



Botley West Solar Farm

Phase One Consultation Summary Report

July 2023

Introduction

Photovoltaic Development Partners (PVDP) on behalf of SolarFive Ltd (the Applicant) is proposing a new solar farm in the west of Oxfordshire called Botley West Solar Farm (the 'Project').

Our first phase of community consultation initially ran for six weeks from Thursday 03 November until Thursday 15 December 2022. The consultation was extended by a further week to Thursday 22 December 2022 to allow more time to provide feedback on our proposals.

We would like to thank the hundreds of people who took the time to engage with the project through attending events, contacting our team, and providing feedback on our proposals. This feedback is actively being considered by our project team.

This document, our Consultation Summary Report for the first phase of community consultation, provides an overview of the feedback that we received. This includes the amount of feedback received, the key themes raised by local people, and how we are responding to these themes in our updated design as we approach our second, statutory phase of community consultation in Summer/Autumn this year.

This document also provides a broader project update, including the progress of the ongoing environmental assessments and the next steps of the project as we move towards our second phase of community consultation.

We recognise that there is a high level of interest in our proposals, and we appreciate that this has resulted in a significant number of comments and questions. The aim of this document – along with the list of FAQs which is kept updated on our project website – is to provide updated information in response to these areas of interest.

Our communication channels – including email, phone and post – remain open if you would like to get in touch with members of our team. Details can be found on the back page of this leaflet.

The Opportunity



Botley West will add to Oxfordshire's **biodiversity** by helping to protect and rebuild habitats on land currently used for agriculture.



Botley West will provide **supply chain and employment opportunities** during the construction and operational phases.



Following the end of Botley West's operation, the solar equipment will be removed, and the site will be returned to agricultural use.



Botley West will deliver **secure homegrown** power directly to the National Grid, helping to reduce our reliance on imported energy.



Botley West will lead the way in **achieving Oxfordshire's Energy Strategy** agreed target of 50% reduction in carbon emissions by 2030, and 100% net zero carbon emissions by 2050.



Botley West could generate enough low-cost clean and renewable electricity to power approximately **330,000¹** homes.

¹ The calculation of this figure can be found in the FAQ page on the project website.

Our First Phase of Community Consultation

Our first phase of consultation ran from Thursday 03 November to Thursday 22 December 2022, and included a variety of ways for local people to engage with our proposals.

Before launching our phase one consultation, we contacted elected representatives and organisations including MPs, local authorities, councillors and parish councils. This included holding several meetings and two webinars for elected members and parish councils.

We then undertook our consultation by:

- + Distributing our Community Consultation Leaflet to over 22,000 properties and businesses across the project area.
- + Creating a project website to display information on the project, including a variety of maps and concept plans. Our website remains open for the duration of the project, and you can visit here: www.botleywest.co.uk.
- + Advertising our consultation in the Oxford Times, Witney Gazette, Banbury Guardian and the Herald Series.
- + Holding seven in-person community consultation events, including organising an additional two events during the consultation period. Events were held in the towns and villages of Woodstock, Long Hanborough, Cassington, Tackley, Cumnor, Eynsham and Begbroke.
- + Hosting an online community webinar for people to share our proposals, including a Q&A session with different members of the project team.
- + Inviting feedback on our proposals through an online and paper feedback form.
- + Maintaining open communication lines for people to send questions or feedback via email, our freephone information line and our freepost address.

Our communication lines remain open for the duration of the project, and the details can be found on the back page of this leaflet.

Consultation Summary Report – Key Statistics

We have been greatly encouraged by the amount of engagement and feedback received during the first phase of community consultation.

During our first phase of consultation, we:



Received **767** feedback forms, including **663 digital** and **104 hard-copy** feedback forms.



Received **316** pieces of written feedback via our communication channels in the form of emails and letters.



Spoke to over **620** people at our in-person information events.

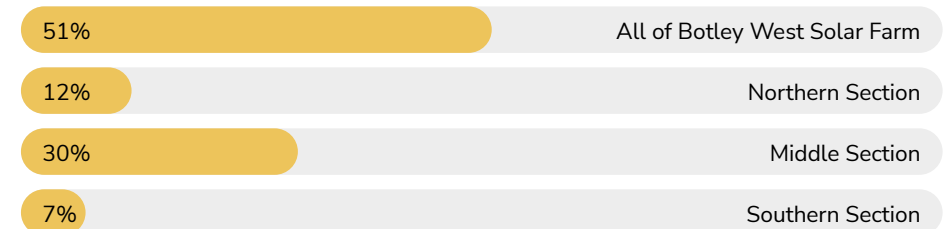


Hosted **56** people on our online community webinar.

Within our digital and hard-copy feedback forms, we asked a number of multiple-choice questions to better understand where feedback was coming from, areas of the site local people were most interested in, and people's overall views toward the project.

Community engagement is a key part of our consultation process, and the majority of feedback through our feedback forms was submitted by local people. 93% of those who submitted a feedback form identified as a local resident.

Interest in project areas



A slim majority of respondents indicated they were providing feedback on the entire project. The middle site area was the most frequently commented on single site.

The need for solar

We recognise that many respondents do not agree with, or do not feel as though they understand the need to install, ground-mounted solar infrastructure.

The UK is seeing the effects of climate change like never before. Demand for electricity continues to increase along with pressure on household bills. A secure, low carbon, low-cost electricity supply is needed.

Nationally, the UK Government has stated the important role of solar energy generation. The Government has published the British Energy Security Strategy and recently the Powering Up Britain policy paper, setting and confirming clear targets to decarbonise our electricity supply by 2035 and achieve Net Zero by 2050. A key target within these plans is to increase the amount of solar generation capacity to 70 GW – a five-fold increase from current levels.

Solar is a proven, affordable, and quick to install way of generating clean electricity in the UK. Homegrown clean electricity at scale is key to securing a reliable source of power for UK homes and businesses.

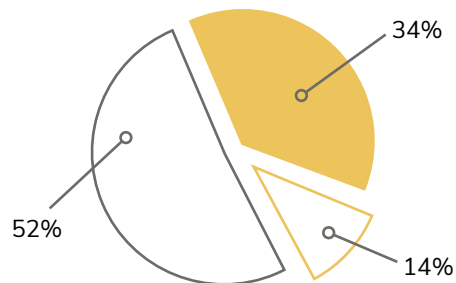
Oxfordshire is leading the way in the fight against climate change, with ambitious targets that can make a real difference. The Oxfordshire Energy Strategy, signed up to by all councils within Oxfordshire, includes:

- Calls for a 50% reduction in carbon emissions by 2030.
- A five-fold increase in solar energy by 2030.

The Oxfordshire Energy Strategy sets out that “The majority of the low carbon energy needed in Oxfordshire is likely to be met by solar PV.” Botley West will contribute significantly to this target, helping both the county and the nation reduce the impacts of climate change and deliver a secure supply of low carbon power.

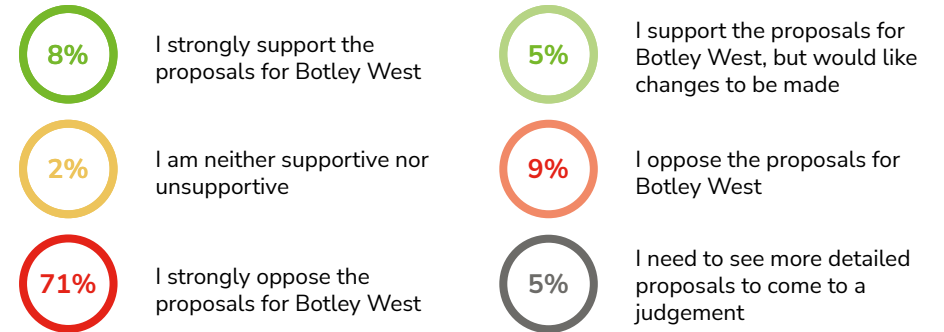
At our first phase of consultation we asked consultees: ***In principle, what is your view of installing ground-mounted solar infrastructure in the UK?***

- I agree with the need to install ground-mounted solar infrastructure.
- I do not feel I understand enough about the need to install ground-mounted solar infrastructure
- I do not agree there is a need to install ground-mounted solar infrastructure



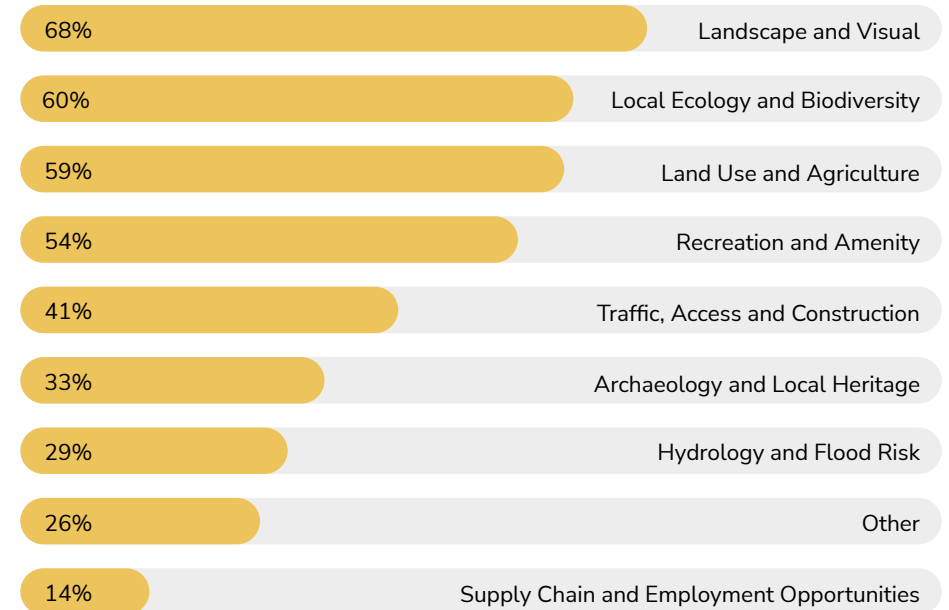
Initial views of Botley West

Based on our early-phase proposals, what are your views on Botley West Solar Farm?



While responses were mixed, we acknowledge that the majority of respondents expressed opposition to our initial proposals. This feedback, along with the key topic areas (presented below) is very important to us so we can best understand the concerns raised to further refine and update the design of Botley West.

Which aspects of the project are most important to you? (respondees could select more than one field)



Consultation Summary Report – Key Themes

The table below is a summary response to your comments at this phase. We will further set out how we have responded to all consultation feedback in our Consultation Report, which will be submitted as part of our Development Consent Order application to the Planning Inspectorate, anticipated to be in late 2023 or early 2024.

Your comments	How we are considering this feedback
Landscape and Visual	
<p>Respondents expressed concern about the visual impact of the solar farm across the site and how it could affect the landscape and character of the area. Respondents expressed concern that the project will industrialise the landscape.</p> <p>Respondents commented that the scale is inappropriate, with many noting that it could become the second biggest solar farm in Europe. The size of the middle site area was mentioned in particular.</p> <p>Respondents expressed concern about the current buffer zones and the proximity to villages and residential properties.</p> <p>Respondents commented that the project poses a potential safety risk to Oxford Airport.</p>	<p>We recognise the concern of local residents regarding the landscape and visual impact of the project. This is being carefully considered as the project progresses, and ongoing assessments will allow us to understand how we can further mitigate against any potential landscape and/or visual impacts. This includes a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) undertaken across the site. We will be sharing our emerging plans for further feedback during our phase two consultation.</p> <p>We recognise that the aerial plans of Botley West, which we shared during our phase one consultation, show the full scale of the project from a bird’s eye view. At our phase two consultation, we will be able to publish visualisations which give a better impression of how the project may be seen at eye-level from agreed local viewpoints.</p> <p>Our landscaping team are considering feedback alongside the visual profile of panels, gently undulating topography and existing landscape structure to sensitively design Botley West to integrate into the landscape as effectively as possible. Planting to further screen the panels is also being considered.</p> <p>We appreciate the feedback regarding the location of panels in proximity to residential properties. Our updated designs will now include a minimum 25 metre buffer zone with some areas in excess of 25 metres adjacent to settlements, increasing the buffer to further mitigate visual impacts.</p> <p>We are continuing to engage with Oxford Airport. Our updated plans for Botley West will include removing an area originally planned for solar array development to allow Oxford Airport to increase the amount of landing lights. The project will be developed so that it will not pose a safety risk to Oxford Airport.</p>

There are no plans for permanent lighting to be included as part of the proposals, so there should be no night-time visual impacts associated with Botley West. Only motion sensor security lighting around sensitive equipment will be installed.

Local Ecology and Biodiversity

<p>Respondents expressed concern about potential damage to local ecology and wildlife, and scepticism regarding the potential for solar farms to support an increase in biodiversity.</p> <p>This included comments regarding a perceived loss of habitat, safety, species levels and the impact of physical barriers such as fencing. Various local species were mentioned such as deer, swans and skylarks.</p> <p>Respondents commented that panels will block sunlight hitting the ground which will impact the ground underneath, in terms of plant growth and soil quality.</p>	<p>We are developing our proposals for Botley West so that it delivers an overall net gain in biodiversity. We will set out a calculation for how this will be achieved in our DCO application.</p> <p>As part of the EIA process, we are conducting a number of surveys analysing a variety of ecological and biodiversity impacts across the site – both positive and negative. This will inform the appropriate mitigation and enhancement measures required to boost biodiversity. The emerging results of this work will be shared as part of our phase two consultation.</p> <p>We are in discussion with Blenheim Estate about the organisation becoming the long-term environmental steward and manager of the land throughout the project’s lifespan, ensuring that ecological and biodiversity gains are properly secured and achieved.</p> <p>The design of Botley West includes gaps between the rows of panels, as well as gaps at intervals within the rows of panels. This ensures that light will hit the ground underneath, encouraging plants such as wildflowers to grow. Furthermore, taking fields out of intensive agriculture allows the ground to rest, meaning that the soil underneath panels is more likely to be healthier at the end of Botley West’s operation than at the start.</p>
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Archaeology and Cultural Heritage

<p>Respondents expressed concern that the proposals will affect archaeology and local heritage.</p>	<p>We understand the concerns raised regarding the impact to archaeology and local heritage. Our ongoing environmental assessments include geophysical and archaeological surveys, as well as site visits to mitigate against potential impacts on archaeology.</p> <p>The design of Botley West is being refined to ensure that panels are kept out of conservation areas and away from listed buildings and scheduled monuments.</p> <p>As we develop our proposals, we have also worked to refine our cable route. Between the northern, middle and southern sections, the cable route will avoid any known potentially sensitive areas of archaeological or cultural significance. We want to make sure that the project is delivered sensitively, which the refined cable route helps to achieve.</p>
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Traffic, Access, and Construction

Respondents have expressed concern that construction will increase the level of traffic, congestion, and pollution on roads across the project area.

There are comments that the roads around the villages are unsuitable and too narrow for construction traffic, such as the A4095 through Bladon. Some respondents have requested information on how the impacts of construction will be mitigated.

Respondents commented there is already bad congestion and traffic in the area and that the project will increase this. Some requested that the traffic from other projects is considered alongside this project.

We recognise the concern around the impact of traffic during construction. We are currently undertaking traffic and transport assessments to better understand current traffic levels and the potential impacts of the project to allow us to mitigate further. We are in dialogue with Oxfordshire County Council Highways on these matters and will continue to work with the authority throughout the duration of the project.

Our DCO application will include a Construction Traffic Management Plan, detailing the findings of our assessments and how traffic will be managed during the construction period. Cumulative impacts of traffic will be considered and addressed as part of the environmental assessment.

We want to ensure that construction is carried out sensitively with minimal impact on the surrounding area.

Land Use and Agriculture

Respondents expressed concern about a loss of agricultural land and crops. There was also concern about the loss of Green Belt land.

Respondents expressed concern that the solar farm threatens food security and the aim for self-sufficiency and would mean more carbon output in terms of imported food.

We recognise the importance of food security in the UK and are developing our proposals with this in mind. This will be considered in our planning application alongside the UK's energy needs and policy.

Our four supportive landowners won't be ceasing food production, if they are currently farming, and revenue from the rent will help them to diversify and improve the operation of their farms.

Botley West presents an opportunity to improve the condition of agricultural land and soil quality by temporarily taking the land out of intensive agricultural use for a period of time. Although we have strong local knowledge of the quality of the land within the site boundary, we are undertaking comprehensive land classification surveys across the site to fully understand the quality and grading of the land.

There will also be opportunities for continued agricultural use across the site area during the operation of Botley West. This could include the grazing of sheep or areas of horticulture. We are continuing to explore these opportunities through working with local stakeholders.

Hydrology and Flood Risk

Respondents commented that the whole site area is prone to flooding. Some specific areas mentioned were the Evenlode Valley, Lower Road, Cassington, Bladon, and Farmoor Reservoir.

Respondents expressed concern about the project increasing flood risk to the area. This includes panels run-off and inability for water to drain under the panels.

Well-designed solar farms do not cause an increase in the risk of flooding. Our focus is on ensuring Botley West is designed well to respond sensitively to the local environment. We are carrying out a comprehensive flood risk and ground conditions assessment which will detail the mitigation measures taken to reduce any adverse effects on flooding and ground conditions, including any additional drainage needed.

We do not anticipate the solar arrays having an adverse effect on flood risk, due to the minimal surface area required to construct the supporting structures for the PV panels.

Recreation and Amenity

Respondents expressed concern about a potential reduction in access to areas for recreation and public amenity.

Respondents expressed concern about the impact to existing footpaths and Public Rights of Way. There was particular concern that members of the public wouldn't want to walk through paths with solar panels on either side.

Respondents requested improved and new access routes for walking, running, cycling and motorised use. There was also a request for recreational facilities such as wildlife walks, birdwatching, visitor centres, and fitness equipment.

As we refine the project design, we are looking at ways to improve recreation and amenity in the area and mitigate against potential impacts. Within the project design, there are new permissive paths proposed which will increase access across the site for local communities, and we are working to understand where further footpaths and routes can be added. We are working closely with Blenheim Estate to align the project with its existing connectivity and active travel improvements planned for the local area.

Botley West intends to retain all existing Public Rights of Way (PRoWs) throughout the project area. We will be undertaking a recreation and amenity assessment that will consider the impact on PRoWs within and near the site. Alongside this, we are looking at ways we can improve the PRoWs in the area.

It is proposed to add a cycle track from Bladon to Begbroke across the site.

Site Selection and Alternatives

Respondents have commented that other technologies should be used instead of ground-mounted solar such as offshore and onshore wind, nuclear, tidal, and hydroelectric.

Respondents also commented that solar panels should be placed in alternative locations. This included rooftops, brownfield sites, car parks and reservoirs. Some commented that solar farms should be sited out of Oxfordshire.

We are supportive of all renewable energy technologies that help meet the government's targets to decarbonise our electricity system. Solar power is one of the most affordable forms of electricity in the UK and is quick to construct relative to other low carbon technologies, meaning that it is key in the transition away from fossil fuels. We will be including an assessment of how alternatives have been considered in our DCO application.

We understand concerns regarding the location of the solar farm and we are supportive of solar energy generation being installed on rooftops and other sites. We have considered other areas of potential development, including brownfield sites, however these have not been viable due to existing development constraints, land ownership issues, or grid capacity issues. This will be reflected within the alternatives section of our Environmental Statement (ES). Further information on the ES can be found on page 14 of this leaflet.

Community Impact

Respondents expressed concern that the project could have an impact on local people, including current and potential future residents. This included concerns regarding quality of life and the property values. There was also concern that various potential visual and heritage impacts to the area would reduce tourism which could in turn impact the local businesses.

Respondents commented that there are no benefits to local communities, with some requests that they receive energy directly and at cheaper rates.

We are considering all suggestions that are made to us about potential community benefits. We are already working with a number of local groups to explore benefits to the area, including engaging with local agricultural organisations about using areas of the site to enable community food production.

We have had valuable feedback about providing power from the project to the local community. We have been engaging with community energy groups across the local area on the potential for providing power at wholesale cost.

As the project progresses, we will continue to meet with local groups to discuss community benefits, which will form part of our phase two community consultation later this year. This will provide you with the opportunity to leave your feedback and provide further suggestions.

Project Updates

While we are working to update and refine the proposals following your feedback, we would like to provide a number of other updates on the project:

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

We are grateful for all the questions and feedback that we received during the first phase of community consultation. We have continued to update the FAQs on our website to include some of the most common questions on the project.

You can view the updated FAQs here: <https://botleywest.co.uk/FAQS.html>

Scoping Report

On 15 June 2023, we submitted our Scoping Report to the Planning Inspectorate (PINS), which can be viewed via the PINS website. Further information on the Scoping Report can be found on page 14.

Please note that the red line boundary within the Scoping Report has undergone minor adjustments compared to the red line boundary presented at the first phase of community consultation.

Statement of Community Consultation (SoCC)

Ahead of our second phase of community consultation, we will be consulting with the host local authorities on our Statement of Community Consultation (SoCC). This document, which will be published ahead of the second phase of consultation, outlines how we intend to engage and consult with the local community during this consultation.

The SoCC will take into account the recommendations from local authorities as well as the effectiveness and suggestions from our first phase of consultation.

Phase Two Community Consultation

We are planning to hold our second phase of community consultation in **Autumn 2023**.

This consultation will include sharing a Preliminary Environmental Information Report (PEIR), which provides greater detail on the proposals and will include the results of our technical and environmental assessments to date.

Scoping Report and the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)

We submitted our Scoping Report to the Planning Inspectorate on 15 June 2023.

The Scoping Report is a report that sets out how we intend to assess the environmental impacts for Botley West Solar Farm. It forms part of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) process, which is split into three main areas:

01 EIA Scoping Report

02 Preliminary Environmental Information Report (PEIR)

03 Environmental Statement (ES)

Following the submission of the Scoping Report, PINS will now consult a series of consultees from local planning authorities and statutory bodies to form a Scoping Opinion. The Scoping Opinion will inform how the likely environmental impacts of the project should be assessed, which will feed into the development of the Preliminary Environmental Information Report (PEIR). The PEIR will be consulted on at our second phase of community consultation.

Our DCO application will include an Environmental Statement, containing the full details of the environmental assessments undertaken for Botley West and the mitigation and enhancement measures proposed.

This process, as seen within our indicative project timeline below, is over a significant period of time and involves ongoing consultation with a variety of stakeholders. This ensures that we gain sufficient relevant environmental information from local residents and key consultees, and build this into our assessments within the ES.

Indicative Project Timeline

November-December 2022

Phase One Consultation

Spring 2023

- Refinement of early proposals
- Consultation on Statement of Community Consultation (SoCC) with Local Planning Authorities

Summer/Autumn 2023

- Submission of Scoping Report to Planning Inspectorate (PINS)
- Publication of Statement of Community Consultation
- Publication of Preliminary Environmental Information Report (PEIR)
- Phase Two Community Consultation

Autumn 2023

- Further refinement of proposals, following feedback received during community consultation
- Preparation of documents such as Environmental Statement and Consultation Report

Late 2023/Early 2024

- Submission of DCO application to PINS

All future dates are indicative and may change.

Contact us



Email: info@botleywest.co.uk



Freephone Information Line: 0808 175 3085

Available Monday - Friday, 9am - 5pm

Voice-mails can be left outside of these hours



Freepost: BWSF

You will not need a stamp to send any correspondence to the freepost address



Website: www.botleywest.co.uk

If anyone needs this document in large print, audio or braille formats, please contact us using the details above.

Please note that all graphics and maps in this document are for illustrative purposes.