

Mr Mark Owen-Lloyd
Photovolt Development Partners GmbH

By Email

Wednesday 7 February 2024

Dear Mark,

We are writing in response to your Statutory Consultation on the proposed Botley West Solar Farm as local Members of Parliament and parliamentary candidates at the forthcoming General Election.

Over the last eighteen months, we have all been contacted by a significant number of constituents and local residents who are extremely worried about the proposals. Local strength of feeling was made clear last summer in a petition presented to Parliament, with over 2,000 signatures in opposition to the scheme from one area alone. Cherwell, West Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils have also all raised concerns about the plans at various stages.

In their revised form, your proposals cover a total area of 1,300 hectares, with an estimated power generation of 840 MW. Your amalgamation of three distinct, clearly separated sites as one vast development ensures that they are considered as a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project. This in itself has caused considerable anxiety, as our District Councils will play less of a role in the determination of the scheme. We believe residents are right to be concerned that your proposals will escape an important level of local scrutiny as a result.

None of us question the need to increase our domestic renewable energy production in order to meet the Government's rightly ambitious Net Zero targets. Solar has an important role to play in this transition, with a national target to increase production to 70 GW by 2035. However, we firmly believe that its deployment should be focused on rooftops, commercial and brownfield sites wherever possible. Any greenfield developments should be proportionate and sensitively located. Given this development would, if approved, be the largest solar farm in Europe, we do not think it comes close to meeting these criteria.

Residents are concerned that your proposals would result in the loss of vast swathes of productive agricultural land. A significant area of the site has been identified as Best and Most Versatile – a classification reserved for our most fertile and productive farmland nationally. The war in Ukraine has only reinforced the importance of a resilient domestic food supply. Residents also do not accept that a lifespan of 40 years constitutes a temporary or fully reversible development. We agree that the long-term loss of such a large area of productive agricultural land is entirely unacceptable.

The proposals would further have a significant impact on the character of some of Oxfordshire's most iconic, rolling countryside. It cannot be overlooked that roughly three quarters of the development is located within the Oxford Green Belt. Moreover, each of the three sites are located in close proximity to sensitive receptors. These include the Blenheim World Heritage Site, multiple Conservation Areas, Scheduled Monuments, Listed Buildings, Ancient Woodlands and Public Rights of Way. It is clear that your proposals are not sensitively located and would cause unacceptable harm to the surrounding area.

It is also felt strongly that the Community Benefit Funding of £50,000 per annum currently proposed – should your scheme ultimately be approved – is woefully inadequate for a development of this scale. This will scarcely ameliorate the detrimental impact of these proposals for local communities. We believe any funding must go further, and be delivered more widely, to ensure the benefit is proportionate to the negative impact residents are expected to endure. Community groups argue that a starting point for discussion should instead be £3 million.

Finally, residents feel that this consultation has failed to provide sufficient, objective information to justify the plans. We are aware that several villages affected have not received any communication from your company regarding the consultation, and those who have believe the information provided was inadequate. This has led to residents feeling misled, fostering further distrust among the community. As this process moves forward, we implore you to provide the appropriate level of detail and objectivity required to listen to and address the concerns that residents rightly have.

For the above reasons, we cannot support your proposals in their current form and we urge you to reconsider. Given the strength of feeling this development has generated locally, we could only support a radically different approach.

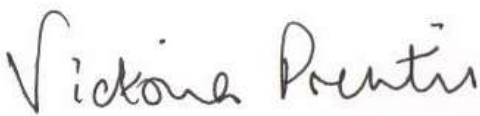
Yours sincerely,



Robert Courts KC MP
Member of Parliament for Witney



John Howell OBE MP
Member of Parliament for Henley



Rt Hon Victoria Prentis KC MP
Member of Parliament for Banbury



Rupert Harrison
Parliamentary Candidate for
Bicester and Woodstock