



**WEST OXFORDSHIRE
DISTRICT COUNCIL**

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Name and date of Committee	DEVELOPMENT CONTROL COMMITTEE - 2 JUNE 2025
Subject	BOTLEY WEST EXAMINATION-SUBMISSION OF WRITTEN REPRESENTATION AND LOCAL IMPACT REPORT
Wards affected	All
Accountable member	Councillor Andy Goodwin – Chair of Development Control Committee Email: andy.goodwin@westoxon.gov.uk Councillor Hugo Ashton - Executive Member for Planning and Sustainable Development Email: hugo.ashton@westoxon.gov.uk
Accountable officer	Andrea McCaskie - Director of Governance Email: democratic.services@westoxon.gov.uk
Report author	Andrew Thomson – Planning Policy Manager Email: andrew.thomson@westoxon.gov.uk
Summary/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.
Annexes	Annex A – Written Representation Annex B – Executive summary of Draft Joint Local Impact Report
Recommendation(s)	That Development Control Committee resolves to: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1) Note the executive summary of the Draft Joint Local Impact Report2) Endorse the draft Written Representation, subject to any amendments as may be agreed at the Development Control Committee,

	<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"> • Putting Residents First • A Good Quality of Life for All • A Better Environment for People and Wildlife • Responding to the Climate and Ecological Emergency • Working Together for West Oxfordshire
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)