

From: Stop Botley West Campaign <contact@stopbotleywest.com>
Sent: 16 November 2023 13:46
To: cassingtonclerk@cassington-pc.gov.uk
Subject: Latest news, plus this week's newsletter, "Solar and Soil"



Dear Supporters – please see the latest news below, and this week’s Newsletter from Professor Alex Rogers – Co-Chair of the SBW campaign. As ever, your thoughts and offers of help and support are always welcome.

News

STATEMENT OF PHASE 2 COMMUNITY CONSULTATION PUBLISHED BY PVDP

PVDP has published the Statement of Community Consultation (SOCC) for the Botley West Utility-Scale Solar Power Station. Consultations will be held between the 8th December, 2023 (Bladon Methodist Church) to the 19th January, 2024 (Eynsham Village Hall). There will also be a Community Webinar on the 23rd January. This is despite a direct call by SBW to delay the Community Consultation until after Christmas and the New Year to allow people the best opportunity to feed into the process. It is what it is unfortunately. We encourage everybody to engage with this process. Make yourselves aware of what the proposal contains and how it will affect you and be prepared with questions for the consultation events. Further details and guidance on SBW [website](#). The SOCC can be downloaded [here](#) under Phase Two Consultation Documents.

CALLS FOR A DELAY TO THE PUBLIC CONSULTATION IGNORED BY PVDP

The SBW Chair wrote to PVDP to ask for a delay in the public consultation. It is felt that holding the public consultation over the Christmas and New Year period will inevitably mean that people are away during the festive break or spending time with friends and family. Unfortunately this request has been turned down.

OXFORD LOCAL PLAN 2040 CONSULTATION

The Oxford Local Plan 2040 has now been published in its first draft by Oxford City Council. The plan covers areas such as protecting heritage, house building, net zero carbon policies, biodiversity targets and employment. We note that the headlines to

tackling the climate emergency are mainly around net zero building policies. Despite a glossy picture of solar panels over a car parking area, roof-top or brown field solar are not mentioned on the website. There is now an opportunity to comment on substantive issues related to the plans with a deadline of the 5th January. We encourage everyone to read the plan and to respond to the consultation. See [here](#) and go to the bottom of the webpage to link through to the consultation.

FOREVER FIELDS

Please attend the [FOREVER FIELDS](#) exhibition of works from local artists celebrating our incredible green spaces at Worton Park, 24th – 26th November. See the advert at the end of this newsletter.

DONATIONS

Many thanks for the donations. Please continue to donate what you can - we will continue to need your support to stop this inappropriate development.

What can I do?

1. Watch out for the Developer's booklet coming through your door soon
2. Head over to the [SBW website](#) for venues, dates and guidance on the consultations and how to respond.

3.

Co-Chair Alex Rogers: Solar and Soil; A Concerning Lack of Evidence

Dear Readers,

Soil is a precious resource. Its physical and biological characteristics determine its capacity to hold water, store carbon and to grow crops. It is not simply a mineral; it contains a rich microbial flora including bacteria and fungi as well as animals smaller than the human eye can see up to more familiar creatures such as earthworms. Soil is a living ecosystem. What we do to the soil can permanently damage it, alter its drainage properties, impoverish its biodiversity, release its carbon to the atmosphere exacerbating the climate crisis and render it less fertile or even infertile for the growing of crops.

The effects of solar power stations on soil are currently difficult to ascertain. This is because there are relatively few scientific studies on the subject. A recent study by the Welsh Government, The Impact of Solar Photovoltaic (PV) Sites On Agricultural Soils and Land is informative. The study concludes that the main impact of solar power stations is deep soil compaction arising from the three phases of solar development

including the building of the installations, their operation and their decommissioning. They state that it can take many years for soils to recover from compaction and in some cases damage may be permanent (generally when compaction extends below 45cm from the surface). Compaction can also be made worse by grazing the land on which solar arrays stand and by the runoff of water from the panels which can cause channelling. Compaction alters the characteristics of soil making them less permeable when it is wet and reducing their capacity to hold water when there are drought conditions. This obviously damages the productivity of farmland but also poses a potential risk to communities surrounding such developments because of their affects on hydrology and consequent influence on water runoff from land.

The report also talks about the claimed benefits of solar power stations. One of these, often claimed by the developer, is that soil carbon levels increase under solar farms because intensive agriculture is no longer practiced. This carbon comes from the plants which grow under and around the solar panels. However, there are caveats to this. Firstly, where soil organic carbon content increases as a result of coming out of tillage, it will do so at a maximal rate for the first few years but will then decline as a new equilibrium is reached. Also, if the soil is returned to tillage at any point thereafter (i.e. after a solar power station is removed) then the carbon is lost again to the atmosphere. Soil carbon storage potential also depends on what happens during solar power station construction. If topsoil is removed, the carbon uptake may never happen. Alterations to soil microclimate resulting from the presence of the solar array may also influence the soil's capacity and rate of take up carbon. The report concludes that further evidence is required of the benefits of solar power stations to soil carbon content.

Other problems with solar arrays and soil include the erosion of soils because of the formation of drainage channels beneath the lower edges of the panels. Shading can also affect plant growth. However, many of these aspects, just like the storage of carbon by soils under solar arrays are poorly investigated.

All this is extremely concerning given the massive proliferation of proposals for utility scale solar power stations across the countryside of the United Kingdom. In a world of great uncertainty food security must be a concern for all of us. When even temporary (40 years in the case of Botley West) installation of solar power stations can severely damage soils it should be a concern for the whole country. We should confine solar to rooftops, brownfield sites and wastelands. Certainly, moderately to good productivity land should be protected from such developments (e.g. Grade 3a and 3b land). We may depend on it in the future for our survival.

References

ADAS (2023) 2020/21 Soil Policy Evidence Programme. The impact of solar photovoltaic (PV) sites on agricultural soils and land. Work Package Three: Review of Impacts. Report produced for the Welsh Government by ADAS, Preston Wynne, Herefordshire, 79pp.



The Stop Botley West Campaign is entirely dependent on your generosity, both in time and donations. If you are able to contribute, please do give whatever you can - click the link below and scroll down to the donate section. Together, we will Stop Botley West. Thank you.

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