

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

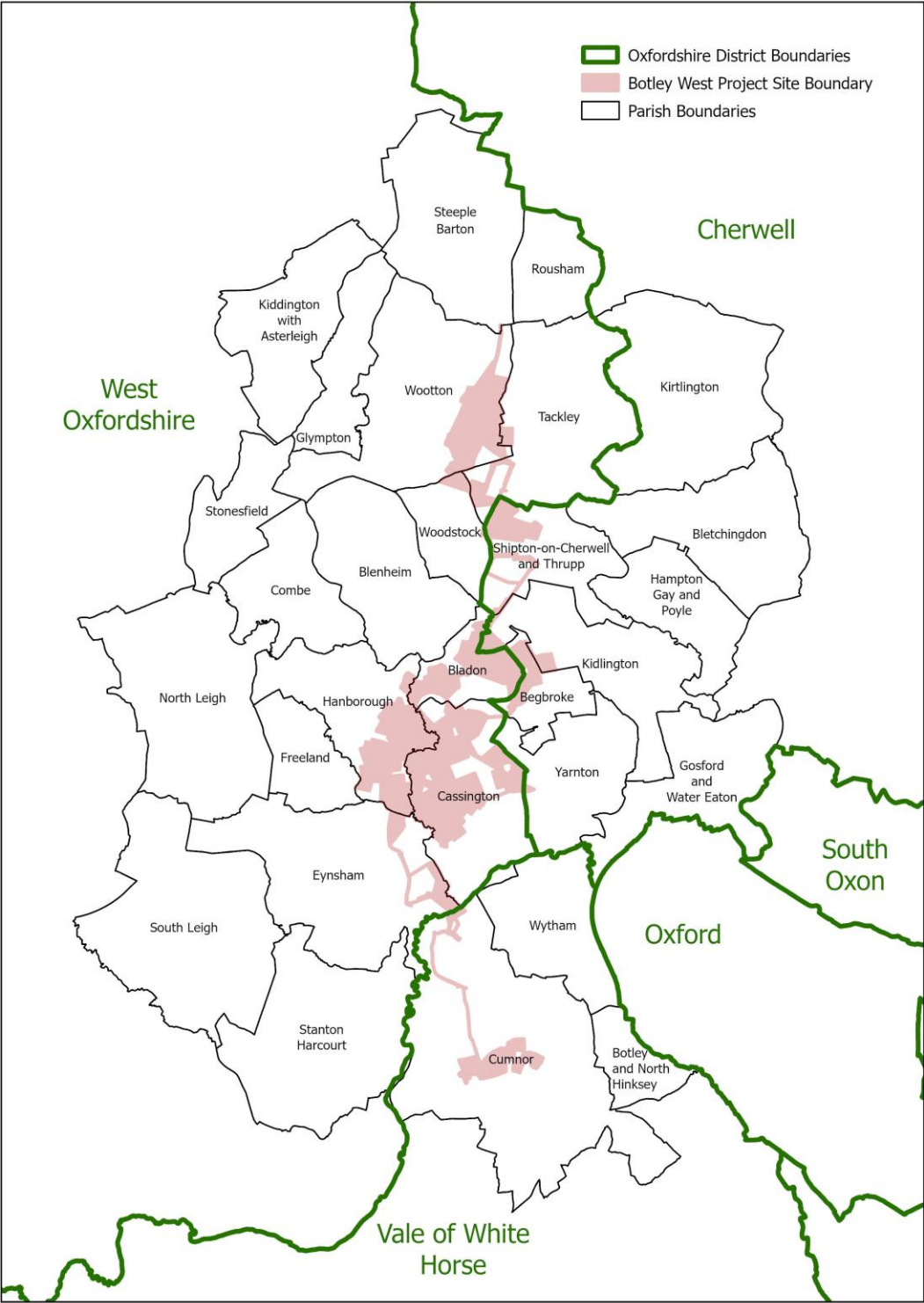
Executive Summary

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



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