

WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

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

Held in the Council Chamber, Woodgreen, Witney, Oxfordshire OX28 1NB at 11.00am on
Monday 5 February 2024.

PRESENT

Councillors: Julian Cooper (Chair), Michael Brooker (Vice-Chair), David Jackson, Alaa Al-Yousuf, Lysette Nicholls, Dan Levy, Andy Goodwin, Nick Leverton, Andrew Prosser, Jeff Haine, Elizabeth Poskitt, Rachel Crouch, Harry St. John, Alistair Wray, Adrian Walsh, Phil Godfrey, Liam Walker, Rosie Pearson, and Dean Temple.

Officers: Andrea McCaskie (Director of Governance), Bill Oddy (Assistant Director – Commercial Development), Phil Shaw (Business Manager – Development Management), Andrew Brown (Business Manager – Democratic Services), Max Thompson (Senior Democratic Services Officer), Anne Learmonth (Democratic Services Officer), Maria Harper (Democratic Services Officer), Andrew Thomson (Lead Planning Policy Implementation Officer) and Kim Hudson (Planning Implementation Officer).

Other Councillors in Attendance: Charlie Maynard, Tim Sumner, Alaric Smith, and David Melvin.

22 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for Absence were received from the following Members:

Councillors Hugo Ashton, Andrew Beaney, Rizvana Poole, Lidia Arciszewska, Andrew Lyon, Mark Walker, and Colin Dingwall.

Councillor Elizabeth Poskitt substituted for Councillor Lidia Arciszewska.

Councillor Liam Walker substituted for Councillor Colin Dingwall.

23 Declarations of Interest

Councillor Dan Levy stated that in his role as an Oxfordshire County Councillor and Cabinet Member for Property, his division and portfolio covered a large area of the intended Solar Farm site. Councillor Levy also stated that he knew people (including councillors) who would be materially affected by the proposed solar farm, but who do not have a disqualifying position.

Councillor Andy Goodwin stated that they had with engaged residents of the intended solar farm area and knew people (including local councillors) who would be materially affected by the proposed solar farm, but who do not have a disqualifying position. Councillor Goodwin also stated they had engaged with local stakeholder groups in relation to the proposed Solar Farm site.

Councillor Harry St. John stated that they had met with Mr. Robert Gunn, a local resident, and had previously worked with Mr. Gunn, in relation to North Leigh Common. Councillor St. John also stated that they were a Member of Wychwood Forest Trust.

Councillor Elizabeth Poskitt stated they were a Member of Sustainable Woodstock.

There were no other declarations of interest made by Members of the Committee.

24 Minutes of Previous Meetings

Councillor Elizabeth Poskitt proposed that the minutes of a previous meeting, held on Monday 27 March 2023, be agreed by the Committee as a true and accurate record, and signed by the Chair.

This was seconded by Councillor Jeff Haine and was put to a vote. There were 8 votes in favour, 0 votes against, and 9 abstentions. The Vote was carried.

Councillor Julian Cooper proposed that the minutes of a previous meeting, held on Wednesday 24 May 2023, be agreed by the Committee as a true and accurate record, and signed by the Chair.

This was seconded by Councillor Michael Brooker and was put to a vote. There were 14 votes in favour, 0 votes against, and 3 abstentions. The Vote was carried.

The Committee **Resolved** to:

- I. Agree the minutes of the previous meetings, held on Monday 27 March 2023 and Wednesday 24 May 2023, as a true and accurate record.

25 Botley West Solar Farm - Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP) - Response to Statutory Pre-Application Consultation.

Phil Shaw, Business Manager – Development Management, introduced the report, which sought to agree a response to the Botley West Solar Farm (BWSF) statutory consultation, and notification of the BWSF pursuant to Section 42 of the Planning Act 2008.

Robert Gunn addressed the Committee as a local Parish Councillor, which raised no points of clarification from the Committee.

Anthony Thompson of the ‘Stop Botley West’ Campaign Group addressed the Committee in objection to the scheme, which raised points of clarification regarding an external report related to the “Pathway to Net Zero”, and land ownership of the proposed site.

Hilary Brown of the ‘Sustainable Woodstock’ Action Group addressed the Committee in support of the scheme, which raised points of clarification regarding offers of compensation to affected residents adjacent to the proposed site, and the site’s intended energy usage and output.

Andrew Thomson, Lead Planning Policy Implementation Officer, delivered a presentation, which provided clarification on the following points:

- Updated Proposals – These included an updates site layout and updated cable routing;
- The role of the Secretary of State – Government would make the final decisions in relation to the proposed site, and the Council, as the Local Planning Authority, were not the final decision maker;
- Locational Site Maps and Setting of Conservation Areas – The presentation made reference to the location of the proposed site, which made additional references to listed buildings, values of the landscape in the proposed development area, character and heightened layout of the landscape area, proximity to public rights of way, air quality of the site, potential impacts to human health including recreational areas, flooding and hydrology risks, proposed solar panel locations, implications to the

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Greenbelt, noise impacts on local wildlife, proximity to the Cotswold National Landscape area, impacts on conservation areas, impacts to agricultural land, proximity to existing residential dwellings, impacts to wildlife and proximity to the Blenheim World Heritage Site.

The Lead Planning Policy Implementation Officer gave Members a high-level overview of the characteristics of the proposed development, including details of the draft masterplan and how these related to the characteristics of the West Oxfordshire environment, including historic environment landscape & visual resources. The presentation was framed in the context of the Preliminary Environmental Information Report and covered all thematic chapters relevant to the Council's proposed consultation response.

The Lead Planning Policy Implementation Officer stated that it was apparent that aspects of the environmental assessment were incomplete at this stage. Further detail would be presented through the Environmental Statement when the Development Consent Order (DCO) application was made and he was unable to comment on the suitability and effectiveness of all proposed design and mitigation measures at this point, in the absence of full environmental assessment and landscape and ecology management plans. Furthermore, the Council would make a detailed assessment of local impacts through the preparation of a Local Impact Report should the Botley West DCO application proceed to Examination.

The Lead Planning Policy Implementation Officer further highlighted that both London Oxford Airport and the Civil Aviation Authority were statutory consultees in relation to the wider application, and their expertise surrounding impacts of radar provisions and radio communications would be vital.

The Lead Planning Policy Implementation Officer also stated that, if necessary, further site visits could be arranged for Members to become more familiar with the full, proposed site.

The Chair guided the Committee through the proposed consultation response paragraphs, which raised the following points of clarity from Members for amendment by Officers.

- 4.6 and 4.18 – Harry St. John and Nick Levertton – Detail contained within the Proposed Draft Masterplan;
- 4.16 – Harry St. John and Andrew Prosser – Lack of general information detailed at local exhibition events;
- 4.18 – Dan Levy – Building Salt Cross Garden Village Area;
- 4.23 – Harry St. John – Proposed Buffer Zones and Public Rights of Way;
- 4.27 – Andy Goodwin, Dan Levy – Maps contained within the Preliminary Environmental Information Report, and Projected Lands adjacent to the River Thames;
- 4.32 – Rosie Pearson – Comparisons to other National Significant Infrastructure Projects and other Solar Farms within the district;
- 4.35 – Harry St. John – References made to Grade 1 and 2 Listed Buildings;
- 4.42 – Rosie Pearson, Dan Levy – Specific characteristics of the Blenheim Palace World Heritage Site;
- 4.43 – Elizabeth Poskitt – Planning Policies related to Blenheim Palace Estate;
- 4.50 – Lysette Nicholls – Strengthening of wording surrounding Mitigation Measures;

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- 4.61 – Harry St. John – Reference made to burial of Sir Winston Churchill, and specific locations of ‘inverters’;
- 4.74 – Elizabeth Poskitt – Protection of Skylarks and impacts on general wildlife;
- 4.111 – Andy Goodwin – Benefits of carbon reduction associated with the proposals;
- 4.114 – Andrew Prosser – Potential impacts of local agriculture employment;
- 4.115 – Harry St. John – Employment opportunities within the local area of the proposed site;
- 4.129 – Harry St. John – Quoting of land grading within mapping contained in preliminary report;
- 4.145 – Lysette Nicholls, Rosie Pearson, Elizabeth P, Andy Goodwin, – Level of Community Benefits associated with the scheme.

The Business Manager and Lead Planning Policy Implementation Officer both committed to re-visiting the points raised by Members, with a further revision of the response shared where appropriate.

In general debate, Members of the Committee questioned whether there should be a cost-based analysis associated with the proposals. The Business Manager stated that this would be included in the Climate and Ecological Emergency Implications section.

Members also stated that the response should include reference to other existing consented solar schemes within the West Oxfordshire District.

Councillor Julian Cooper proposed that the Committee agree to the recommendations as listed on the report. This was seconded by Councillor Michael Brooker. was put to a vote and was unanimously agreed by the Committee.

The Committee **Resolved** to:

1. Endorse the contents of the draft consultation response;
2. Agree submission of the consultation response by the consultation deadline.

26 Frequency of Sub-Committee Meetings

Andrew Brown, Business Manager – Democratic Services, introduced the report which allowed the Development Control Committee to consider the frequency of Sub-Committee meetings.

The Business Manager explained that the frequency of meetings was last considered in November 2022, and the tabled options were either to hold the 2 Area Planning Sub-Committee meetings (Uplands and Lowlands) 4-weekly (as at present), or monthly.

Councillor Jeff Haine proposed that Area Planning Sub-Committee meetings be held monthly. This was seconded by Councillor David Jackson, was put to a vote, and was unanimously agreed by the Committee.

The Committee **Resolved** to:

1. Agree to hold monthly meetings of the Council’s Area Planning Sub-Committees.

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27 Notification Policy

The agenda item was not considered at the meeting.

The Meeting Closed at 1.16pm.

CHAIR