



WEST OXFORDSHIRE
DISTRICT COUNCIL

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Name and Date of Committee	DEVELOPMENT CONTROL COMMITTEE – 5 FEBRUARY 2024
Subject	BOTLEY WEST SOLAR FARM – NATIONALLY SIGNIFICANT INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECT (NSIP) – RESPONSE TO STATUTORY PRE-APPLICATION CONSULTATION.
Wards Affected	All.
Accountable Members	Councillor Julian Cooper – Chair of Development Control Committee. Email: julian.cooper@westoxon.gov.uk Councillor Charlie Maynard – Executive Member for Planning and Sustainability. Email: charlie.maynard@westoxon.gov.uk
Accountable Officer	Phil Shaw – Business Manager, Development Management. Email: phil.shaw@westoxon.gov.uk
Report author	Andrew Thomson – Lead Planning Policy and Implementation Officer. Email: andrew.thomson@westoxon.gov.uk
Purpose	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.
Annex	Annex A – Draft Consultation Response
Recommendations	That the Development Control Committee Resolves to: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1) Endorse the contents of the draft consultation response;2) 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	NO
Exempt	NO
Consultees/ Consultation	WODC Landscape Officer WODC Heritage and Conservation Officer

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 West Oxfordshire District Council are responding to the Applicant's consultation on the Botley West Solar Farm proposals.
- 1.2 WODC have been consulted on the proposals as a host authority, in accordance with section 42 of the 2008 Planning Act.
- 1.3 A draft consultation response is attached at Appendix I and covers matters relating to the developer's proposals including their draft masterplan and the content of their Preliminary Environmental Information report (PEIR)
- 1.4 WODC have concerns about the potential environmental impacts of the proposal as currently presented 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.
- 1.5 WODC make a number of suggestions as to how negative impacts of the proposal could be minimised including;
 - Restriction of development in certain locations;
 - Focus of environmental enhancements in certain locations;
 - Opportunities for community benefits;
- 1.6 WODC recognise that aspects of the environmental assessment are incomplete at this stage and that further detail will be presented through the Environmental Statement when the DCO application is made.
- 1.7 WODC is 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.
- 1.8 The council will make a detailed assessment of local impacts through the preparation of a Local Impact Report should the Botley West DCO application proceed to Examination.

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 significant 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 Host authorities have a particular role throughout the DCO process and will be called upon at key stages, to respond to proposals, to submit representations and to engage in the Examination of the proposals.
- 2.8 This statutory consultation on the solar farm proposals forms part of the pre-application stage (stage 1) of the DCO process.
- 2.9 The Applicant is inviting feedback through this consultation on updated proposals, including site layout and cable routes, the information presented in the Preliminary Environmental Information Report (PEIR), proposed environmental enhancement measures including biodiversity net gain and new recreational connectivity across the site and proposed mitigation measures to minimise or avoid potential impacts on the environment and local communities.
- 2.10 Representations received through this consultation will be used by the applicant to inform their development proposals and guide the preparation of further environmental assessment.
- 2.11 The Applicant will consider and have regard to all responses received when developing its Application for a Development Consent Order. Responses and representations will form the basis of a Consultation Report that will be one of the factors taken into consideration by the Secretary of State when deciding whether the Application can be accepted for Examination.
- 2.12 WODC wish to respond to the consultation at this stage and to take the opportunity to guide and influence the proposals prior to any application to the Secretary of State for a Development Consent Order.
- 2.13 The proposed response to the consultation is attached at Appendix I.
- 2.14 This response is made to the Applicant's pre-application statutory consultation. WODC will have further opportunities to respond to the proposals and provide detailed assessment of impacts at later stages of the DCO process, should the application be accepted for Examination.

3. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 3.1 The alternative option would be to not submit a response to the statutory consultation. Failure to submit a response at this stage would represent a missed opportunity for the district council to influence the proposals prior to the submission of the DCO application.

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 The Applicant has published a wide range of documentation relating to their proposals, consultation and the DCO process. All information is available via the Applicant's website; https://botleywest.co.uk/document_library.html