

From: Stop Botley West Campaign <contact@stopbotleywest.com>
Sent: 17 March 2024 21:12
To: cassingtonclerk@cassington-pc.gov.uk
Subject: Inadequate Consultation - do it again! - and Gas Lighting the Public



Stop Botley West UPDATE and NEWSLETTER

First, our grateful thanks to all those who have made recent donations. Your financial support is a vital part of our campaign and will become even more important in the future. Please continue to donate [here](#).

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

1. The Statutory Consultation has ended. The next key event is when the Developer submits their Development Consent Order (DCO) application and Environmental Statement (ES) to the Inspectorate which they say will be in **June 2024**.
2. At that time West Oxfordshire District Council (WODC) will also submit their Adequacy of Consultation (AOC) report to the Inspectorate. **WODC have agreed that our campaign, Stop Botley West (SBW) will contribute to this report and Parish Councils should send in reports too.**
3. **SBW will also be writing directly to the Inspectorate about the shortcomings of the consultation and calling for a re-run.**



**PLEASE HELP BY SENDING YOUR OWN REQUEST TO
THE INSPECTORATE FOR A REPEAT CONSULTATION**

Send your E-Mail letter to: botleywestsolar@planninginspectorate.gov.uk

Copy in:

- Your MP: robert@robertcourts.co.uk // layla.moran.mp@parliament.uk
- Leader of WODC andy.graham@oxfordshire.gov.uk,
- Your Parish Council [click here](#) for contact details

If you don't have time to compose your own letter from scratch you could use one of the pro-formas on the Stop Botley West [website](#). These suggested letters include

highlighted sections where you could add a few personal comments if you wish. There are also some further ideas on additional points you may want to make.

PLEASE SUPPORT THE CAMPAIGN TO PROTECT RURAL ENGLAND



CPRE are doing a cracking job of raising awareness, gathering support and influencing MPs and the Government to legislate for rooftop solar rather than huge ground based projects. They are extremely supportive of SBW, supplying terrific help and using their nationwide network to help our cause too.

We are therefore very keen that our supporters should be their supporters too! To learn more, to sign CPRE's rooftop campaign petition and to respond to a government consultation on rooftop solar legislation, click [HERE](#) and scroll to the bottom of the web page for more information.

NEWSLETTER

Gas Lighting the Public: Smoke and Mirrors on the Agricultural Value of Our Land

Professor Alex Rogers, Chairman, Stop Botley West Campaign, March 2024

The first time a representative of Blenheim Estate described the land they manage as mostly Grade 3B and "poor" was at the Cassington Parish Council Meeting of the 1st December, 2022. This was stated by Dominic Hare, the CEO of the charity, Blenheim Estate Trust, and he used this description as part of the justification for converting farmland to a massive ground mounted solar power station. This incorrect information was repeated at several parish meetings about the Botley West Solar Farm Proposal, and I believe it was aimed at misleading the public. It is this 'gaslighting' that is still being repeated, most recently in a BBC Countryfile Magazine article The Great Solar Debate published in March 2024. Here, the article states rather ambiguously: "arable farmland surrounding Blenheim Palace.....25% of this land, the majority of it lower quality, is planned for solar."

However, this untruth was even more deceptive than it initially appeared. As early as 2022, we were aware that the land held a Grade 3 classification, possibly falling within the range of Grade 3a or 3b. Yet, neither of these classifications could accurately be labelled as "poor."

Land Quality

As anyone involved in agriculture knows this is nowhere near a description of "poor". Yarnton Meadows, for example, have been famous for hundreds of years for producing excellent yields of quality hay. Subsequent findings from the Preliminary Environmental Information Report in 2023, have shed light on the matter. A

substantial portion—up to 38%—of the land designated for the Botley West Solar project is, in fact, classified as Best and Most Versatile (BMV) land. BMV land encompasses Grades 1, 2, or 3a, all of which are described as excellent to good. Notably, experts advising the Stop Botley West initiative contend that the proportion of BMV in the central section of the development exceeds the overall average of 38% and may even reach an astonishing 80%. This is farmland that is capable of yielding high quantities of a select range of arable crops, as well as good yields of grass, oilseed rape, potatoes, sugar beet, and other less demanding crops.



Ground mounted solar panels and soil health

Referring to the BBC Countryfile article there is the statement that solar farms have a “generally positive” influence on soil health. Some of the farmers on this land that have farmed it for generations might disagree. The following statement is a reiteration of one that appeared in the Phase One Consultation Summary Report.

“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.”

Again, a justification for this massive industrialisation of part of the Blenheim Estate. Why is this statement questionable? There is evidence that ground mounted solar farms can have significant impact on land quality due to the compaction of the soil and the potential to increase the chance of flooding by damaging the existing field drains by driving 2 million piles into the ground to support solar panels.

If Blenheim, as the organisation with rights over this land, knows that agricultural practices are damaging their main asset, why have they not done something about it before now? So rather than prioritizing sustainable development that benefits both the climate and people, they are pursuing large-scale industrialization of Oxfordshire’s farmland and greenbelt. This cynical approach appears to prioritize maximising income over environmental stewardship.

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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