



WEST OXFORDSHIRE
DISTRICT COUNCIL

WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Name and date of Committee	Development Control Committee – 24 February 2025
Subject	Botley West Solar Farm - Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP) – Relevant Representation
Wards affected	All
Accountable member	Cllr. Julian Cooper - Chair of Development Control Committee Email: julian.cooper@westoxon.gov.uk Cllr. Hugo Ashton Member for Planning and Sustainable Development Email: hugo.ashton@westoxon.gov.uk
Accountable officer	Andrew Thomson – Planning Policy Manager Email: Andrew.thomson@westoxon.gov.uk Chris Hargraves – Head of Planning Email: chris.hargraves@westoxon.gov.uk
Report author	Andrew Thomson – Planning Policy Manager Email: Andrew.thomson@westoxon.gov.uk
Summary/Purpose	<p>The proposed Botley West Solar Farm is a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (“NSIP”) and, to be consented, it will require a Development Consent Order (“DCO”) from the Secretary of State for the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero.</p> <p>The Applicant intends to build a new solar energy generation station on three land parcels located within the administrative areas of Cherwell District Council, West Oxfordshire District Council, Vale of White Horse District Council and Oxfordshire County Council.</p> <p>The Botley West Solar Farm DCO application was accepted for examination on 13 December 2024. WODC were notified of the acceptance on 7 January 2025.</p> <p>In accordance with section 102(1)(C) of the Planning Act 2008 (PA 2008), West Oxfordshire District Council as a host authority, automatically</p>

	<p>qualifies as an 'interested party' for the purpose of the examination of the Botley West Solar Farm. In its capacity as an interested party WODC intends to submit a Relevant Representation in accordance with sections 56 and 102(4) of the Planning Act 2008.</p> <p>The Relevant Representation provides an opportunity to highlight areas of the application that the council agrees and disagrees with. It is an opportunity to identify the main issues and impacts of the proposal. The Relevant Representation is used by the examining authority to inform their initial assessment of the principal issues for examination.</p> <p>The purpose of the report is to explain the content of the council's Relevant Representation and to highlight the key issues that are relevant to the DCO application and that should be subject to detailed consideration through the Examination.</p>
Annexes	Annex A - Draft Relevant Representation
Recommendation(s)	<p>That Development Control Committee resolves to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Endorse the contents of the draft relevant representation 2. Authorise officers to make amendments following meeting in consultation with the Executive Member for Planning and the Chair of Development Control Committee 3. Agree submission of the consultation response by the consultation deadline.
Corporate priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Putting Residents First • A Good Quality of Life for All • A Better Environment for People and Wildlife • Responding to the Climate and Ecological Emergency
Key Decision	There is no decision to be made at this stage.
Exempt	NO
Consultees/ Consultation	<p>WODC landscape Officer WODC Heritage and Conservation Officer Flood Risk Manager Senior Environmental Health Officer</p>

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- I.1** Photovolt Development Partners, acting on behalf of SolarFive Ltd (“The Applicant”) seeks development consent, under the Planning Act 2008 (PA 2008), to construct, operate and maintain, and decommission a solar farm and associated infrastructure.
- I.2** The project is called Botley West Solar Farm (the “Project”), with the name derived from the location of the grid connection point. The Project will have an anticipated generation capacity of approximately 840 MW, providing secure and clean energy to the equivalent of approximately 330,000 homes.
- I.3** The Project extends from an area of land in the north, situated between the A4260 and the Dorn River Valley near Tackley and Wootton (Northern Site Area), through a central section, situated broadly between Bladon and Cassington (Central Site Area), and connecting to a section further south near to Farmoor Reservoir and north of Cumnor (Southern Site Area), where the Project will connect to the National Grid transmission network. The Project is located in parts of the administrative areas of West Oxfordshire District Council (WODC), Cherwell District Council (CDC) and Vale of White Horse District Council (VWHDC) and is within the county of Oxfordshire.
- I.4** West Oxfordshire District Council intends to make a Relevant Representation about the Botley West Solar Farm Development Consent Order (DCO) application in accordance with sections 56 and 102(4) of the Planning Act 2008.
- I.5** The Relevant Representation provides a summary of what West Oxfordshire District Council considers the main issues of proposal to be, and their impacts. The content of relevant representation will be used by the Examining Authority to help inform their initial assessment of principal issues for examination.
- I.6** WODC were notified about the acceptance of the application for a Development Consent Order (“DCO”) 7 January 2025. The deadline for the submission of the Relevant Representation is 27 February 2025.
- I.7** Officers have undertaken a review the application details including plans and drawings, the Environmental Statement and associated assessments and masterplan and draft Development Consent Order.
- I.8** WODC have concerns about the environmental impacts of the proposal and wish to bring these to the attention of the examining authority including;
 - Landscape character and visual impacts of the proposal
 - Impacts on the Green Belt
 - Impacts on historic environment and the setting of heritage assets,
 - Impacts on the setting of Blenheim Palace World heritage Site
 - Impacts on best and most versatile agricultural land
- I.9** WODC have made a number of suggestions as to how negative impacts of the proposal could be minimised through pre-application consultation including;

- Restriction of development in certain locations
- Focus of environmental enhancements in certain locations
- Opportunities for community benefits

1.10 WODC do not consider that all concerns and impacts identified through the pre-application consultation have been adequately addressed.

1.11 The relevant representation provides a summary of key issues identified with the proposal and its impacts. Although the council has not provided detailed comments on every theme covered in the Environmental Statement, the absence of comment should not be taken as WODC's agreement on those matters. The council will make a detailed assessment of local impacts through the preparation of a Local Impact Report at the Examination stage.

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 Although West Oxfordshire District Council, as a host authority, is classed as both Interested Party and Statutory Party for the purpose of examination, we wish to submit a Relevant Representation, to ensure that the examining authority is aware of our views early in the process.

2.8 The proposed Relevant Representation is attached at Appendix I.

2.9 WODC will have further opportunities to respond to the proposals and provide detailed assessment of impacts at later stages of the DCO process including through the submission of a Local Impact Report and Written Representation.

3. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

3.1 The alternative option would be to not submit a relevant representation. As a host authority, WODC do not need to submit a relevant representation to be included as an interested party at examination. Not submitting a relevant representation would represent a missed opportunity to highlight issues to the examining authority.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

4.1 There is potential for a significant amount of officer time to be dedicated to engaging with the DCO process. Opportunities for a Planning Performance Agreement will be sought, where it is considered that officer engagement will impact the Council's ability to perform its statutory functions.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The district council are a statutory consultee on these proposals and are not the decision making authority. It is considered that there are no legal implications relating to the report and proposed consultation response.

6. RISK ASSESSMENT

6.1 The district council are a statutory consultee on these proposals and are not the decision making authority. It is considered that there are no risks associated with the report and the proposed consultation response.

7. EQUALITIES IMPACT

7.1 It is considered that the Botley West Solar Farm proposal will not have any differential negative impact on any group, with protected characteristics, in West Oxfordshire.

8. CLIMATE AND ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCIES IMPLICATIONS

8.1 The Botley West Solar Farm proposal has the potential to generate significant amount of renewable energy, contributing to the decarbonisation of the National Grid and helping to achieve net zero carbon targets by 2050.

8.2 The scale and location of the proposal would likely result in significant impacts on biodiversity and natural capital.

8.3 There is potential for the proposal to result in both positive and negative impacts, both in terms of addressing the causes and mitigating the impacts of climate change.

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

9.1 All documentation relation to the Botley West DCO application and examination is available via the a dedicated project page on the Planning Inspectorate website.

<https://national-infrastructure-consenting.planninginspectorate.gov.uk/projects/EN010147>