALS**

1. West Oxfordshire District Council welcome the opportunity to respond the Botley West Solar Farm and to engage in the Examination of the proposed development.
2. We wish to cross refer to the Local Impact Report prepared jointly by the Oxfordshire Host Authorities in support of this representation, as it is through the report that WODC explore the impacts of the proposed scheme and draw our conclusions about the suitability and sustainability of the development.
3. West Oxfordshire District Council wishes to make clear that it supports the development of appropriate renewable energy schemes in the District and has a good record of support for such infrastructure. In so doing the Council has placed significant importance on the protection of the environment to ensure that such proposals have thus far retained the high quality landscape, heritage and soil resources of the District.
4. The position with Botley West Proposed Development is that the Council recognises and endorses the need for increased renewable energy generation in the District, but that cannot be to the significant detriment of historic, built and environmental assets and West Oxfordshire's communities, especially where the impacts could be mitigated, so as to reduce them to more acceptable levels.
5. We consider that the Botley West proposals could be made acceptable in planning terms, but owing to the range and magnitude of detrimental impacts likely to arise from these proposals in their current form, West Oxfordshire District Council objects to the proposals as currently framed.
6. There is a concern that the extent and magnitude of the harms arising from the proposed development have been underplayed by the applicant, in that they have been characterised as 'temporary' or not significant for a range of impacts. The length of time that the development would be in place, coupled with the ongoing impacts post development (e.g. of the screen planting and ability to fully decommission elements of the scheme) are such that the Council questions aspects of the project assessment methodology.



7. The proposals, as a result of their scale and intervisibility, would fundamentally alter the landscape character over a significant area, recognised as being of particular quality and sensitivity to change.
8. The Council have consistently identified areas of the proposed development that should be removed from the project, particularly areas proposed for panel coverage, in order to reduce harms to landscape, heritage and soil resources. The Council have prepared a series of maps to more clearly identify the parts of the proposed development where the harmful impacts are likely to be most significant and to communicate these to the Examining Authority.

**Map I - Project Area and West Oxfordshire Land Parcels**



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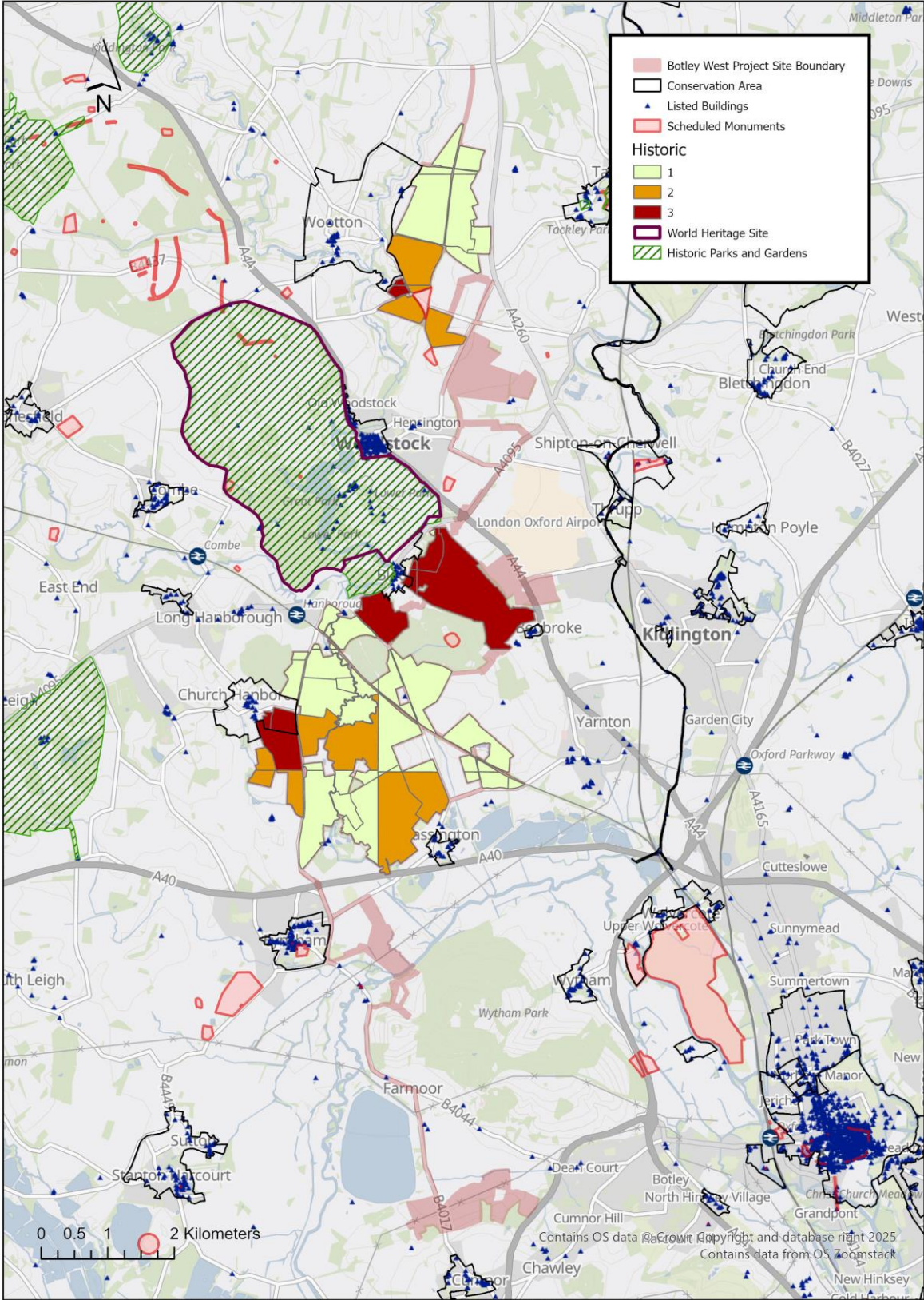


9. Map 1 indicates the extent of the project area with land parcels proposed for development in West Oxfordshire outlined. The land parcels outlined on the map align with the applicant's Land Plans document [APP-007].
10. West Oxfordshire District Council have considered the significance of impacts likely to arise from the Proposed Development, in relation to a series of impact pathways and for each individual land parcel, to make recommendations for project changes and mitigations, to address the impacts of development.
11. The Council recognises that the scale and location of the proposed development has been dictated by the availability of land and a suitable grid connection. The Applicant has stated that they consider it rational to propose a scheme which delivers the greatest possible decarbonisation and energy security benefit from the available land and available grid connection [PDB-014] and that this is the approach which the Applicant has taken to the location and design of the Project.
12. West Oxfordshire District Council consider that the scale of the proposed development should be dramatically reduced to address the harmful impacts of the scheme.
13. We consider each impact pathway below in line with the chapters of the applicant's Environmental Statement and the Host Authorities Local Impact Report.
  - Historic Environment
  - Landscape and Visual Impact
  - Ecology and Nature Conservation
  - Hydrology and Flood Risk
  - Noise and Vibration
  - Agricultural Land

#### **Historic Environment**

14. West Oxfordshire District Council's concerns relating to the impact on the historic environment primarily relate to changes within the setting of important heritage assets.
15. The Botley West scheme proposals are spread over a large expanse of the Oxfordshire countryside, which contains assets of the highest significance.
16. As the significance of a heritage asset derives not only from its physical presence but also from its setting, careful consideration should be given to the impact of large-scale solar farms which depending on their scale, design and prominence, may cause substantial harm to the significance of heritage assets.
17. West Oxfordshire District Council have considered which land parcels contribute most to the setting and significance of heritage assets, with particular regard to Blenheim Palace World Heritage Site, Grade I Listed Buildings at Cassington and Church Hanborough and Conservations Areas at Wootton, Bladon, Church Hanborough and Cassington. The wider setting of these heritage assets include the topography, natural and built environment, land use and visual relationships, social and cultural practices. Such elements define the landscape character of the District and the Council consider that fundamental changes to the landscape character will therefore harm heritage assets of the highest significance.
18. Map 2 below indicates the land parcels that we consider contribute most significantly to the setting of heritage assets. Red parcels (Score 3) are those within or directly adjacent to a heritage asset, where development would have a direct impact on the setting of an asset. Orange parcels (Score 2) are those where the setting of a significant asset can be viewed from the surrounding countryside and where development would impact the landscape setting of an asset. Green Parcels (Score 1) form part of the wider countryside setting of heritage assets, but the topography of the countryside in these locations reduces the contribution that these parcels make to the setting of the assets.

Map 2 - Significance of Heritage Impacts in West Oxfordshire

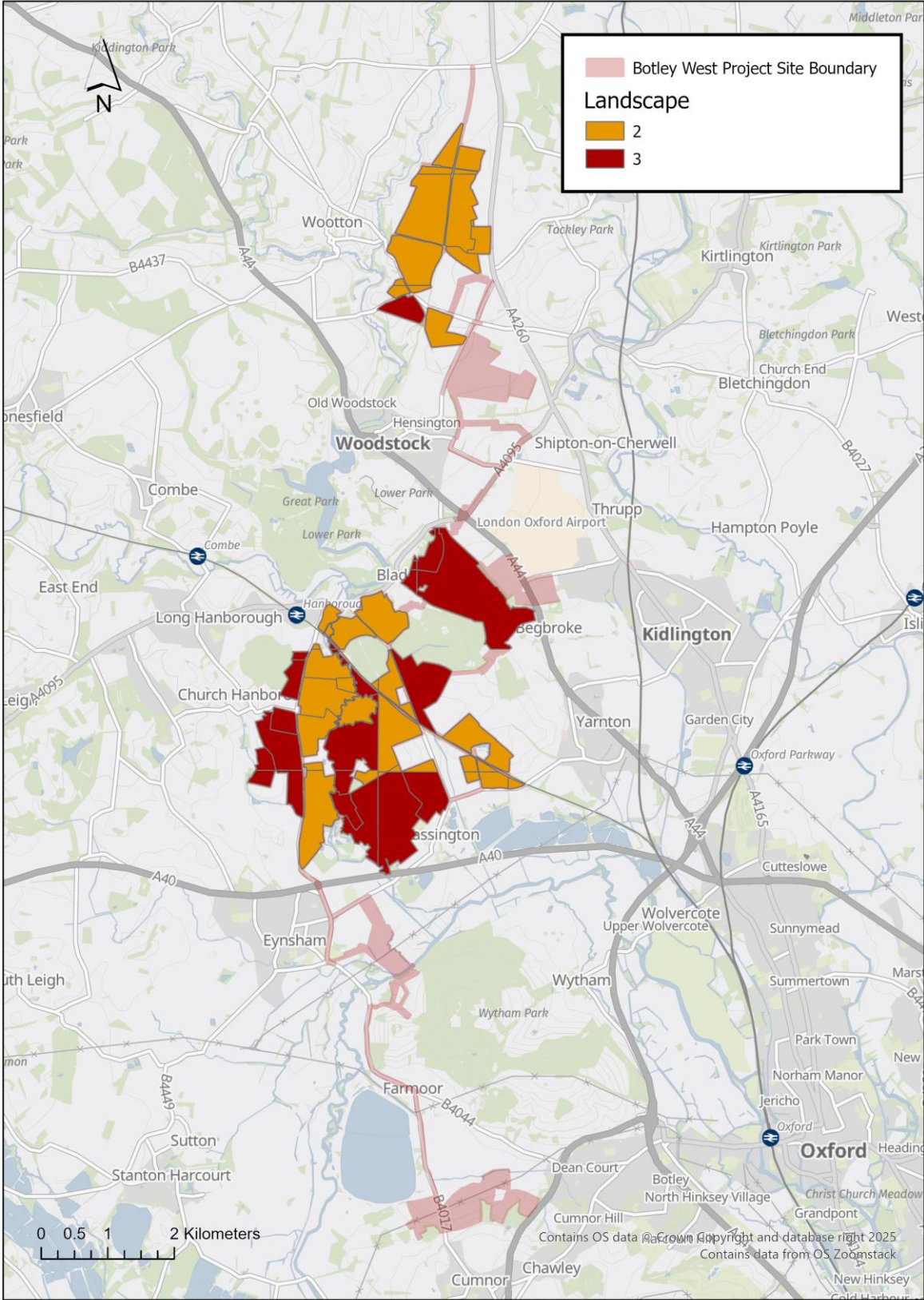


## **Landscape and Visual Impact**

19. West Oxfordshire District Council consider that a proposed development at this scale will fundamentally change the landscape character of the area from rural, arable fields to a semi-industrial landscape for the lifetime of the project. The Council consider that the Applicant's assessment of landscape impacts significantly underestimates the impact on local landscape character and views.
20. WODC seek to conserve and enhance the quality, character and distinctiveness of West Oxfordshire's natural environment, including its landscape, cultural and historic value, tranquillity, geology, countryside, soil and biodiversity.
21. We provide a detailed description of how and where it considers the impacts on the landscape to be understated in the Local Impact Report and the concerns it has with the applicant's methodology for assessing impacts.
22. Our Written Representation seeks to draw the Examining Authority's attention to those areas of the proposed development where the landscape impact is considered to be most significant and where removal of development from land parcels would reduce the landscape impacts of the proposed development.
23. Areas indicated in red on the map (Score 3) below indicate areas of exposed, elevated and sloping land where the proposed development will be more prominent in the landscape. The council requests that these areas land parcels should be excluded from development to minimise harm to the landscape character of the area.
24. In addition to the impacts of the proposal on the landscape character of the area, the proposed development will result in significant visual impacts on sensitive receptors, primarily users of the public rights of way network (PRoW) across the project area. The development will, by its scale and nature, adversely affect the experience of PRoW users travelling through the area. In many locations, PRoW users will either travel between large areas of solar infrastructure or walk through corridors of hedgerows or tree belts with no, or very limited, views of the surrounding landscape.
25. The Applicant has proposed a range of mitigation measures including planting of hedgerows to screen views of the solar farm from the wider countryside. The Council consider that the removal of panels from land parcels adjacent to public rights of way will be much more beneficial in reducing the visual impacts of the proposed development and protecting views of the wider countryside.
26. The Council consider that in its current form, the proposed development would significantly detrimentally impact the public rights of way network across the project area both in terms of landscape and visual harm and the degradation of routes for the benefit of the local community.



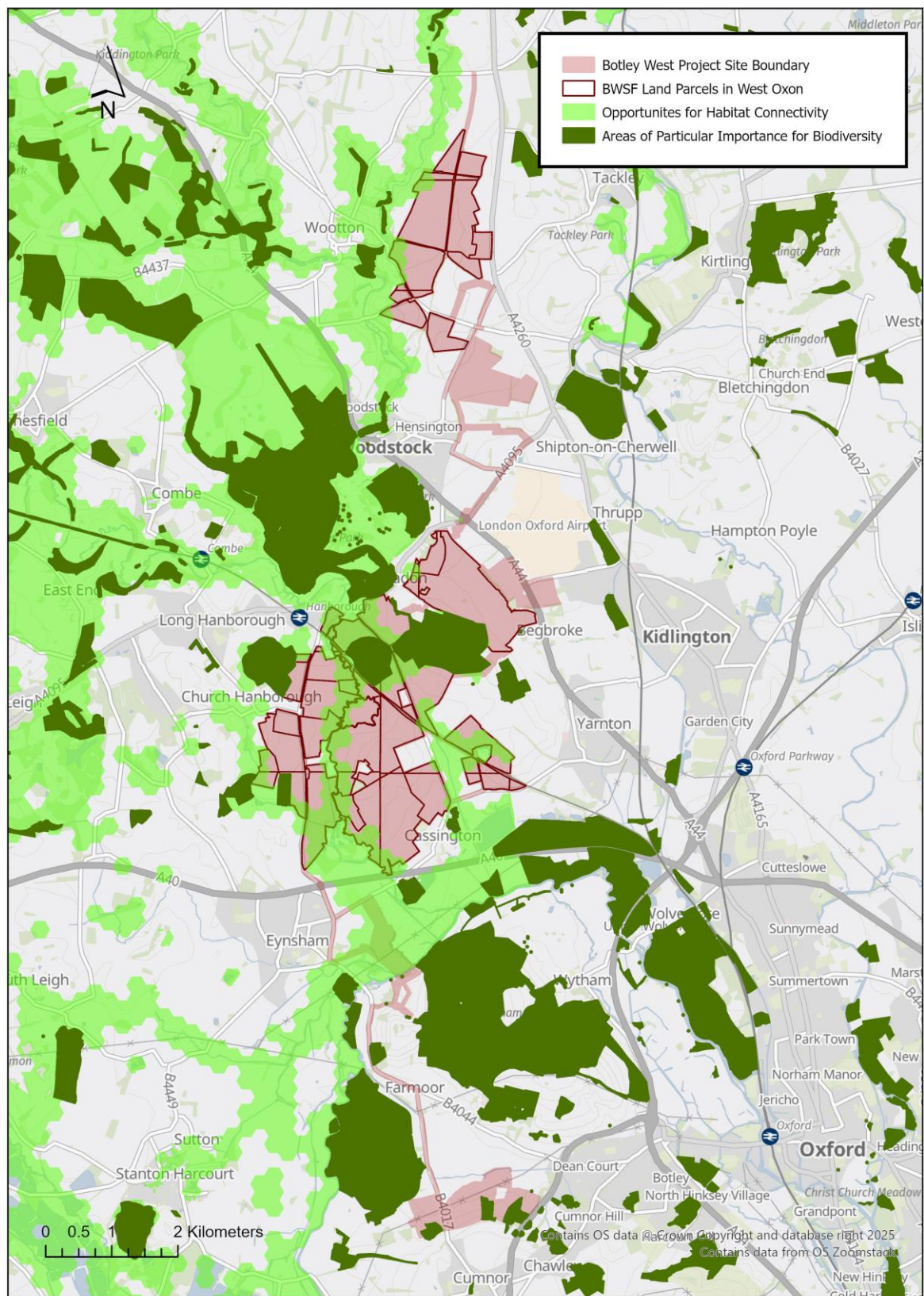
Map 3 - Significance of Landscape Impacts in West Oxfordshire



## Ecology and nature conservation

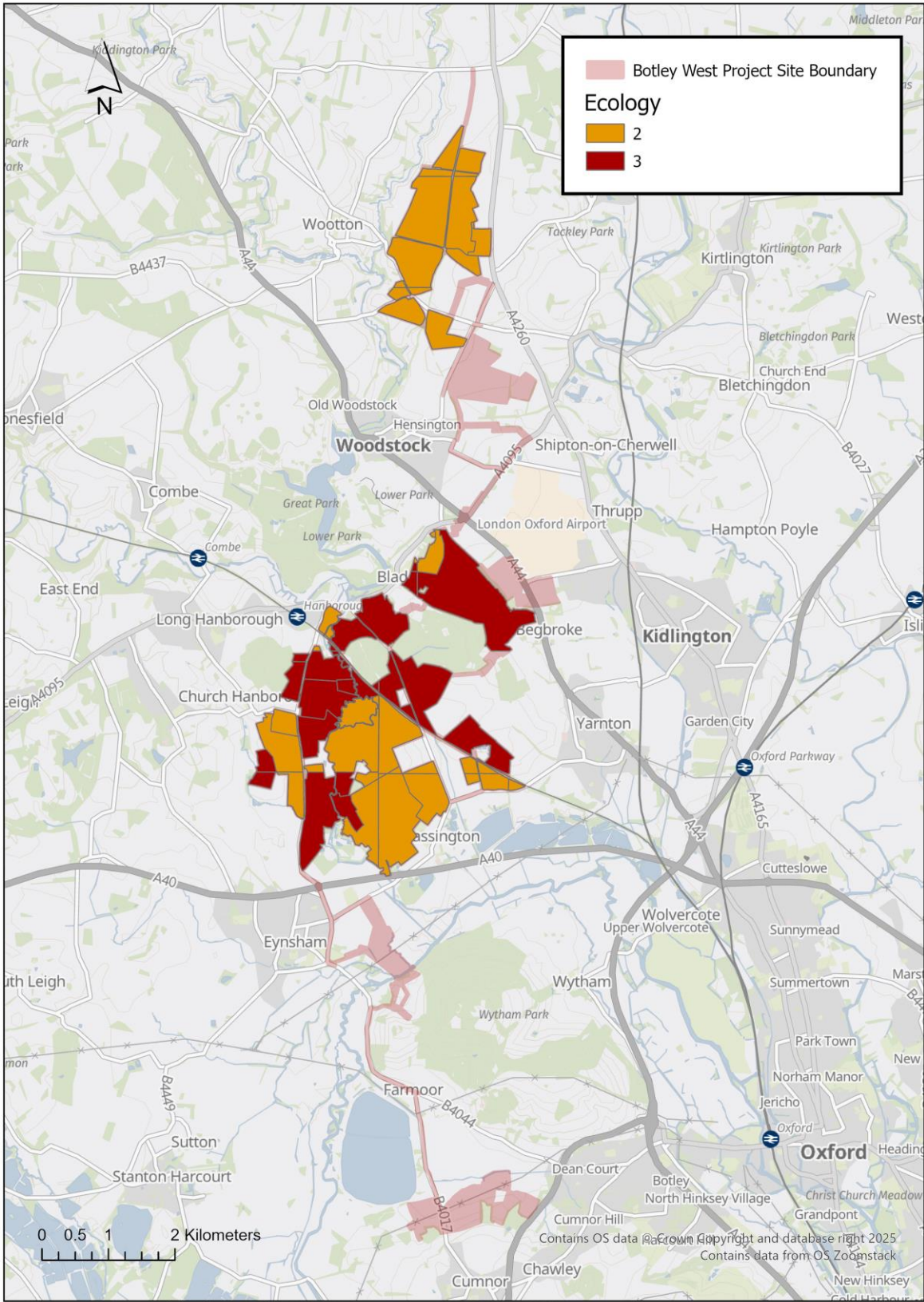
27. West Oxfordshire District Council's assessment of ecological impacts arising from the proposed development is detailed in the Local Impact Report.
28. The LIR identifies a range of predominantly negative impacts to protected habitats and species across the project area which will likely require further mitigation, enhancement or changes to the project, in order to avoid or minimise harms.
29. These include impacts on bat populations, aquatic mammals and great crested newts, for which inadequate survey work has been undertaken by the Applicant and impacts on farmland birds and Ancient Woodlands, for which inadequate mitigation of impacts is currently provided.
30. WODC consider that the project could be amended to deliver further enhancement to trees and woodlands which would deliver additional benefits for protected species. There are several Ancient Woodlands within and adjacent to the site. Ancient Woodlands are irreplaceable habitats and any deterioration of these habitats must be for wholly exceptional reasons and unavoidable.
31. WODC consider that a 50m buffer adjacent to Ancient Woodlands would reduce the impact of edge effects of the proposed development and contribute to the protection of Annex II bat species associated with woodland (maternity roosts for both Bechstein's and Barbastelle bats). Ideally however, opportunities should be sought to connect woodland and contribute to the aims of the emerging Local Nature Recovery Strategy.
32. More appropriate mitigation for the impact on farmland birds needs to be provided within the project, as the proposed provision of skylark plots is inadequate and will likely result in the displacement of farmland birds to the periphery of the development or more open areas within the project. There may be opportunities to manage areas of archaeological interest for the benefit of farmland birds if such areas are to be excluded from development.
33. Red areas on Map 5 (Score 3) indicate areas of the proposed development that should be removed to mitigate the impacts on important ecological features and to improve ecological connectivity through the landscape. Orange areas indicate where enhanced mitigation is likely to be required to mitigate impacts on protected species, particularly farmland birds.







Map 5 - Ecological Impacts



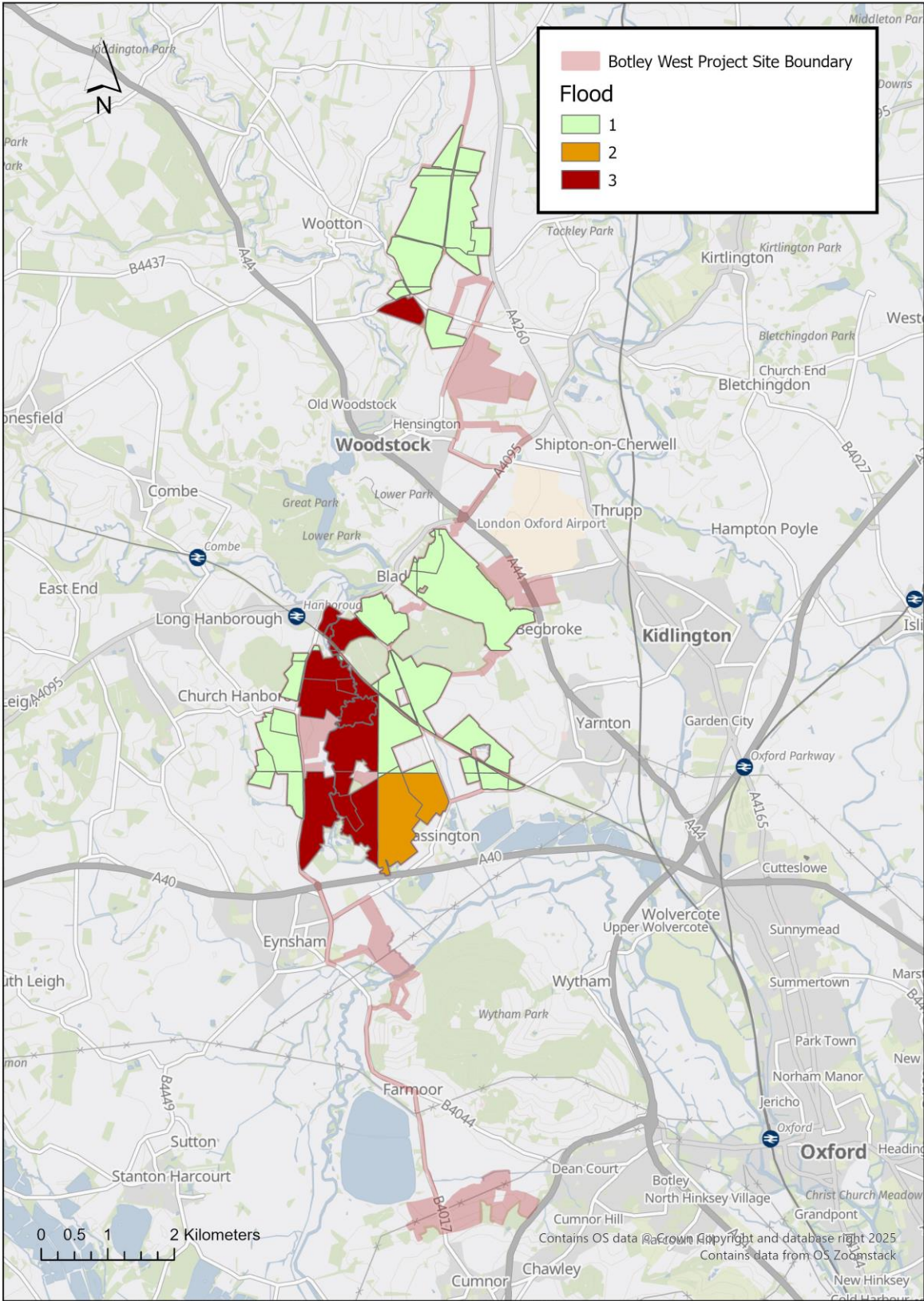
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## Hydrology and Flood Risk

34. WODC recognise that the proposed development has been restricted in areas at risk of fluvial flooding, but have previously highlighted concerns about surface water drainage to the north of Cassington [RR-1102].
35. The village of Cassington is at particular risk of impacts of surface water flooding having experienced property flooding (at Bell Close and Elms Road) on a number of occasions in recent years. The existing issue of surface water drainage is recognised in evidence prepared by the Applicant and this will require careful consideration through project design, to reduce and not increase the flooding risks to people and property in proximity to the scheme.
36. The development proposals indicate the introduction of buffer strips, bunds, ponds and ditch widening to the north of Cassington, designed and positioned to mitigate the surface water impacts of the proposal and provide betterment compared to the existing baseline position. However further work on the modelling of proposals needs to be undertaken, to confirm the effectiveness of these measures to mitigate flood risk.
37. The proposed development relies on the construction and operational management of the land to effectively drain the site for surface water flows. Where this is not secured, flood risk could be increased due to increased rates of runoff. The surface water drainage proposals that included in the application require significant information and calculation to confirm their acceptability. The Council requires information on how the land management, particularly during the operation will address any issues around sheeting off the solar panels to reduce bare ground and channelling of water in any specific way. The inspection and maintenance regime is key to mitigating any potential effects and should be included in any operational plans.
38. Red areas on Map 6 (Score 3) indicate land parcels that include areas of flood zone 2 which in most cases are already excluded from development. Orange areas (Score 2) are areas recognised as being at risk of surface water flooding, where development may create additional risk to existing properties. Green Areas (Score 1) are areas at less risk of flooding.



Map 6 - Flood risk and hydrology impacts



## Noise and Vibration

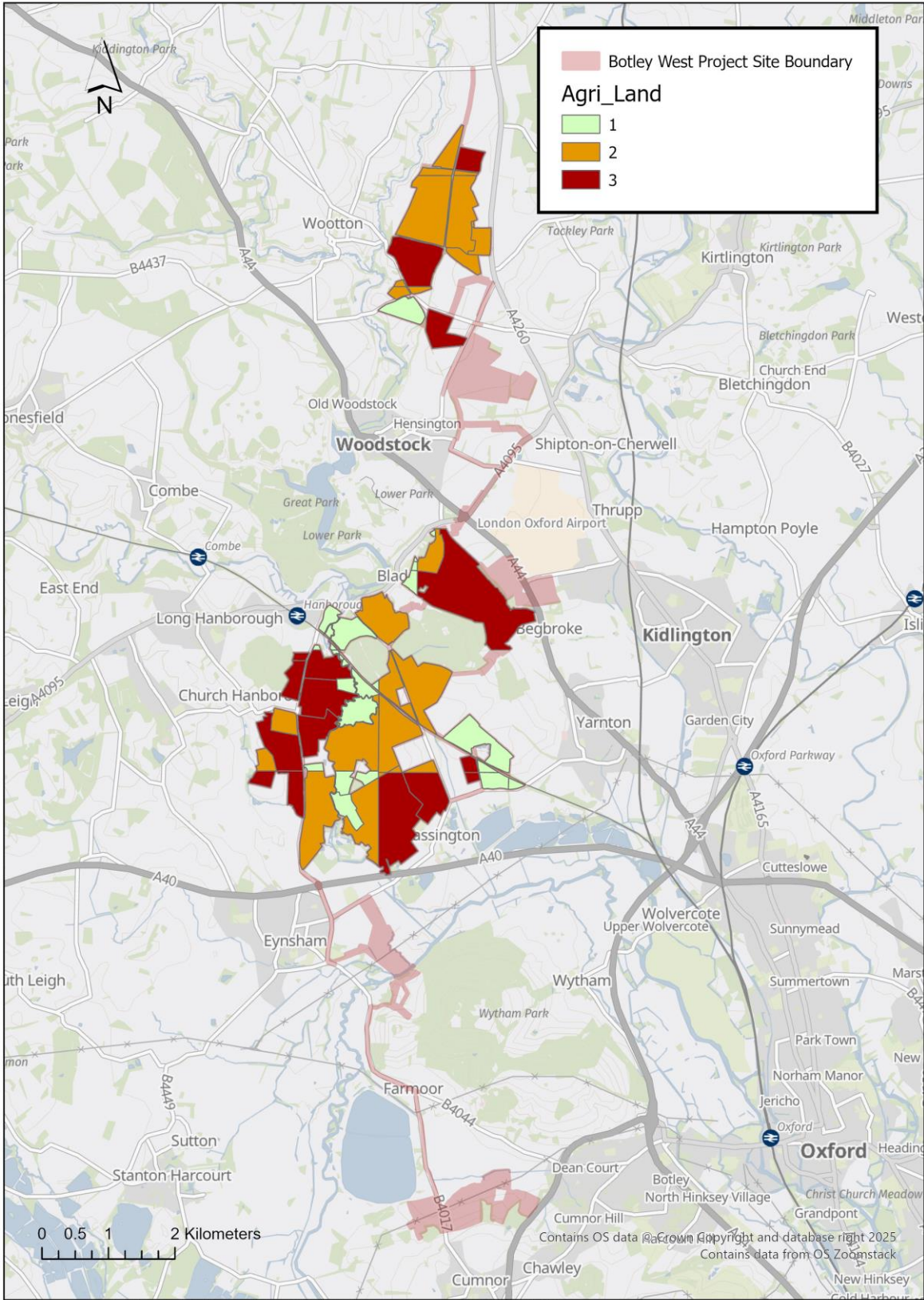
39. WODC have previously highlighted concerns regarding the noise impacts of the proposal during the operational phase of the development, particularly noise impacts of the Power Converter Stations and Sub Stations.
40. The Applicant has assessed the impacts on noise sensitive receptors in proximity to the proposed development (primarily residential properties neighbouring the site) but it is not clear that the assessment extends to users of the public rights of way network and associated impacts on the tranquillity of the countryside.
41. The modelled noise emissions levels for Power Converter Station (PCS) units is up to 92 dB(A) **(APP-213)** There are 156 such units proposed across the project area. The applicant's baseline assessment of background noise, from both long term and long term monitoring positions indicates sound levels well below this with maximum daytime noise level of 69 dB at LT6, adjacent to Lower Road within the Central Site. The background noise at this monitoring position is dominated by road traffic.
42. The Applicant's solar design parameters have previously indicated a noise impact of 67 dB at 10m distance from each PCS. A rough calculation, based on the development of 156 PCS units across the site equates to an area of 5ha, where the noise impacts would exceed the monitored baseline position adjacent to a main highway.
43. The Council consider that noise impacts of the project will have a detrimental impact on the environmental quality and amenity of the countryside, particularly in proximity to public rights of way, contrary to Local Policy.

## Agricultural Land

44. Significant areas of best and most versatile agricultural land would be taken up by panel development and permanently lost in the case of the grid connection substation.
45. National Policy Statements state that solar development should avoid "the use of Best and Most Versatile agricultural land where possible". It goes on to define BMV land as those in Grades 1, 2 and 3a of the Agricultural Land Classification.
46. For developments in West Oxfordshire, the Council require that all development proposals are required to show consideration of efficient and prudent use of natural resources, including minimising their use on the soil resource. Any proposals for a solar farm involving best and most versatile agricultural land would need to be justified by the most compelling evidence which demonstrates why poorer quality land has not been used in preference to best and most versatile agricultural land.
47. The applicant's mapping of Best and Most Versatile Agricultural Land included in their Agricultural Land Classification and Soil Survey Report [APP-223] indicates significant coverage of BMV across the project area. Approximately 40% (216ha) of the land proposed for solar PV would be sited on Best and Most Versatile (BMV) agricultural land.
48. WODC request that areas of best and most versatile agricultural land should be removed from the project in order to protect the soil resource and to avoid any long term issues that may impact the quality of the soil resource such as inadequate decommissioning and remediation at the end of the project.
49. Map 7 shows land parcels with high concentrations and coverage of best and most versatile agricultural land shaded red (Score 3). Parcels with low coverage or no indication of best and most versatile agricultural and are shaded green (Score 1).



Map 7 - Agricultural Land impacts



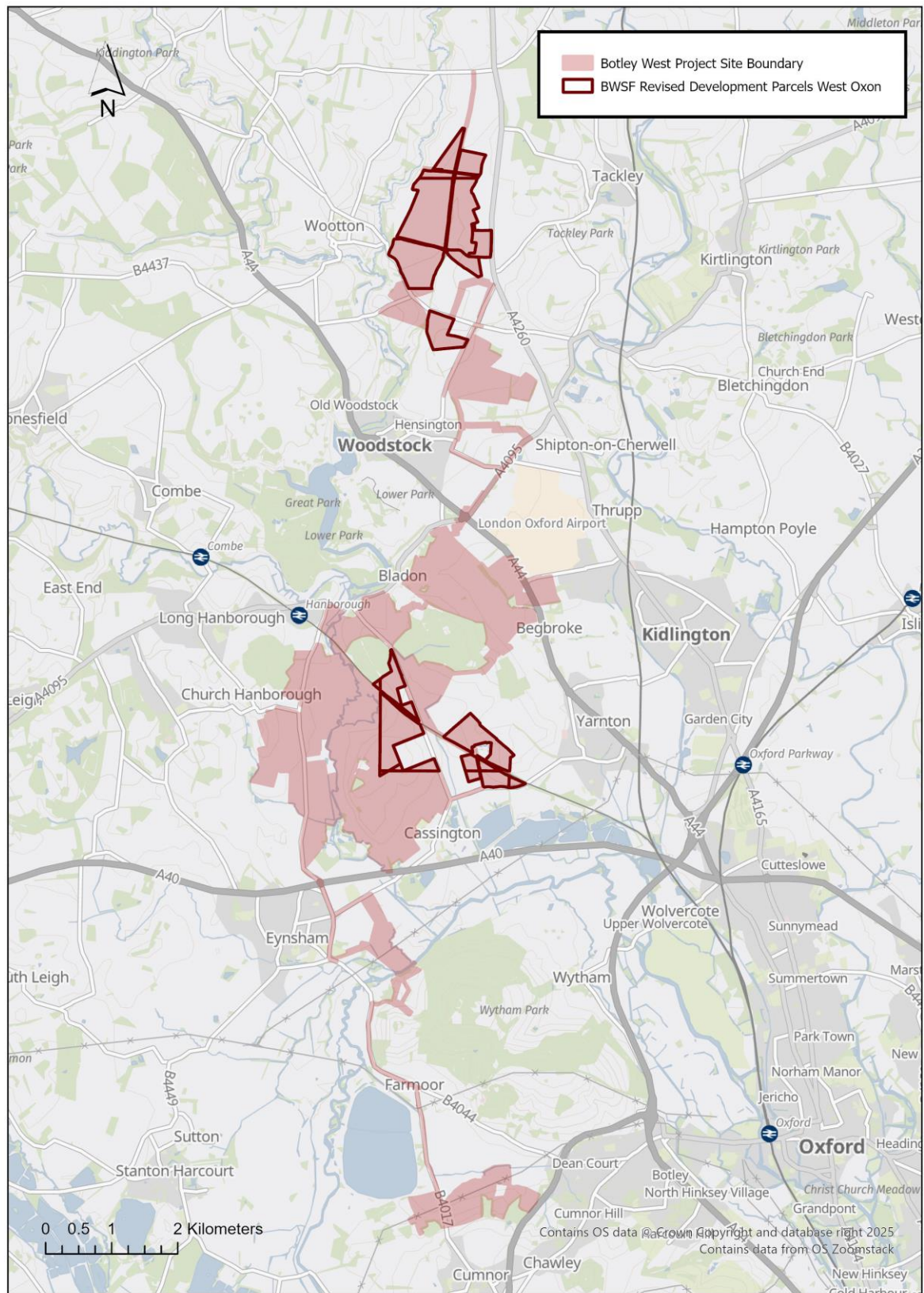
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## Conclusion

50. The mapping and commentary above primarily relate to the spatial impacts of the proposed development, identifying where West Oxfordshire District Council consider the proposed development should be reduced to minimise harmful impacts of the environment, resources and communities.
51. There are other non-spatial impacts that West Oxfordshire District Council assess through the Local Impact Report, including impacts on waste, socio economics and climate change, but it is these spatial impacts in particular that are critical to the Council's view about the suitability and sustainability of the proposed development.
52. In totality the cumulative impact of such a major development, in its current form, 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. In light of this assessment West Oxfordshire District Council have undertaken mapping of the proposed scheme to identify where cumulative impacts, against a range of receptors and topics overlap and where it is considered that the scheme should be decreased in scale through the removal of panels (see map 8 below).
53. There has been no meaningful engagement by the Applicant to seek to address issues as they have arisen. Rather it is the case that the proposed mitigation of impacts on sensitive receptors is inadequate with minimal buffers to ancient woodland, inadequate habitat compensation for ground nesting birds and incomplete survey work for bats of national importance alongside small/inadequate stand offs against heritage assets thus robbing them of their setting and importance. Other key national policy directives, such as retaining the Green Belt free of inappropriate urbanising development and ensuring that the best and most versatile agricultural land is not sterilised have been set aside too willingly.
54. 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. Furthermore, it is a lost opportunity to demonstrate how necessary infrastructure such as strategic renewable energy generation, could be sensitively and appropriately inserted into a historic and attractive landscape and leave a lasting legacy beyond the lifetime of the plan, to the benefit of the landscape, heritage assets, nature and the receiving population.
55. In order to arrive at a development proposal that would address the harmful impacts of the project, West Oxfordshire District Council have identified a number of parcels that could potentially accommodate some development. (See Map 8) The scale of the project would undoubtedly be dramatically reduced but would likely still pass the threshold for a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project with capacity to generate significant levels of energy.
56. There may be other parcels that could accommodate some development beyond those identified by the Council, but development proposals must be guided by the characteristics of the West Oxfordshire environment and seek to conserve and enhance the quality, character and distinctiveness of West Oxfordshire's natural environment, including its landscape, cultural and historic value, tranquillity, geology, countryside, soil and biodiversity.



### Map 8 - West Oxfordshire revised Development Parcels



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# **Joint Local Impact Report of**

**Cherwell District Council**

**Vale of White Horse District Council**

**West Oxfordshire District Council**

**Oxfordshire County Council**

**BOTLEY WEST SOLAR FARM (BWSF)**

**REF: EN010147**

**Executive Summary**

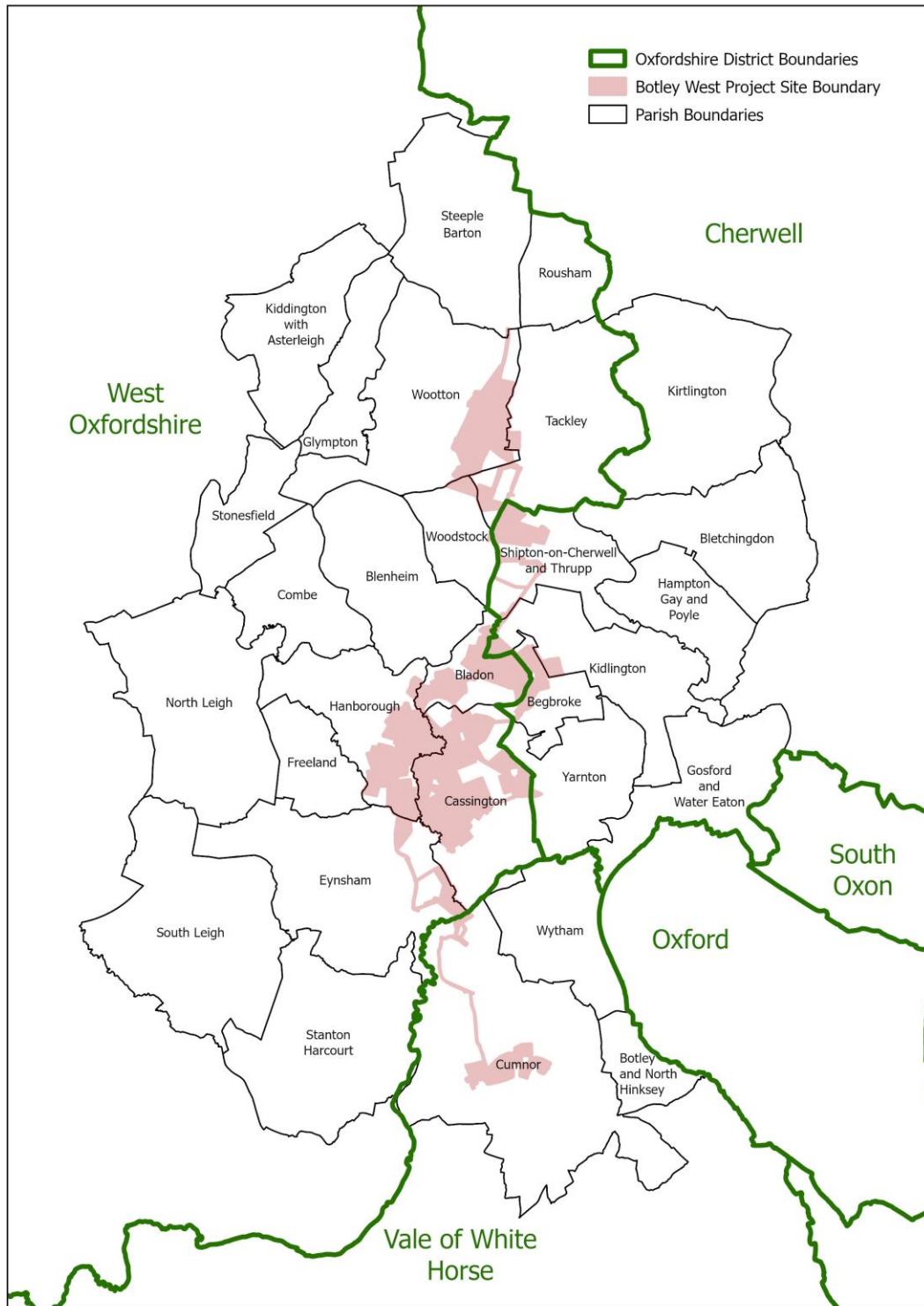
**21/05/2025**

## **Executive Summary**

1. The Botley West Solar Farm (BWSF) proposal, referenced as EN010147, involves the development of a large-scale solar farm across approximately 1,418 hectares of land within the administrative areas of Cherwell District Council (CDC), Vale of White Horse District Council (VWHDC), West Oxfordshire District Council (WODC), and Oxfordshire County Council (OCC).
2. The proposed development aims to generate renewable power through photovoltaic (PV) panels, delivering approximately 840MWe of power to the National Electricity Transmission System (NETS) and providing clean energy to meet the needs of approximately 330,000 homes over a period of 42 years.
3. The Oxfordshire Host Authorities have prepared a Joint Local Impact Report to assess the impacts of the proposed development on the local area
4. The Local Impact Report provides details of the likely impact of the proposed development on the area and seeks to cover all themes that relevant to the impact of the proposed development
5. The report consists of a statement of positive, neutral and negative local impacts in relation to each theme,
6. The draft Local Impact Report sets out the degree of compliance of the proposed development with the Local Development Plans for each of the Host Authorities including any made Neighbourhood Development Plans relevant to the area. It also provides views on DCO articles, requirements and DCO obligations where relevant.
7. The LIR is structured in the same order and covers the same topics as the applicant's Environmental Statement, with additional chapters covering impacts on minerals resources, public rights of way and aviation activities.
8. At present, the assessment of impacts indicates predominantly negative impacts that are likely to arise from the proposed development as submitted for examination.



## Map of Project Area



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## **Key Local Impacts:**

### **Green Belt**

9. The proposed development area includes approximately 960 hectares within the Oxford Green Belt, which equates to about 60% of the total area. The development is considered inappropriate in the Green Belt, and very special circumstances must be demonstrated to justify it. The proposal would introduce substantial development into open countryside, impacting the openness and visual amenity of the Green Belt.

### **Historic Environment:**

10. The development would affect the setting of several heritage assets, including the Blenheim Palace World Heritage Site, conservation areas, and listed buildings. The significance of these assets derives not only from their physical presence but also from their setting. The proposed solar farm could cause substantial harm to the significance of these heritage assets.

### **Landscape and Visual Impact:**

11. The Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) indicates that the development would have significant effects on local landscape character and views. The Councils consider the LVIA to underestimate the impact of the development. The proposed mitigation measures, including hedgerow reinforcement and planting, may not be sufficient to address the adverse effects on the landscape.

### **Ecology and Nature Conservation:**

12. The ecological surveys identified the presence of important species, including Bechstein's bats, barbastelles, dormice, and nightingales. The development could have a discouraging impact on the movement and foraging of these species. The Councils recommend further surveys and mitigation measures to protect these species and their habitats.

### **Hydrology and Flood Risk:**

13. The project area includes extensive areas at risk of fluvial flooding, primarily associated with the River Evenlode and River Thames. The applicant's Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) indicates that the impact of the development on flood risk is negligible with appropriate mitigation measures. However, the Councils recommend further detailed testing and modelling to ensure the effectiveness of these measures.

### **Agricultural Land Use:**

14. Approximately 40% of the land proposed for the solar farm is classified as Best and Most Versatile (BMV) agricultural land. The Councils question why the location of panels has not been amended to preserve areas of higher quality agricultural grades. The loss of BMV land could impact opportunities for food production and the rural agricultural economy.

**Traffic and Transport:**

15. The development would generate significant construction traffic, impacting the local road network. The Councils recommend measures to minimize the impact on the strategic and local road network and to promote sustainable transport access.

**Noise and Vibration:**

16. Noise and vibration during construction and operation could impact residential properties and the tranquillity of the countryside. The Councils recommend measures to mitigate these impacts, including restrictions on construction hours and noise monitoring.

**Climate Change:**

17. The development aligns with Oxfordshire's target of becoming a zero-carbon county by 2050. However, the Councils recommend further consideration of the resilience of the scheme to the impacts of climate change, including extreme weather events and flooding.

**Socio-economic:**

18. The development would provide employment opportunities during construction and operation, benefiting the local economy. However, the long-term impact on the local community and economy is considered neutral.

**Conclusion:**

19. The Botley West Solar Farm proposal presents both opportunities and challenges. While the development would contribute to renewable energy generation and support Oxfordshire's climate targets, it also poses significant local impacts on the Green Belt, historic environment, landscape, ecology, flood risk, agricultural land, traffic, noise, and socio-economics. The Councils recommend careful consideration of these impacts and appropriate mitigation measures to ensure a balanced and sustainable development.

## Summary of Positive, Neutral and Negative Impacts of the Proposed Development

Topic Area	Chapter (ES)	Potential Impact
Historic Environment	(Chapter 7) APP-044	Negative
Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment	(Chapter 8) APP-045	Negative
Ecology and Nature Conservation	(Chapter 9) APP-046	Negative
Hydrology and Flood Risk	(Chapter 10) APP-047	Neutral
Ground Conditions	(Chapter 11) APP-048	Neutral
Minerals and waste		Negative
Traffic and Transport	(Chapter 12) APP-049	Neutral
Public Rights of Way	(Chapter 12) APP-049 (Chapter 17) APP-054	Negative
Noise and Vibration	(Chapter 13) APP-050	Negative
Climate Change	(Chapter 14) APP-051	Neutral – Subject to resilience
Socio-economic	(Chapter 15) APP-052	Tourism – Negative Jobs – Neutral
Human Health	(Chapter 16) APP-053	Neutral
Agricultural Land Use	(Chapter 17) APP-054	Negative
Waste and Resources	(Chapter 18) APP-055	Negative
Air Quality	(Chapter 19) APP-056	Neutral
Cumulative Effects and Inter-relationships	(Chapter 20) APP-057	Negative
Aviation impacts	ES appendix 4.4 APP-128	Negative
Summary of Likely Significant Effects	(Chapter 21) APP-058	NEGATIVE