

## Planning and Strategic Housing

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### Via Email

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Date: 18 November 2024  
Your ref: EN010147

Dear Caroline Hopewell

### **Planning Act 2008 (as amended) – Section 55 Adequacy of consultation request**

Thank you for consulting West Oxfordshire District Council on the applicant's Adequacy of Consultation during the Pre-application stage.

Please find a completed Adequacy of Consultation Representation Proforma enclosed.



Andrew Thomson  
Lead Planning Policy and Implementation officer



## Adequacy of Consultation Representation Proforma

Under *Section 55(4)(b) of the Planning Act 2008* (as amended) (PA2008) the Planning Inspectorate, on behalf of the Secretary of State, must take any adequacy of consultation representation (AoCR) received from a local authority consultee into account when deciding whether to accept an application for development consent, and this will be published should the application be accepted for examination.

An AoCR is defined in s55(5) in PA2008 as “a representation about whether the applicant complied, in relation to that proposed application, with the applicant’s duties under sections 42, 47 and 48”.

<b>Project name</b>	Botley West Solar Farm
<b>Date of request</b>	18 November 2024
<b>Deadline for AOCR</b>	02 December 2024
<b>Return to</b>	<a href="mailto:Botleywestsolar@planninginspectorate.gov.uk">Botleywestsolar@planninginspectorate.gov.uk</a>

Please complete the proforma outlining your AoCR on the above NSIP.

<b>Local Authority</b>	West Oxfordshire
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In the opinion of the local authority, has the applicant complied with the legislative requirements listed below?

*Please note that this is specifically about the statutory consultation(s) undertaken.*

<b>Assessment of Compliance - Required</b>	
<b>S42 Duty to consult</b>	Yes
<b>S47 Duty to consult local authority</b>	Yes (with qualifications)
<b>S48 Duty to publicise</b>	Yes

If you would like to give more detail on any of the above, please do so below.

*Please keep it as succinct as possible and refer to facts and evidence related to consultation, rather than the merits of the application.*



<b>Additional comments - <i>Not compulsory</i></b>	
<b>S42 Duty to consult</b>	<p>The applicant consulted all relevant prescribed consultees as well as host and neighbouring authorities about the proposed application.</p>
<b>S47 Duty to consult local authority</b>	<p>WODC have engaged regularly with the applicant and their representatives throughout the pre-application period, holding regular meetings with the developer team, to understand progress with the project and the applicant's intentions regarding the DCO application.</p> <p>WODC were consulted formally on the EIA Scope, Statement of Community Consultation and the details of the proposals including the Preliminary Environmental Information Report, through 3 formal (statutory) rounds of consultation.</p> <p>West Oxfordshire District Council responded to the applicant's SoCC consultation, providing details of appropriate venues for in-person events and its view on the timing of events during the consultation period. Although the applicant determined that they would not hold in person events at 2 suggested locations, WODC were satisfied that the proposed venues (i.e. excluding Tackley and Wootton) were satisfactory to enable affected communities to engage with the applicants and to be consulted effectively.</p> <p>The SoCC (section 7) committed the applicant to ensure inclusive, meaningful and open consultation. Further reflection on whether this was achieved are set out under the further comments below.</p>
<b>S48 Duty to publicise</b>	<p>The applicant undertook consultation in accordance with the Statement of Community Consultation, by providing sufficient notice of the consultation period, making documents available for inspection online, at deposit locations and at in-person consultation events and by providing a sufficient length of time to allow stakeholders to respond.</p> <p>The applicant publicised their consultation through a number of channels and direct correspondence with relevant stakeholders and affected communities during the pre-application period.</p> <p>WODC consider that the applicants consultation events were publicised in accordance with the statement of community consultation and that publication was done in the prescribed manner.</p>



**Any other comments**

The applicant undertook three rounds of statutory consultation during the pre-application period. The level of detail presented at each round of consultation varied, in accordance with the nature and detail of the consultation being undertaken.

Although WODC consider that the information provided at each round of consultation was proportionate to each stage, e.g by providing more supporting documentation and holding public meetings at the PEIR stage, the council are aware of concerns expressed by the members of the public, about proposals lacking necessary detail, for stakeholders to take an informed view of potential impacts at each stage and to undertake meaningful engagement with the applicant through the pre-application phase.

Maps and details of proposed changes to order limits presented through rounds of focused consultations for instance, lacked clarity and detail, which could have affected stakeholders ability to engage effectively though each round of consultation.

The Stop Botley West campaign group and others have highlighted a number of limitations to the applicant's statutory consultation, that they wish to bring to the attention of the Planning Inspectorate. A copy of the Stop Botley West AOC review is appended to this response for the consideration of the Inspectorate.

The concerns relate primarily to the Gunning principles for public consultation and in particular, that there should be sufficient information to give intelligent consideration and to provide an informed response.

Further details of issues and concerns at each stage of statutory consultation, that WODC wish to bring to the attention of the Inspectorate are as follows;

**1) Full statutory consultation on draft proposals and preliminary Environmental Information Report**

The 10 week consultation focussed on the draft design and masterplan of the development as well as details of the potential environmental impacts of the proposals as detailed in the PEIR.

A significant volume of detailed technical information was presented for consultation, with documentation available to download from the applicant's website, via a number of deposit locations and at a number of scheduled, in-person consultation events.

The PEIR extended to 20 chapters and approximately 7,000 pages, covering a range of social, environmental and economic factors, with a non-technical summary providing a useful summary and signposting to detailed information held within the PEIR chapters.

It was apparent that there were gaps in information presented at the PEIR stage and this may have affected stakeholders' ability to engage fully with the consultation. Important elements such as a heritage impact assessment, particularly with regard to impacts on Blenheim Palace World Heritage Site and any proposed measures to mitigate impacts on landscape, heritage, residential amenity and surface water flooding were not detailed in the PEIR.



This undermined stakeholders ability to comment on the effectiveness of any proposed mitigation and reflect on whether the applicant's conclusions about the significance of impacts were robust and justified.

Although documentation relating to the PEIR was structured in a logical manner, we consider that this could have made more accessible, particularly access to mapping resources and illustrations. Masterplan documents were particularly detailed and it should be recognised that the file sizes of such documents may have prohibited stakeholders from accessing documentation easily, thus inhibiting their ability to engage in consultation.

## **2) Focused consultation on project boundary and order limits**

The second statutory consultation related to focused changes to the project order limits. A total of 57 changes were consulted on, relating to map accuracy, engineering and feasibility and transport and access to the site. Many of the proposed changes were relatively insignificant in nature, but many introduced concepts of vegetation removal and may result in more significant impacts than previously indicated through the PEIR consultation.

Only very high level and limited information on the potential impacts was provided in the consultation material and the scale of the mapping in the change note was likely to be difficult for stakeholders to interpret without access to the site or digital mapping tools.

We recognise that consultation activities can and should be proportionate to the level of detail of the consultation, but aspects of the SOCC, such as a commitment to hold in person events throughout the consultation zone were not undertaken during the second statutory, focused consultation.

Some of the proposed changes were made in response to representations made during the first round of Statutory consultation, such as the removal of cable route options through Long Mead Meadow to the south east of Eynsham, but the majority of changes did not appear to address any comments or concerns expressed by host authorities and statutory agencies at the PEIR stage. Changes made appeared to reflect the developer's own requirements, rather than responding to the concerns of host authorities.

The need to consult on the proposed changes in the manner undertaken suggest that the applicant's first consultation may have been rushed, before details of the required project boundary were finalised.

## **3) Focused consultation on proposed change to order limits to allow for alternative cable route corridor.**

The third and final statutory consultation was focused on a single veteran tree and concerned revisions to the project boundary, to protect the integrity of the tree and root structure.



Consultation material provided was difficult to interpret due to the resolution and scale of the images provided which is likely to have inhibited stakeholders' abilities to engage in the consultation.

As with the second statutory and first focused consultation, commitments made in the SoCC were not followed in terms of in person consultation events within the core consultation zone.

#### **Concluding comments**

Although WODC are generally satisfied that the pre-application consultation undertaken meets the Regulation requirements and process outlined at s42, s47 and s48 of the Planning Act 2008, we wish to draw your attention to a number of general observations of the adequacy of consultation in consideration of s.55 of the Act.

The host authorities have **not** been engaged with the applicant on the design evolution of the proposed solar farm through successive rounds of consultation and have **not** had an opportunity to respond to changes made to the project design during the pre-application stage, other than where changes have been made in response to archaeological assessment or to the project order limits.

As the best opportunity to shape the proposals, the host authorities would have welcomed further consultation on updated design proposals and assessments undertaken by the applicant, with an opportunity to address specific concerns about landscape impact, heritage impact and impacts on the Green Belt.

The applicant's Consultation Statement submitted to the Planning Inspectorate on 15 November 2024, indicates that representations made by host authorities and other statutory agencies and members of the public will be addressed in forthcoming application material.

**Appendix 1 – Stop Botley West Campaign AOC Summary (November 2024)**

# **BWSF Statutory Consultation 30/11/23 to 8/2/24**

## **SBW Summary of AOC report and Survey Results**

Evidence provided by a detailed study of the PEIR together with observations and feedback from consultees, including 1400+ responses to a survey conducted by SBW\*, indicates that the BWSF statutory consultation was not adequate and should be re-run for the reasons listed.

\*SBW worked with an independent consultant to ensure that the survey design was unbiased and that the questionnaire allowed respondents to express their views effectively, regardless of their stance on the proposals

### **Key Findings from the SBW Survey**

- 50-64% of respondents felt that there was insufficient clarity, detail and consistency in the maps and information provided.
- 66% of respondents to the SBW survey believe they did not have adequate opportunity to influence what is being proposed.
- 61% of respondents felt the developers were not listening
- Quote from Developer's spokesman "if 100% of people in the area are against it, it will make no difference"

### **Summary of observations by SBW and consultee feedback**

#### **1. The Information available was neither sufficient nor accurate.**

##### 1.1. Major subjects not addressed in PEIR included

- Green Belt – very special circumstances
- Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment
- Environmental Management Plan
- Traffic Management Plan
- Impact assessment on Blenheim World Heritage Site
- Thames crossing and damage to floodplain meadows
- Decommissioning

##### 1.2. Other key missing information

- No maps at required scale of 1:2,500
- Photomontages of most key viewpoints omitted
- Location/impact of secondary sub-stations and temporary compounds
- Effects on the historic environment

##### 1.3. Community Consultation Leaflet

- Absence of objective, honest and balanced statement of facts
- Key facts missing: total area of site, infrastructure on maps, photomontages
- Some claims exaggerated, misleading or untrue

##### 1.4. Non-Technical Summary

- No photographs or photomontages
- Inadequate maps, none better than scale of 1:100,000 at A3
- Many adverse effects described as "not significant" without objective evidence

## **2. The Information was not sufficiently Accessible**

### 2.1. Communities omitted

- No Consultation event or Community Access point for entire northern site, 700 acres near villages of Wootton and Tackley (pop. 1675)
- Village of Combe (pop. 774) completely omitted from the Consultation (no Community Consultation leaflets, event or access point) despite being only 2km from the site. Parish Council ignored.
- No Consultation event at Kidlington or Yarnton (pop. 17871) adjacent to the site
- Insufficient advertising in the affected communities (statutory minimum only despite size of this proposal)
- Delivery of Consultation leaflet patchy in all communities, delayed by Christmas post, easily mistaken for junk mail in unmarked envelopes
- Held over Christmas and New Year despite request to delay
- Very limited times, dates and venues – inaccessible to many residents, especially those in full time work

### 2.2. Consultation Events defects

- No local advertising eg village magazines, no signage boards or posters displayed outside event venues
- Poor choice of venues, in many cases difficult to locate, no parking, no public transport
- Missing experts; of those staff present some uninformed, dismissive and/or biased so questions not answered satisfactorily
- Maps unclear, of inadequate scale and insufficiently detailed, poorly displayed, some infrastructure not shown.
- Photographs of unacceptably poor quality and poorly displayed
- Massive files to read, no seating, impossible to navigate, no master index
- Insufficient copies of Non-Technical Summary

### 2.3. Other ways to access Information

- Information Access Points:
  - no posters displayed, files still in boxes or shut away
  - inadequate space, no large scale maps,
  - restricted opening days and times
- Applicant's Website:
  - Many attempted file downloads crashed due to size, especially on mobile devices so information inaccessible
  - No search facility within documents up to 650 pages long

## **3. Information was not easily interpretable for consultees**

### 3.1. Difficulties in interpreting information in the documentation

- Labyrinthine documentation with no master contents list or index and little cross-referencing in the PEIR
- Misleading and difficult to understand statements in the non-technical summary
- No explanation of terms used or judgements made
- Biased question 2 in Applicant's feedback form.

# BWSF Targeted Consultations July and September 2024

## SBW Summary of Shortcomings of targeted consultations 3 and 4

Quote from an email sent by Mark Owen Lloyd to Prof Alex Rogers, Chair SBW on 2 May. 2024.

*The consultation you refer to is targeted only in subject matter not in audience. We will communicate with the whole consultation zone in the same way as we communicated during the statutory consultation - the leaflet will go to the same 22,000 addresses and be publicised via press notices and the BWSF website. Full details of the consultation will be in the leaflet. **The consultation will be statutory and accord with the SoCC***

**This clearly didn't happen and consultations 3 and 4 did not comply with the SoCC.**

The actual facts are:

### Consultation 3: Targeted Consultation - 57 Changes

- o No leaflets were sent out - only postcards directing people to 5 libraries or the Botley West website
- o No in-person events (as listed in the SOCC) were held.
- o No prior notification of the consultation was given contrary to the SOCC requirement for 14 days notice. In some cases information was not available until 4/5 days after the start of the consultation.
- o **Crucially** many of the locations of the changes were inaccessible to the public being on private land (mostly Blenheim's). With no photographs, very poor maps and no public access **it was impossible to engage in the consultation for over half of the 57 changes because they could not be located, visited or visualised.**

### Consultation 4: Targeted Consultation - single veteran Tree

- o Just one letter was posted to a single resident. Emails were sent to some of the people who had responded before. No other notifications were issued. Information was available at the 5n libraries and on the Botley West website but the majority of residents - probably at over 20,000 of the addresses within the CCZ - didn't know the consultation was happening.
- o No in-person events (as listed in the SOCC) were held.
- o No prior notification of the consultation was given contrary to the SOCC requirements.
- o The 4th Consultation regarding a veteran tree is clearly a rushed afterthought with blurry images and the usual inadequate map/diagram. Lack of clear measurements mean the developer has failed to provide evidence that the revised cable trench route will avoid damage to the tree roots. This tree is also on private land so not accessible to the general public
- o Measurements made by the Stop Botley West Campaign show that, in fact, **any** route chosen within the new red line corridor would be too near the tree (according to guidelines provided by Forestry England and Woodland Trust). Further, there are several other veteran oaks potentially affected by cable trenches but not identified in this consultation.

### Both Consultations 3 & 4

1. NONE of the issues raised in the earlier Statutory consultation responses have been addressed and no modifications were made to the scheme despite the many hundreds of responses to the first two consultations. Questions remain unanswered and further engagement, with Councils or other key stakeholders, has not happened.
2. The fact that these consultations were required at all - to address earlier errors and omissions - confirms the inadequacy of the statutory consultation which was incomplete and had been rushed through just before Christmas against all advice.
3. As in the Statutory Consultation, the maps used were inadequate. They were inconsistent, not based on OS maps, had no visible scale or reference points and no cross referencing making it almost impossible to identify the locations of the changes. The descriptions given of individual changes are considered by nearly all respondents to be inadequate, confusing even "totally incompressible" because they lack accurate reference points, contain little detail, no photographs, include several factual errors and give no explanation or justification of oft repeated terms such as "unlikely to lead to significant adverse environmental effects" or "suitable mitigation" This suggests that the developer has insufficient understanding of the area or of the issues and provides little confidence that they truly intend, or understand how, to "avoid environmental impacts"

**Appendix 2 – Stop Botley West Campaign AOC Report (May 2024)**



# ‘Botley West Solar Farm’: Report on Adequacy of Consultation

May 2024

Prepared by Stop Botley West



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A statutory public consultation was conducted by Photovolt Development Partners GmbH (PVDP) between 30th November 2023 and 8th February 2024 on its proposal to construct a 1300 hectare ground-mounted solar farm, Botley West Solar Farm (BWSF).

This report, compiled by community campaign group Stop Botley West, examines the adequacy of that consultation. We hope this will assist West Oxfordshire District Council and the Planning Inspectorate in their own assessments of the adequacy.

We examined the consultation according to the **Gunning Principles**, four principles that provide a strong and widely used legal foundation for assessing the adequacy and legitimacy of public consultations. We referred also to government and Planning Inspectorate (PINS) guidance on public consultations.

**Gunning Principle 1** requires that proposals are still at a formative stage, i.e. a final decision has not yet been made or predetermined by the decision makers. The Development Consent Order (DCO) application for BWSF has not yet been submitted and a decision has not been made by the Secretary of State. However PVDP as the Applicant is also a decision maker, and there is serious concern amongst consultees about specific statements that imply the decision has in effect already been made and the construction of the solar farm is inevitable. Such statements undermined public confidence that the decision is not predetermined and that responding to the consultation would serve any useful purpose.

**Gunning Principle 2** requires that there is sufficient information to give intelligent consideration to the proposal. It specifies that for consultees to provide an informed response, the information must be available, accessible and easily interpretable. We found there is widespread concern amongst local residents and other stakeholders that the consultation failed to provide sufficient information to enable a proper understanding of the proposed project and its impacts.

We reviewed eight subject areas in the Preliminary Environmental Impact Report (PEIR) as well as the Community Consultation Leaflet and Non-Technical Summary. We found that in numerous respects the documents lacked essential assessments and related evidence base. Key subjects were covered by simply signposting consultees to surveys and assessments that were yet to be conducted and were therefore not available for consideration. Missing information included a presentation of alternative options, a Heritage Impact Assessment for the Blenheim World Heritage Site, an explanation of the Very Special Circumstances for developing green belt land, a Biodiversity Net Gain assessment and an Environmental Management Plan. Furthermore, numerous statements and inferences were made that are not accurate and balanced and were in effect misleading. The lack of sufficient, accurate information impeded consultees' ability to understand the project and its impact and to respond effectively to the consultation.

We reviewed the accessibility of information in the consultation process, looking at the ways information was provided by the Applicant through documentation and information events. We found many failings in the way the consultation was conducted which made it difficult for consultees to access the information they needed. Numerous households did not receive the Consultation Leaflet. The PEIR was very difficult to access online or in hard copy. Some information events were held in unsuitable venues and in several areas no events were held at all; they were poorly scheduled and advertised, making it difficult for consultees to access them. There was a lack of technical expertise available at the information events to answer consultees' questions and the visual resources provided (maps and photomontages) were poor quality and confusing.

We looked at whether the consultation documents were easy for consultees to interpret. We found that the PEIR was extremely long (7,000 pages) and unnecessarily repetitive. It lacked a contents list, master index and cross-referencing to help consultees navigate it. As a result, the PEIR was so daunting as to be actively off-putting for most consultees and obscured an understanding of what is proposed. The Non-Technical Summary lacked clarity and explanation or justification for statements made and included no cross-references to where that might be found in the PEIR. The Community Consultation Leaflet presented information that was highly selective and biased and as such did not enable consultees to interpret the information and form an objective understanding. Analysis of the language of the consultation documents using standard readability tests found they scored poorly and the text is not easily accessible to a wide audience.

**Gunning Principle 3** requires that there is adequate time for consideration and response. It specifies that consultees should have sufficient opportunity to participate in the consultation and the consultation period can vary according to the subject and extent of impact. We found that the 10-week consultation period was not realistic or proportionate given the unprecedented scale and impacts of the proposed development and the volume of the consultation documents. Moreover it was scheduled over the Christmas and New Year holiday period when people have very limited time available to participate in a consultation. The Applicant chose not to respond to the many requests that were made not to hold the consultation over the holiday period. Consultees should have been given a longer, more proportionate amount of time to consider the consultation documents and form their responses.

**Gunning Principle 4** requires that conscientious consideration is given to the consultation responses before a decision is made and that decision-makers are able to provide evidence that they took consultation responses into account. We found that many consultees believe they did not have adequate opportunity to influence what is being proposed and do not believe the developers listened to their comments in the consultation. Confidence that the Applicant will consider consultation responses was further undermined by the fact that following the earlier Informal Consultation, it appears the Applicant did not take serious account of the responses.

In conclusion, we consider the Applicant's approach to engagement with the affected communities did not have sufficient regard to the relevant guidance and did not meet the standards required for a public consultation. According to the standard of the Gunning Principles, the public consultation was not adequate or legitimate. We submit that the Applicant should be required to rectify the numerous serious inadequacies identified with the consultation and to conduct it again, making more effort to ensure effective and meaningful engagement with the public.

## INTRODUCTION

Stop Botley West (SBW) is a community campaign group that began in November 2022 when local residents were first informed about the proposal to construct Botley West Solar Farm (BWSF).

This report compiled by SBW provides evidence intended to assist West Oxfordshire District Council and the Planning Inspectorate in their assessment of the adequacy of the Statutory Consultation on BWSF conducted by the Applicant, Photovolt Development Partners GmbH (PVDP), between 30 November 2023 and 8 February 2024.

The report is based on data from three sources:

- a survey of local residents carried out by SBW during the consultation to gather feedback on the adequacy of the consultation. The survey was designed by an independent consultant and was impartial: the questionnaire allowed respondents to express their views regardless of their stance on the proposal. A total of 1,442 responses were received and analysed (the survey report is attached at Annex 1)
- analysis of the consultation documents carried out by local residents who volunteered their expertise
- observations and feedback on the consultation documents and process from local residents who participated in the consultation

This report assesses the consultation according to the Gunning Principles. These four principles form the legal foundation from which the adequacy and legitimacy of public consultations is assessed<sup>1</sup>. We also refer to the guidance set out in *The Planning Act 2008: Guidance on the pre-application process (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2015)*<sup>2</sup> and in Planning Inspectorate Advice Notes.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/The%20Gunning%20Principles.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-the-pre-application-process-for-major-infrastructure-projects>

## PRINCIPLE 1: PROPOSALS ARE STILL AT A FORMATIVE STAGE

‘A final decision has not yet been made, or predetermined, by the decision makers.’

Our assumption is that in advance of receiving the evidence, the Planning Inspectorate and the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero have not made any decisions in regard to the BWSF proposal.

The Applicant is also a decision maker regarding the plan and should respond to consultees with modification of their plans. However there is serious concern that statements that have been made by the Applicant suggested to consultees that the decision is in effect predetermined. For example:

- the consultation documents state that BWSF has an agreement to provide 840 MW of power to the National Grid. This gives a clear message to consultees that a solar farm at the proposed scale has been agreed with the National Grid and cannot be reduced or denied
- BWSF Director Mark Owen-Lloyd told a consultee (and two witnesses) at the information event in Woodstock on 13 January 2024: ‘If 100% of people in the area are against it, it will make no difference. We have satisfied all of the government criteria for it to go ahead, so it will’

Such statements undermined public confidence that nothing is predetermined and that responding to the consultation would serve a useful purpose. 66% of respondents to the SBW Survey said they do not believe they had adequate opportunity to influence what is being proposed. One respondent commented, ‘From the very early stages it was quite clear the consultation was simply a box ticking exercise and local feeling will not influence the outcome.’

## PRINCIPLE 2: THERE IS SUFFICIENT INFORMATION TO GIVE 'INTELLIGENT CONSIDERATION'

'The information provided must relate to the consultation and must be available, accessible, and easily interpretable for consultees to provide an informed response.'

Planning Act 2008: 'Guidance on the pre-application process (para 20): The Consultation should be based on accurate information that gives the consultees a clear view of what is proposed including any options.'

We recognize that the PEIR is not as detailed or comprehensive as the Environmental Statement that will be submitted with the DCO application. Nonetheless, as the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) guidance says, 'consultees will need sufficient information on a project to be able to recognise and understand the impacts' (para 68) and 'For the pre-application consultation process, applicants are advised to include sufficient preliminary environmental information to enable consultees to develop an informed view of the project' (para 93). Planning Inspectorate Advice Note 7 (para 8.7) also advises, 'Applicants should consider carefully whether publication of the PEI at a more advanced stage in the design process of the NSIP, where more detailed information is known about the Proposed Development and its environmental effects, would generate more detailed responses and so better inform the design of the Proposed Development and their EIA. This may provide a more effective consultation exercise.'

In this section, Gunning Principle 2 is broken down into the following questions:

- Was the information sufficient and accurate and did it include options?
- Was the information accessible?
- Was the information easily interpretable?

### **2.1 Was the information sufficient and accurate? Did it include any options?**

We understand that the Applicant continues to develop the proposal and that further information will be available with the DCO application. Nevertheless, Government guidance anticipates applications being well-developed and understood by the public, with important issues articulated and considered in advance of the DCO submission.

A significant proportion of the affected communities found there was insufficient information available in the consultation to inform them adequately and that the lack of information diminished the quality of their engagement in and responses to the consultation.

The majority of respondents to the SBW Survey thought the information was not sufficiently detailed (64.5%) and the visual and written information was not clear and easy to understand (51.3%). A significant proportion thought the maps were not clear and easy to understand (49.3%) and the information was not consistent across the various sources (45.3%).

The majority of the information provided for the consultation was in the PEIR. Detailed feedback was provided by local resident experts on specific chapters of the PEIR as follows. Feedback was also provided by consultees on the Community Consultation Leaflet and the Non-Technical Summary (NTS).

#### **2.1.1 Alternatives, PEIR Chapter 4**

The DCLG Guidance (para 20) requires a consultation to give consultees a clear view of what is proposed *including any options* and this was reinforced by the Planning Inspectorate during their

meeting with the Applicant on 13 September 2023. There is widespread concern amongst local residents that the Applicant failed to present alternative options in the consultation with regard to alternative scale, alternative sites or alternative technology.

Almost all of the consultation bodies responding to the informal consultation held in 2022 (their responses are shown at the Appendix to Annex 1 below) were concerned with the scale of the project and several specifically requested consideration of a smaller scale. Many consultees also expressed interest in small scale solar farms (citing for example Southill Solar Farm in Charlbury, West Oxfordshire). However the PEIR gave no indication that alternative scales were considered by the Applicant and none were presented as options in the consultation.

Alternative sites for the project also do not appear to have been considered by the Applicant and none were presented as options in the consultation. Consultees are generally aware that rooftop solar offers enormous unexploited potential<sup>3</sup>, as do brownfield options such as sites at Didcot and Upper Heyford, and large car parks such as those surrounding Oxford. No information on other site options was provided for consultation.

The failure to consider alternative forms of solar energy generation was also seen in the Applicant's Consultation Feedback Form. Question 2 asked: 'In principle, do you agree there is a need to install solar structure?' The multiple choice answers offered to consultees were:

- I agree there is a need to install solar structure
- I do not feel I understand enough about the need to install solar structure
- I do not agree there is a need to install solar structure

Respondents were not allowed an opportunity to distinguish between large scale ground-mounted solar options, smaller solar farms and rooftop or brownfield site options. Many local residents reported that they had left this question unanswered because none of the answers described their view adequately.

Alternative technologies were also not presented as options for consideration in the consultation. There were no options linked to solar panel innovations such as crystalline silicon-perovskite tandem technology which would require much less land to produce the 840 MW that the Applicant aims to produce. Likewise other forms of renewable energy such as wind, biomass and small modular nuclear reactors offer efficient ways to produce clean energy in Oxfordshire but were not included as options for consideration in the consultation.

The Applicant's clear intention was to infer (incorrectly) that there is no credible alternative to large scale ground-mounted solar power stations and therefore (another incorrect inference) there is no alternative to BWSF. Such inaccurate information was misleading for consultees.

### **2.1.2 Historic Environment, PEIR Chapter 7**

Local residents are very concerned about the impact of the proposed solar farm on the World Heritage Site of Blenheim Palace and the numerous historic and listed buildings, scheduled monuments and conservation areas next to the proposed project site. Information in the PEIR on the likely impact on the historic environment was incomplete and misleading.

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<sup>3</sup> In 2023, CPRE published research by members of the UCL Energy Institute that found there is potential for up to 117 gigawatts (GW) of low carbon electricity to be generated from rooftops and other developed spaces across England (i.e. substantially more than the government's target for 70 GW of solar energy by 2035).

The PEIR states that the solar farm would have a minimal or low adverse impact on designated heritage assets. This is an inaccurate and misleading assertion because it fails to include the impact on the *settings* of the Blenheim World Heritage Site and numerous listed buildings. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), National Policy Statements (NPS) and English Heritage Good Practice Advice all emphasise the critical importance of setting to the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of heritage assets. Given the extraordinary scale of the proposed solar farm, the impact on settings could be severe and adverse. The absence of information on the impact on settings was a serious omission in the consultation.

Blenheim is one of just 17 World Heritage Sites in England. UNESCO and Historic England require a Heritage Impact Assessment but none was available for the consultation. The PEIR also does not consider Grade II listed or unlisted buildings to be of significance. The lack of information on the impact on these heritage assets meant it was impossible for consultees to understand the likely impacts and verify the Applicant's claim that the project would have a minimal or low adverse impact.

### **2.1.3 Landscape and Visual Resources, PEIR chapter 8**

Local residents are extremely concerned about the visual and landscape impacts of the proposed solar farm<sup>4</sup>. However, important information that is essential for forming a considered opinion of the project was not provided for the consultation.

#### *2.1.3.1 Green Belt*

Over 75% of the proposed site of the project lies within the Oxford Green Belt.

The NPPF is clear that renewable energy projects, including solar farms, are not appropriate development for green belt land except in very special circumstances. The Planning Inspectorate advised the Applicant that the development on the green belt and the very special circumstances which the Applicant considered relevant must be clearly addressed in the application and was likely to be a key examination matter<sup>5</sup>.

The Applicant did not apply the PINS advice in the consultation and failed to address the Green Belt openly in the PEIR. The fact that most of the proposed development site lies within the Oxford Green Belt is omitted from Table 8.10 Designated Sites and Relevant Qualifying Interests. No assessment was provided of the impact of the project on the Oxford Green Belt, including cumulatively with other planned projects. No explanation was provided for the consultation of the very special circumstances that the Applicant believes justify the proposed location. Consultees therefore had insufficient information to form a considered view.

#### *2.1.3.2 Scale and impact*

The scale of the proposed project is exceptional: it covers a corridor 22 km long and 12 km wide and, at 1300 hectares, it is substantially larger than the largest solar farm operating in the UK today, and indeed larger than any in Europe. The 'zone of theoretical visibility' indicated in the PEIR shows the solar farm would be visible over a very large area including from the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) or National Landscape. The project would also have significant landscape and visual impacts on several district-scale landscape types. However the PEIR omitted to discuss the *scale* of impacts, i.e. that the project would be visible over very large areas and that it would

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<sup>4</sup> According to the Applicant's report on their informal consultation held in Nov-Dec 2022, 68% of respondents identified 'Landscape and Visual' as an aspect of the project that was most important to them

<sup>5</sup> Notes of Planning Inspectorate meeting with the Applicant on 13 September 2023

significantly change several district landscape types. There was also no assessment of the impact on the AONB/National Landscape.

The PIER gave a misleading assessment of the impact on views from the surrounding roads saying: ‘...it is anticipated that there would be no significant effect upon users of the local road network...’. This is an unjustified assertion given the scale of development and the length of time road users would be exposed to the degradation of the countryside. Road users are likely to experience severe, long term, adverse impacts that are incapable of effective mitigation. The PEIR downplayed this impact and in effect misled consultees.

The PEIR gave a similarly misleading assessment of the impact on views from outdoor recreational facilities used by local residents and visitors. The assertion in 8.5.5.29 that ‘There is little potential for the proposed solar arrays and substation to visually affect the above resources in a significant way and therefore they have not been taken forward for detailed assessment’ ignores the significant visual impacts development would have on visitors to, for instance, the Blenheim Palace World Heritage Site to the north, the Cotswolds AONB/National Landscape to the west and Farmoor Reservoir to the south.

The PEIR also gave an incomplete and misleading assessment of the impact on private views. In 8.5.5.40 it asserted: ‘...no residential properties have the potential to experience a degree of harm over and above substantial...’. Defining features of the proposed project site are its scale and the unprecedented proximity to residential properties and communities. The Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Assessment define residents at home as being of Very High Sensitivity and the Residential Visual Amenity Assessment 2019 guidelines state: ‘...there are situations where the effect on the outlook/ visual amenity of a residential property is so great that it is not generally in the public interest to permit such conditions to occur where they do not exist before.’ A full Residential Visual Amenity Assessment was therefore necessary but none was provided for the consultation.

In the Non-Technical Summary, para 6.3.14 made the surprising assertion: ‘There are no significant adverse effects either temporary and permanent effects [sic] on the local landscape character arising from construction and operation of the Project.’ Given the extraordinary scale of the project, even with the mitigation measures, this claim clearly requires objective scrutiny.

#### *2.1.3.3 Mitigation*

Information provided in the PEIR on the proposed mitigation measures did not give consultees an accurate picture of how effective they might be. For example:

- Table 20.1 summarising impacts states that the impact on visual and landscape would not be significant by Year 15. This disguised the fact that impacts would be significant for almost half the lifetime of the solar farm until the screening matures
- none of the four types of mitigation proposed would provide effective screening for 12 months of the year. Again there is no acknowledgement that the mitigation will be ineffectual for half the year
- no account is taken of the undulating river valley topography of the landscape which would expose panels on the valley sides to views from below, whilst creating overviews of panels from higher ground
- there is no recognition that if the proposed mitigation measure of trees and hedges are effective at screening the solar panels, they will screen the views as well. They would obliterate the views rather than mitigate the impact on the views.

The PEIR misrepresented the extent to which the proposed mitigation measures would mitigate either the significant adverse effects on the character and value of the rural landscape or the effects on the visual amenity of local residents and other highly sensitive visual receptors.

RPS photo of Viewpoint 24 looking East. Taken at dusk in heavy shadow with poor resolution, minimising vertical elevation.



RPS  
Representative Viewpoint 24 - View looking east from fieldgate 220000, near Church Hill Farm

Resident's photo looking in the same direction from the same field entrance

Every field in this photograph is scheduled to contain solar panels. NO photomontage was produced of this key viewpoint



#### 2.1.3.4 Visualisations

The visualisations provided for the consultation did not give an adequate representation of the impacts on the character of the landscape or on visual amenity and were inaccurate and misleading for consultees.

Many of the photomontages did not comply with the Landscape Institute Technical Note TGN 06/19 'Visual Representation of Development Proposals' with respect to 'Type 4 Visualisation Methodology'. Nearly all the photographs were taken in poor light conditions in dull overcast weather conditions or at twilight. (All were dated between 13th January and 1st February 2023.) They were in breach of professional guidelines that the photography 'should ... be based on good quality imagery, secured in good weather conditions' (Landscape Institute 2019). The poor light conditions minimised the visibility of dark blue/black glass solar panels set within green fields and disguised the visual impact of the solar panels on the landscape.

The use of distant panoramas with a 90-degree field of vision minimised vertical elevation and maximised the horizontal, thereby reducing the extent that solar panels would be visible in the landscape. Technical Note TGN 06/19 requires distant photomontage to apply a 150% Vertical Enlargement Factor which limits the field of view to 27 degrees horizontal and 18.2 degrees vertical for a single image printed at A3.

An inadequate number of viewpoint photographs were taken for a site of this magnitude (22km x 12km) that includes such a variety of landscapes. Of the 55 viewpoints that were photographed, just 18 were made into visualisations/photomontages for the PEIR.

Viewpoints were selected to minimize the apparent impacts, for example: 'Representative Viewpoint 23/2/ 20: View looking north-east from footpath near Pinsley Wood' adopts a viewpoint looking straight down a broad gap between panels, retained to accommodate existing power lines. A view 10m on either side would show a significantly greater impact.

There were no photomontages of the full width of the lower Evenlode Valley from the footpath between Church Hanborough and Eynsham or from Lower Road - views that affect many local residents and other passing motorists on a daily basis.

Much of the visually intrusive infrastructure of the solar farms (vehicle crossovers, access tracks, parking and turning areas, signage, security cameras, power converter stations, high voltage transformers etc) was under-represented in views such as Representative Viewpoint 13 and was omitted from the montages.

There was no visualisation of Representative Viewpoint 30 where the panels and substation would be particularly evident.

There are photographs of footpath 238/5/20 (Representative Viewpoints 24, 25, 26, 27) but none were visualised for the PEIR. This footpath is one of several places where the impact of the panels would be particularly evident.

The visualisations were biased towards flat landscapes, omitting the valley slopes and the most significant views (e.g. Cassington and the Evenlode Valley).

#### *2.1.3.5 Maps*

The maps provided in the PEIR did not enable consultees to obtain a clear, detailed view of the whole site.

The A0 sectional masterplan map was at a scale of 1:10,000 instead of the minimum scale of 1:2,500 required in PINS Advice Note 6<sup>6</sup>. The largest scale of any map in the PEIR is 1:25,000. We note that the Planning Inspectorate advised the Applicant that plan scales should align with PINS requirements (Advice note to PVDP from Inspectorate, 24 January 2024).

At a scale of 1:10,000, masterplan maps made it very hard for consultees to see important features including roads and footpaths and solar farm infrastructure such as substations, inverters and construction compounds. The lack of clarity was compounded by poor contrast between the colours used to represent different features.

Project maps were presented in isolation from plans for housing and other development. There were no maps showing the cumulative effects of all proposed development in the area.

#### **2.1.4 Ecology and Nature Conservation, PEIR chapter 9**

There is great concern in the local communities about the impact of the proposed project on ecology and nature conservation in an area that has an unusually wide variety of habitats and a rich and

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<sup>6</sup> PINS Advice Note 6 (para 12.1): 'Any plans, drawings or cross sections provided in the application should be consistent with the requirements set out in The Infrastructure Planning (Applications: Prescribed Forms and Procedure) Regulations 2009 ie no larger than A0 size, showing the direction of North and for onshore development drawn to an identified scale no smaller than 1:2500.'

diverse fauna and flora<sup>7</sup>. However important information needed for intelligent consideration of the proposal was not provided.

Perhaps the most egregious example is that while the consultation documents repeatedly claim the proposed solar farm would result in ‘a 70% increase in biodiversity’, the claim is not substantiated in the PEIR. A Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) report was not provided and it seems no baseline data have yet been collected and no information was provided of the metric to be used for BNG. Evidence in the scientific literature on the impact of solar farms on biodiversity is far from conclusive about whether solar farms enhance or reduce biodiversity. Natural England concluded its *Evidence review of the impact of solar farms on birds, bats and general ecology* (NEER012): ‘The lack of evidence available relating to the ecological impact of solar farms is concerning ... more needs to be done to understand the interaction between these new technologies and the ecology that they are ultimately designed to protect.’ Similarly a survey by BSG Ecology (*Impacts of Solar Farms on Biodiversity*) found ‘evidence of solar farms impact on biodiversity remains limited.... there is little empirical data on the subject’. Promises made in the consultation documents of a minimum 70% BNG were not based on evidence and may be misleading to consultees.

Other key information that was not provided for the consultation includes:

- the Outline Landscape and Environmental Management Plan
- impacts of earthworks and proposed mitigation measures
- mitigation of impacts on hedges and scrub
- the Traffic Management Plan
- the Dust Management Plan

The methods used to assess environmental baselines and environmental impact assessment were inadequate and resulted in misleading information being given to consultees. For example:

There was inadequate sampling (e.g. owls, bats, reptiles and amphibians). A persistent feature of the PEIR is the incomplete nature of the many of the baseline surveys. For example, for reptiles, only two sites were assessed. For bats, only two sites were assessed for the northern site and three for the central site, and acoustic monitoring stations were only set up along treelines or hedgerows, not in the arable fields which would be covered by solar arrays. This is a serious omission as solar arrays are known to have a significant negative impact on these species.

Contrary to national guidelines, no specific surveys were undertaken for owls although areas of the site are known to host barn owls, tawny owls and other owl species. Surveys were also not undertaken for dormice, water voles, brown hares or hedgehogs. All these are of conservation interest and likely to be present. A number of consultees had made specific requests that these surveys be conducted as the impact on some species such as brown hares are likely to be significant.

There were deficiencies in sampling design. Although the bird surveys were undertaken according to national guidelines in terms of the time of year, number of replicate surveys and the survey methodology, it is notable that only the margins of fields were generally walked. This means bird numbers may be regarded as a minimum estimate or underestimate of the numbers actually present. For bats, only the habitats assumed by the surveyors to be favoured by bats were surveyed. The survey strategy completely dismissed recent scientific evidence of the importance of arable

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<sup>7</sup> According to the Applicant’s report on their informal consultation in Nov-Dec 2022, 60% of respondents cited ‘Local Ecology and Biodiversity’ as an aspect of the project that is most important to them.

fields as foraging grounds for at least some bat species (e.g. *Nyctalus* spp) and as such failed to identify an important aspect of the vulnerability of these animals to solar farm development.

The PEIR included numerous unjustified assumptions or conclusions such as:

- a significant issue in the ecology assessment was the decision to not consider connectivity. This was justified by considering connectivity to only occur along hedgerows, treelines or waterways. However, connectivity also occurs between adjacent habitats such as forests, hedgerows and arable farmland. Such connectivity is critical for many farmland birds and bats and likely important for animals such as brown hares
- the assumption of local or county significance for wintering and breeding bird populations was subjective, not justified and highly dubious. This has probably resulted in a reduction in the estimated significance of impacts of the proposed development on these animals
- the assumption that bats do not use or avoid arable land is erroneous and leads to a significant underestimation of the impacts of the solar farm on these animals, especially in the light of new evidence of the impacts of solar arrays on bats
- the likely impacts on brown hares were not considered and as a result the conclusion that impacts on this species would be minimal is unsupportable
- many of the mitigations proposed to compensate for the impacts on wildlife were at best unsubstantiated with evidence and at worst were contrary to evidence in the scientific literature. Such proposed mitigations are therefore misleading to the public and reflective of a non-evidential approach to environmental mitigation which is unlikely to be effective

The deficiencies in baseline ecosystem assessment, impact assessment and mitigation proposals meant that the significance of the impacts of the proposal on the natural environment and resident species were consistently underestimated or even ignored. Mitigation proposals for such impacts as are identified were few in number, weak, lacking in evidence that they work and are unlikely to protect nature from the harmful effects of this proposal. In many cases the baseline surveys, estimated impacts and proposed mitigation measures were misleading to the public. The claim that there would be no significant adverse effects, even cumulative ones, on ecology and nature conservation, required far more objective scrutiny.

### **2.1.5 Human Health, PEIR chapter 16**

The PEIR makes a number of unfounded assumptions that downplay the potential impact of the proposed project on human health and thereby gave inaccurate information to consultees. For example:

- existing demographic data on the affected areas shows that the population is average or above on all measures (except for depression and anxiety in Cherwell district). The PEIR concludes from this that the population has the resources and resilience to be unaffected by the loss of open green spaces if the solar farm is built. However, while there is much robust evidence now to demonstrate that open green space plays a significant part in the physical and mental health for people, there is no evidence to show the impact of the loss of such open green spaces. It could equally well be argued that it is the presence of open green spaces available now that has positively contributed to the good health of the population
- there is an unfounded assumption that people will continue using footpaths for recreation within the solar farm. It is however equally likely that people will either use their cars to access open countryside in order to gain health benefits, or they may stop walking altogether

## 2.1.6 Agricultural Land and Public Rights of Way, PEIR chapter 17

### 2.1.6.1 Agricultural Land

The importance of food production is recognised nationally and national guidance requires use of Best and Most Versatile (BMV) land for solar farms to be minimised. There is great concern amongst local residents about the very large area of currently productive agricultural land that would be taken out of production for the lifetime of the proposed solar farm<sup>8</sup>.

The information provided for the consultation failed to give consultees a clear and accurate view of the likely impact of the project on the agricultural land or of alternative options.

Statements made to local residents about the land quality were deliberately misleading. The extent of BMV land in the project site was consistently downplayed in the consultation as well as in the Scoping Report and in information events during the earlier Informal Consultation. At several public events (for example, a meeting of Cassington Parish Council on 1 December 2022) representatives of PVDP and Blenheim Estate stated that the land they proposed to use for the project was poor quality. These statements were subsequently shown to be inaccurate and misleading by the provisional data in the PEIR which indicates the solar farm would occupy 38% BMV land.

In the PEIR there is repeated use of language that ‘confirms’ the ‘low grade’ quality of the land. However the data provided in the PEIR is provisional and therefore cannot confirm the land quality. Grade 3b land is consistently dismissed as agriculturally irrelevant; e.g. in Chapter 17, 3b land is described as ‘lower quality’ land five times, and only once correctly as ‘moderate’ (in Table 17.16 which sets out the official criteria).

The assessment matrix used to present information in the PEIR has an in-built structural bias in favour of reducing the level of adverse effect. In Table 17.19, 11 of the 20 cells are negligible, negligible or minor, or minor (not significant); 7 cells are moderate, moderate or major, or major (significant); 2 cells are minor or moderate, which could go either way. The result is an in-built ratio bias of 12:8 in favour of not significant. The choice of matrix is important as consultees need impartially presented information in order to reach an informed opinion.

Similarly biased information was presented in the PEIR as a result of a decision not to assess the significance of effect of the temporary loss of agricultural land, including BMV land, and the disruption and reduced access to it, during the operational phase. The conclusion that ‘there will be no significant effects on agricultural land, arising from the construction, operation and decommissioning of the Project’ is therefore misleading.

During the consultation, information that was requested by consultees to enable proper consideration of the proposal was denied by the Applicant. For example, the data behind the maps to explain how the land classification percentages were arrived at was not provided and a breakdown of categories in each of the three sites was denied. At a face-to-face meeting between SBW and PVDP in January 2024, the Applicant eventually agreed to provide the requested breakdown of categories in the three sites, but at the time of writing it has still not been provided.

The Applicant claims in the PEIR that the loss of agricultural land would be mitigated by allowing community agricultural groups to operate smallholdings on the edge of one project site, and 50 ha to be used for sheep grazing (para 15.9.5.11). However the ideas are unformed and the proposal is non-committal. Consultation documents say the ideas referred to are being ‘explored’, ‘considered’

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<sup>8</sup> According to the Applicant’s report on their informal consultation, 59% of respondents identified ‘Land Use and Agriculture’ as an aspect of the project that is most important to them.

or ‘discussed’ and there were no concrete proposals for local residents to consider. One of the two organisations with which the Applicant claims in the PEIR and Consultation Leaflet to be in discussion (Cutteslowe Community Larder) says no such discussions had taken place with the Applicant by the start of the consultation. The claim was therefore inaccurate and misleading.

#### 2.1.6.2 Public Rights of Way (PRoW)

The proposed sites are crossed by numerous public footpaths and bridleways that are used by local residents and visitors to the area for exercise and recreation. Local residents are very concerned about the impact of the project on footpaths and other PRoW<sup>9</sup>.

The PEIR focused primarily on agricultural land use and gave little attention to the impact on PRoW. The information that was provided highlights the *quantity* of PROW (e.g. the creation of additional footpaths and cycle tracks) but did not consider the impact on the *quality* of the amenity.

Figure 17.5 suggested that several dozen footpaths would change from traversing agricultural fields to traversing a solar farm with panels mounted up to 2.5 metres high affording views from the footpaths of the underside of solar panels. Yet para 17.9.4.8 stated ‘no additional effects on PRoW are assessed during the operational phase of the Project’, i.e. there would be no effect on recreational amenity from people walking through or near a solar farm rather than agricultural fields.

This assertion was unjustified. It is highly disingenuous to assume that local residents and visitors would find a walk through or overlooking a solar farm equivalent in terms of amenity and health benefits to a walk through an agricultural area. It is also false to assume that alternative footpaths would be available: given the great scale of the solar farm, alternative footpaths that do not traverse or overlook the solar farm would not be available locally and would be accessible only by using a car.

The claims made concerning mitigation measures were also misleading. The table summarising impacts (20.1) emphasised that while there would be significant effects on users of public rights of way within or immediately adjacent to the project, by Year 15 once planting matures these effects would not be significant. However as the proposed mitigation would comprise trees and hedges to screen the solar panels, they would also screen the views that currently exist, obliterating the views rather than mitigating the impact on views.

In order to give consultees adequate information on the proposal, the PEIR should have provided information on the length of existing PRoW that would be adjacent to or surrounded by the project, and that would be within 100m of the project or where the project would be clearly visible. An overlay should have been provided of the Zone of Theoretical Visibility (Fig. 8.3) and the map of public rights of way (Fig. 17.5). In the absence of such objective information in the consultation, it was very difficult for consultees to gain an accurate view of what is proposed and the likely impacts.

### 2.1.7 Cumulative Effects, PEIR Chapter 19

The proposed project is extraordinarily large. It would be over 12 times larger than the largest solar farm operating in the UK and would comprise 2.7 million solar panels in three separate sites linked by cables, plus about 6 secondary substations of 1ha, and a main substation of 1ha. It would take up a substantial area of Green Belt land and significantly change several district landscape types. It would be visible from hundreds, if not thousands, of homes, footpaths and roads.

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<sup>9</sup> According to the Applicant’s report on their informal consultation, 54% of respondents identified ‘Recreation and Amenity’ as an aspect of the project that is most important to them.

Yet the scale of these impacts and their 'in-project' cumulative effects was not addressed anywhere in the consultation documents. This is a serious omission given that the scale of the project is one of its defining features and it was a major concern raised by respondents to the initial consultation and the scale has not changed since then.

The PEIR also failed to address the scale of the impacts and their cumulative effects combined with other changes in the area expected in the 35-42 years of the solar farm's projected lifetime. Chapter 19 listed a range of other projects that are in the planning pipeline but failed to mention the large scale of new housing proposed in local plans. Table 19.7 discussed the cumulative effects of construction, operation/maintenance and decommissioning of the project, but it did not give an indication of scale. Table 20.1 summarised some of the significant effects of the project but again did not discuss scale and the in-project cumulative impacts.

### **2.1.8 Community Benefit**

The consultation documents suggested that reduced electricity rates could be available to those living in the vicinity of the solar farm. The Consultation Leaflet for instance stated 'We are actively exploring potential mechanisms through which the project could directly supply electricity locally at a discounted rate' and offers the idea of creating a retail energy company as an example of a potential mechanism. However the claim is too vague and non-committal to allow meaningful consultation and could indeed prove to be offering false promises to consultees.

Mention was also made of establishing a community benefit fund but again the language was vague. For example the Consultation Leaflet said 'We are committed to exploring making a fund available...'. The sum mentioned (£50,000) is widely regarded by local residents as derisory.

With ideas about community benefits at an extremely early and unformed stage, there is no clarity about whether any of them will come to fruition and in what form. Consultees therefore did not have sufficient information on what is actually proposed to allow a meaningful consultation.

### **2.1.9 Community Consultation Leaflet**

The leaflet provided a short (23 page) summary of the proposed project. Because the PEIR was extremely long and difficult to access and navigate, the leaflet was the document that most people read and relied upon for an understanding of the proposal. However the selection of information provided in the leaflet was not sufficient, objective or balanced. Instead the leaflet was, in effect, a sales brochure for the project.

Key contextual information that was essential for understanding the impact of the proposed project was omitted. The scale of the proposed project was obscured by the fact that the overall size of the site was not mentioned and the maps were very low scale. The intrusive infrastructure of the solar farm was also hidden. The leaflet made no mention of the 156 Power Converter Stations to be positioned adjacent to public footpaths, each the size of a large shipping container and emitting 67dB. The maps also showed none of the infrastructure including inverters, substations, construction compounds, accesses from highways and tracks, fencing, cameras etc.

The section titled 'The Need for Botley West' outlined the need for reduced carbon emissions and increase renewable energy and suggested that the proposed Botley West Solar Farm is therefore needed. This is a false and misleading argument which seeks to invalidate the project-specific questions that will be examined in the DCO application process.

The leaflet presents a selective and inaccurate view of the role of solar energy in the nation's energy security, overstating the role of solar energy and downplaying other renewable energy. The

International Energy Agency (IEA) is cited as highlighting that renewable electricity ‘in particular solar, is key in reducing carbon emissions.’ In fact the IEA report cited does not single out solar as being of unique importance but repeatedly refers to five key clean energy technologies (solar PV, wind, batteries, electrolyzers and heat pumps) and highlights solar PV and wind as the leading means of decarbonising the electricity sector. The UK Climate Change Committee describes offshore wind as the ‘backbone’ of the future energy system.

The leaflet claims ‘Solar is the most affordable form of electricity in the UK.’ The source of this claim is Solar Energy UK, a trade association serving its solar energy sector membership. The government’s ‘Electricity generation costs 2023’ shows that the Levelised Cost Estimates for projects commissioning in 2025, in real 2021 prices, are broadly the same for offshore wind, onshore wind and large-scale solar. Chapter 5 of the PEIR also states in paragraph 5.3.1.15 ‘wind and solar are the lowest cost ways of generating electricity’ but this contextual information is not available in the Consultation Leaflet.

The leaflet makes no reference at all to the generating capacity of rooftop solar and its potential to help the UK in general and Oxfordshire more specifically to reach solar energy targets.

### **2.1.10 Non-Technical Summary**

The inadequacies that characterize the PIER and the Consultation Leaflet are repeated in the Non-Technical Summary and we will not reiterate them here. However it should be noted that there was no cross-referencing between the Non-Technical Summary and the PEIR, much of the terminology was not clearly explained and many conclusions are unsubstantiated.

One example serves to illustrate the problem. In Paragraph 6.3.6, the claim is made ‘Due to the low level of the solar development and proposed mitigation, there is no potential for any private views to be adversely affected over and above substantial.’

This is a highly subjective judgement that is not explained. ‘Substantial’ is the highest level of adverse effects in the Significance of Effects Matrix for Landscape (PEIR Chapter 8, table 8.19). The implication is that a ‘substantial adverse effect’ is acceptable, but there is no explanation or justification, and no acknowledgement that these are public as well as private views with so many public footpaths crossing the site.

## **2.2 Was the information accessible?**

Information was provided in the Community Consultation Leaflet and the PEIR. It was disseminated to consultees through the project website, Community Access Points and information events.

### **2.2.1 Community Consultation Leaflet**

According to the Applicant’s website, consultation leaflets were distributed to about 22,000 properties in the ‘Core Consultation Zone’ extending 2km from the proposed project site.

Residents report that numerous properties and entire streets within the consultation zone did not receive consultation leaflets<sup>10</sup>. The entire village of Combe (population 775) which lies within the 2km consultation zone was excluded from the distribution because the Applicant had decided, as

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<sup>10</sup> They include Manor Road and the entire Park View estate in Woodstock; Church Street in Bladon; Main Road, Millwood End, Oliver’s Close and Regents Drive in Long Hanborough; several properties in Church Hanborough; Common Road in North Leigh.

stated in the Statement of Community Consultation (SOCC) that in that area ‘there are no property interests within a 2km limit from the boundary of the proposed development’.

Others areas report receiving the leaflet late, in some cases a week after the start of the consultation and in others after the information event in that area had taken place. This is likely to be because the Applicant held the consultation in the Christmas/New Year period and leaflet deliveries coincided with the Christmas mail.

The consultation leaflets were delivered in plain white envelopes with no sender’s name or logo to identify them and they were addressed simply to ‘The Occupier’. As a result, many were inadvertently discarded as junk mail. In the SOCC (page 16), the Applicant stated, ‘We have also considered how our posted materials are presented to encourage engagement with them following feedback regarding the plain envelopes our phase one leaflets were posted in.’ However the feedback was ignored and leaflets were again delivered in plain envelopes for the Statutory Consultation.

### **2.2.2 PEIR**

The PEIR comprised about 7,000 pages. It was available online in the Document Library of the Botley West website and in hard copy.

#### *2.2.2.1 Formats*

In order to access the electronic version of the PEIR, 54 separate downloads were required. Some files were so large that many people found them difficult or impossible to open.

Broadband coverage is widespread in the rural communities that surround the project sites but it cannot be assumed that all residents had access to the technology required to access the consultation material online. This is particularly the case given the unusually large size of the PEIR files, the often slow broadband speeds available, and the older than average demographic of the area.

The PEIR was also available to consultees in hard copy, comprising 20 A4 ring binders. The Applicant charged £600 per copy of the PEIR. The cost was identified by many consultees as a barrier to access.

#### *2.2.2.2 Community Access Points*

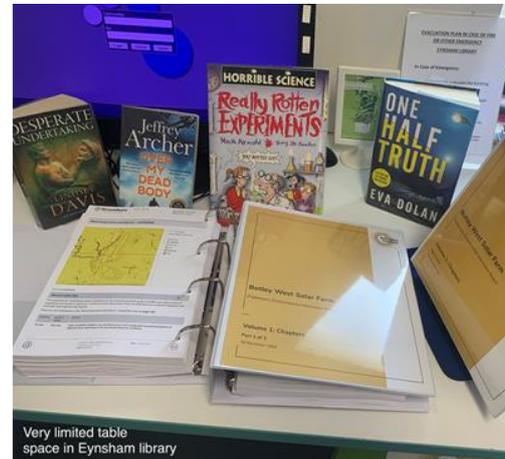
Hard copies of the PEIR were made available to the public to read in five Community Access Points (CAPs) - four libraries and one shop. Unfortunately access to the CAPs was severely restricted by a range of factors that the Applicant did not anticipate or rectify:

- there were no posters or signs outside or inside the premises of any of the CAPs to advertise that the PEIR was there. The CAP in Botley Library was located behind a locked door marked ‘Staff Only, No Entry’
- most CAPs were inadequate in terms of space. No workspace was available at two of the CAPs (Eynsham and Botley) where the 20 ring binders of the PEIR could be opened. Space in the other two libraries (Woodstock and Kidlington) was too limited to review the maps. In three of the CAPs (Eynsham, Kidlington and Botley), the files were left piled up in the large boxes in which they were delivered with no explanatory information<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> As an example, in Eynsham library a small desk already holding a computer was the only table space and the 20 volumes of the PEIR were in boxes beneath the table. The librarian apologised that the library was too small to provide adequate access. She had not been warned how many volumes would be lodged or how much space would be needed. No previous site visit had been made by the Applicant. On the morning the PEIR was

- none of the CAPs contained masterplan maps or indeed any map where the infrastructure could be clearly seen
- the CAPs were inadequate in terms of location. There was no CAP in the entire Northern site (a site that is large enough to be considered an NSIP in its own right)
- The CAP in the WODC shop in Witney was 8.5km from the western edge of the project site and open only during the day on weekdays



### 2.2.3 Information Events

Ten public information events were held in total: nine in-person events in village halls and community centres and one community webinar.

#### 2.2.3.1 Locations and venues

Information events were held in eight locations: Bladon, Woodstock (2 events), Begbroke, Hanborough, Cassington, Cumnor, Botley and Eynsham.

There were no information events in eight other villages (total population 24,000) that are within the consultation zone: Combe, Farmoor, Freeland, North Leigh, Kidlington, Tackley and Wootton and Yarnton. There were no information events in the entire Northern site.

Many respondents to the SBW Survey raised concerns about the limited number of information event locations for a consultation on a development of such scale and with such wide-ranging implications affecting such a large local population.

Some of the venues were inconvenient to access because of limited parking. In Bladon there was no car parking space while in Begbroke and Woodstock, the few available parking spaces were all taken by the vehicles of the Applicant's representatives. Bus services to most of the venues are very limited or non-existent.

The SBW Survey found that information event arrangements did not take adequate account of the needs of less able people. As a result some consultees were effectively excluded (82 respondents said they had accessibility issues that had impacted on their ability to participate in the consultation). Nearly half of them cited mobility issues. 22 respondents said that they had not taken part in the information events because the format and/or venue was inadequate for their needs. 77

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delivered, she was told 'you have a legal obligation to house it' and the boxes were deposited in a pile for her to deal with.

respondents said they did not access the information events due to difficulty accessing the venue/webinar.

### 2.2.3.2 Advertising and signage

The schedule of information events was listed in the consultation leaflet but no other local advertising for the events was provided by the Applicant. In this rural area, parish magazines are the primary source of local information. However the Applicant did not make use of them to advertise the events, nor did they consider facilitating others to do so as the lead times were too short for information to be included in parish magazines<sup>12</sup>.

No signs indicating the venues to help consultees find them were displayed at or near any of the venues. (The one exception was in Woodstock where one A4 printed sign was displayed in a backstreet pub and another *inside* the venue.)

SBW was keen to facilitate local participation in the information events and supplied and displayed posters and directions to every event venue. The one exception was the information event in Botley where SBW did not provide any advertising. That event had the lowest turnout of all the events (just 49 people). This suggests the Applicant's advertising was inadequate and if SBW had not advertised the information events, participation would have been much lower.

### 2.2.3.3 Scheduling

The scheduling of the information events did not facilitate the participation of consultees. In the SBW Survey, just under 15% of respondents (594 people) said they had not accessed the information events and of these, 65% (388 people) said it was because the time, date or day was not suitable. The timing of the information events made it very difficult for people working normal working hours to access them. The events were open for a total of 38 hours: only 2 hours were after 7pm on weekdays, none were after 7.30pm and only 8 hours were at weekends. Census data for the 15 affected parishes shows 54% of the population are in full-time work and therefore unlikely to be able to attend during working hours<sup>13</sup>.

Another reason frequently cited by SBW Survey respondents for not accessing the information events was that they took place over the Christmas/New Year period. Four of the ten information events were held in the pre-Christmas period in December. Many people pointed out that this time of year is extremely busy for everyone with family and social commitments and pre-Christmas preparation. For some, the problem was compounded by the late delivery of the consultation leaflet setting out the dates and venues (one said the 'Leaflet arrived after the in-person event had taken place in my most convenient location').

The impact of the scheduling of the consultation was seen in attendance numbers at the information events. SBW recorded a total of 252 people attending the four events held in the pre-Christmas period, an average of 63 per event. Four of the five information events in January averaged 170 consultees per event (the one exception was the event in Botley in January which was given no advertising by the Applicant or by SBW and consequently only 49 consultees attended). Consultees in villages with only a December event date (Bladon, Begbroke and Hanborough) were in effect

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<sup>12</sup> Most of the parish magazines are published and distributed monthly during the first week of the month with a deadline for material of around 14th of the previous month. The Applicant issued their first press notification on 16th November and started the consultation on 30th November. This meant the earliest that the information could be circulated to villages in parish magazines was early January.

<sup>13</sup> At the event in Hanborough which ran from 1pm to 5 pm on a weekday, a representative of the Applicant asked 'where are all the young people?'. He seemed to think their absence meant they were supportive of the proposed project rather than that the scheduling excluded them as they were likely to be at work.

discriminated against in the consultation process, because it was harder for them to engage fully in the process.

Furthermore because the information events were closely grouped with four events held in six days in December and five events in seven days in January, anyone who was away for a week during this holiday period could have missed half the events available.

Ahead of the consultation, the Applicant was asked by SBW, the local MP Robert Courts and others to change the timing because of the clash with the Christmas period but the Applicant did not respond<sup>14</sup>.

#### *2.2.3.4 Technical expertise*

The Applicant was represented at the events by PVDP staff, their planning consultants (RPS) and their PR consultants (Counter Context).

Many consultees were frustrated at the lack of technical experts available at the information events to answer their questions. For example:

- many local residents are concerned about the ecological impact of the project but the Applicant's ecology expert was frequently absent from the information events. No ecologist was present at the events in Begbroke, Cassington, Cumnor, Hanborough or Woodstock. One respondent to the SBW Survey reported 'There was no one there able to address my many questions on biodiversity' and another who had not attended an information event commented 'Heard from attendees that experts in ecology not available at in person events, so no point in trying to attend as I have ecological questions.'
- there is a lot of concern locally about the potential impact of the proposed project on local flood risk but it appears no hydrology/flood expert attended any of the information events to answer consultees' questions
- Blenheim Estate is identified by the Applicant as the body that will be responsible for land management in the project area but it provided no experts to answer questions on the subject

Many respondents to the SBW Survey reported that even when relevant experts were present, they could not answer their questions within their area of expertise or they gave contradictory answers. For example, the question 'how many lorry journeys will there be per day' elicited answers ranging from 45 to 720; and a question about the use of CCTV and security lighting along the fences received two different accounts from two different representatives. Some typical comments from respondents to the SBW Survey were:

- 'The representatives listened to questions but in each case definitive answers were not given. Facts were very difficult to establish.'
- 'Most of the developer's representatives were inadequately informed to answer questions.'
- 'Too many questions were answered with "that's something we're working on".'

SBW tried to ascertain the expertise that was available at the information events by asking the Applicant. They agreed to send a list of the personnel present at the events but failed to do so.

A predominant view amongst people attending information events was that it was more a presentation than a consultation. They felt they were not listened to and were made to feel that that

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<sup>14</sup> The same scheduling problem was evident in the Applicant's initial informal consultation which was held in the run up to Christmas in 2022 (3 Nov - 22 Dec 2022).

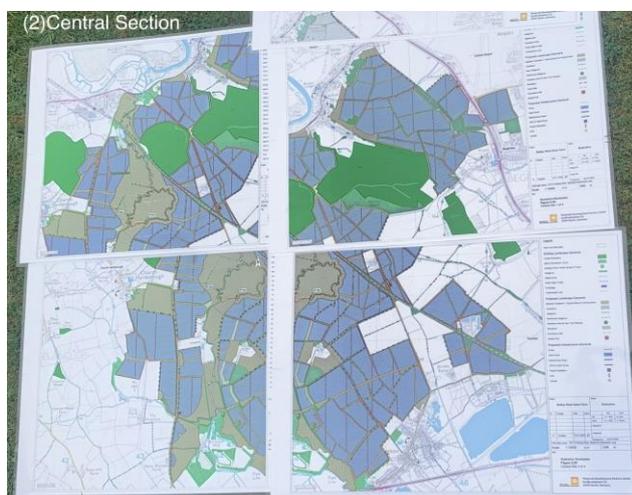
nothing they said would affect the outcome. A consistent theme in comments of respondents to the SBW Survey was that there was a lack of clear, substantiated facts and that information was being presented in a way that deliberately emphasised the claimed benefits and avoided the more difficult questions. They were disappointed at the lack of availability of appropriate experts to address their concerns.

#### 2.2.3.5 Maps and Photomontages

The maps provided at the information events did not enable consultees to obtain a clear, detailed view of the whole proposal. Just under half of respondents (49.3%) to the SBW Survey disagreed with the statement that the maps were clear and easy to understand, 19.3% of them strongly. Many commented on the poor quality of the maps saying they were very difficult to read, lacking in detail and not displayed properly. (According to one, the Applicant's consultants at the event agreed that the 'map visibility was poor').

Key problems included:

- no large-scale map showing the entire area was provided. The largest scale was 1:35,000 and most maps showing the whole site were at a scale of 1:65,000 or 1:100,000. (One respondent to the SBW Survey commented, 'At no point did I see a detailed map of the entire proposed solar farm and I believe that it is something that would make it absolutely clear how enormous this proposal is; something I think PVDP don't want people to understand'.)
- the map sections could not be laid out together to show the entire project area. Map sections were scattered together on a table, making it impossible for consultees to see how they fitted together, and the sections overlapped so could not be placed together and viewed as a single overall project map
- NONE of the masterplan maps were available at the Information Access points
- similarly, the visualisations provided at the information events did not enable consultees to form an accurate and realistic picture of the visual impact of the proposed project. The poor quality of the images and the unrepresentative selection of images are described above in 2.1.3.4 and 2.1.3.5 (Landscape and Visual Resources)
- The presentation of the montages at the information events was confusing for consultees. They were denoted only by number, creating confusion about their location. Most of the montage prints were piled on tables in a disorderly fashion, not displayed on panels to provide an organised view





particularly for those who for various reasons were effectively excluded from the in-person events by scheduling and access restrictions (as described above).

The scheduling of the community webinar (5.30-7pm on a Tuesday) was unhelpful for people with normal working hours as illustrated by these comments by respondents to the SBW Survey: 'Was travelling home from work at the time of online event' and 'There was only one webinar with no alternatives for me to join at a more convenient time.'

At the Parish Council webinar, two Parish Councils from villages that lie within the 2km consultation zone were not invited (Tackley and Combe). One of the Applicant's main speakers (Julian Allsop) was inaudible throughout. A transcript was requested by consultees but was not provided.

## **2.3 Was the information easily interpretable?**

DCLG guidance (para 20) says a consultation should contain sufficient information to allow for intelligent consideration and achieve this through providing accessible and easily interpretable information. Planning Inspectorate guidance on the preparation and submission of application documents for NSIPs recommends applicants think carefully about document size, suggesting that summaries should be provided if documents exceed 1,500 words in length. Unfortunately for the consultees, the Applicant failed to observe the guidance.

### **2.3.1 PEIR**

The PEIR comprised 20 volumes, over 7,000 pages and over 100 maps and photographs. It was extremely long and complex and contained much unnecessary repetition. There was no master contents list, index or cross-referencing to facilitate navigation through the documents.

The quantity of information, and often less than helpful signposts around it, was so daunting as to be actively off-putting for most consultees. It would be challenging even for organisations and institutions with plenty of capacity and expertise. Most individuals, local campaign groups and Local Authorities do not have that. Indeed, BWSF Director Mark Owen Lloyd said of the PEIR, 'it's a large tome, I challenge people to read all of it.'<sup>15</sup>

While the consultation necessarily involved a considerable amount of documentation given the scale of the proposed project, it should have been presented in a much clearer and more accessible way. The documentation obscured an understanding of exactly what is proposed, the expected impacts, the proposed mitigations, and the justification for it. All are crucial issues for meaningful consultation.

Ironically, despite the lengthy documentation, much information that was needed to understand the impacts on local communities was omitted, as detailed in 2.1 above. This made it extremely difficult for consultees to form an informed response to the proposals. Assumptions were often not stated explicitly or not fully explained, leading to difficulties in understanding whether proposed methodologies are adequate. In many areas of the technical reports, there is little interpretation of results, and the interpretation that was offered was frequently biased. This all added to the consultees' difficulty in understanding complex issues.

### **2.3.2 Community Consultation Leaflet**

The Consultation Leaflet had a very important role to play. Because of the extreme length and complexity of the PEIR, the leaflet was the document that most people read and on which they based their understanding and views. However, as detailed in 2.1.9 above, the selection of

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<sup>15</sup> BBC Radio Oxford, Sophie Law, 26th October 2023.

information for the leaflet was not sufficient, objective or balanced; rather it was biased presentation of the Applicant's case. As such, it failed to facilitate consultees to interpret the information and form an objective understanding of the proposed project.

### **2.3.3 Language**

The text of the consultation documents was not sufficiently accessible to a wide audience. Linguistic analysis of the documents found that they are difficult to read for a number of reasons. According to the 'Gunning Fog Index' and the 'Flesh-Kincaid Reading Test' (tools commonly used to confirm whether text can be read easily by the intended audience), the consultation documents have a significantly poor score. Texts for a wide audience generally need a Fog index of less than 12 and texts requiring near-universal understanding generally need an index of less than 8. The lowest score in the Community Consultation Leaflet is 15.28 and the highest (the Introduction) is 17.59<sup>16</sup>.

The analysis found the text is inaccessible to a wide audience because it contains a high density of polysyllabic words, and because words of three or more syllables are often clumped together. The text is heavy with compound noun phrases which do not have a clear referent. Processes are represented with noun phrases which obscure exactly what is being done when, where, and by whom.

The result was that the public consultation documents were not readily accessible and interpretable for the public.

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<sup>16</sup> For detailed analysis see Annex 3

### PRINCIPLE 3: THERE IS ADEQUATE TIME FOR CONSIDERATION AND RESPONSE

‘There must be sufficient opportunity for consultees to participate in the consultation. There is no set timeframe for consultation, despite the widely accepted twelve-week consultation period, as the length of time given for consultee to respond can vary depending on the subject and extent of impact of the consultation.’

The Applicant provided a consultation period of 10 weeks. They said they extended the period to take account of the Christmas and New Year break and considered the length of the consultation to be generous because it was longer than the statutory minimum of 4 weeks. However Gunning Principle 3 says a 12-week consultation period is widely accepted and the DCLG Guidance (para 72) says the consultation period should be ‘realistic and proportionate to the proposed project’. Given the unprecedented scale of the proposed solar farm, the size of the directly affected population, the range and complexity of the impacts and the volume of PEIR material presented, we believe the consultation period was neither realistic nor proportionate.

Furthermore the consultation period included the busy Christmas and New Year holiday period when people have much less time available than usual to read and digest large amounts of information and engage in a consultation. It is not usual to hold important public consultations over public holidays for this reason. The Applicant was requested by SBW, the local MP Robert Courts, CPRE and many local residents not to hold the consultation over the Christmas/New Year period. This could have been achieved by delaying the start of the consultation by just six weeks. The Applicant did not respond to the requests.

As described in 2.2.3.3 above, low attendance numbers at the information events held in the pre-Christmas period (an average of 63 consultees per event) compared to significantly higher numbers at information events held in January (170 per event) illustrates the impact of the Applicant’s decision to hold the consultation over the Christmas period.

People attending the earlier information events such as those in Bladon, Begbroke, Hanborough and the first Woodstock event were further hampered by lack of time to review the PEIR. With only eight days between publication of the PEIR on 30th November and the first Information Event on 8th December in Bladon, consultees attending that event were apparently expected to digest the equivalent of three thick paperback books per day for a week.

It was extremely difficult for consultees to understand the likely significant effects of the proposals and fully evaluate the PEIR within the timescale provided. Consultees should have been given a longer, more proportionate amount of time to consider all the material and form their response.

## PRINCIPLE 4: 'CONSCIENTIOUS CONSIDERATION' MUST BE GIVEN TO THE CONSULTATION RESPONSES BEFORE A DECISION IS MADE

'Decision-makers should be able to provide evidence that they took consultation responses into account.'

At the time of writing in advance of the DCO application and the Applicant's Consultation Report, we do not know whether responses to the public consultation were taken into account by the Applicant.

Confidence in the Applicant's willingness to consider consultation responses was undermined by the fact that following the Phase One Informal Consultation (3rd November to 22nd December 2022), it appears little account was taken of responses to that consultation. Para 3.2.2.4 of the PEIR noted that more than 1,000 feedback forms/letters had been received by the project team and that 'This feedback has been analysed by the project team and informed the refinements in project design'. However the PEIR does not give a comprehensive review of what the feedback was, what issues were identified or what refinements were consequently made.

We hope the Applicant takes better account of the formal consultation in their DCO application. However a significant finding of the SBW Survey is that 66% of respondents do not believe they had adequate opportunity to influence what is being proposed. More than half of them felt this strongly.

Most of the respondents to the SBW Survey do not believe that the Applicant's representatives were listening to their comments in the consultation. In answer to the statement 'I believe the Developers actually listened to my comments', 61% of respondents disagreed and nearly two-thirds of those disagreed strongly. Just 10% of respondents said they do believe the developers actually listened to their comments, with just a quarter of them feeling this strongly.

This is a severe indictment of an exercise described as a consultation.

## CONCLUSION

A detailed study of the consultation documents and processes together with observations and feedback from consultees shows that the Applicant's approach to engagement with the affected communities did not have sufficient regard to the relevant guidance and did not meet the standards required for a public consultation. The consultation was therefore not adequate or legitimate.

We submit that the Applicant should be required to conduct the consultation again in order to achieve effective and meaningful engagement with the public.

Regarding **Gunning Principle 1** (Proposals are still at a formative stage): we found that while a decision has not yet been made by the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, the Applicant (also a decision maker) has made public statements that suggested the decision is in effect predetermined. The statements undermined public confidence that nothing is predetermined and that responding to the consultation would serve a useful purpose.

Regarding **Gunning Principle 2** (There is sufficient information to give intelligent consideration and provide an informed response): we found that key surveys and assessments and other important information required for a proper understanding of the proposal were yet to be conducted and were therefore not available for consideration. Moreover numerous statements and claims were inaccurate and, in effect, misleading.

Key information that was missing from the consultation (and should be provided in a repeat consultation) includes:

- information on alternative options including alternative scale, sites, cable routes, technologies and forms of renewable energy
- Heritage Impact Assessment for the World Heritage Site of Blenheim including its setting, and historic and listed buildings, scheduled monuments and conservation areas and their settings
- explanation of the very special circumstances for using green belt land
- assessment of the impact on the Cotswolds AONB/National Landscape
- full assessment of Residential Visual Amenity.
- visualisations that represent a full range of viewpoints and are compliant with professional guidelines
- map of the entire project site to a minimum scale of 1:2500 as required by PINS and showing all solar farm infrastructure including substations, inverters and construction compounds
- Biodiversity Net Gain report including baseline data and metrics to be used
- outline Landscape and Environmental Management Plan
- full wildlife baseline surveys that are compliant with national guidelines
- Traffic and Noise Management Plans
- full agricultural land classification with BMV breakdown for each of the three sites
- assessment of loss of agricultural land and mitigations
- assessment of impact on all PRoW including maps and overlay with the Zone of Theoretical Visibility
- full assessment of Cumulative Effects including in-project cumulative effects and new housing in Local Plans
- information on community benefits

The Applicant must ensure that the information provided in the repeat consultation is objective and evidence-based and that it avoids bias.

Regarding the requirement that the information is accessible, the repeat consultation should ensure:

- the consultation documents are more accessible:
  - the Community Consultation Leaflet should be delivered to all households in the consultation zone
  - the PEIR online should be available in smaller, easily accessible electronic files
  - hard copies of the PEIR should be available to the public in more numerous and more accessible Community Access Points and at lower cost to those who need/wish to obtain their own copy
- Information Events are better organised:
  - they should be held in all affected villages and sites and be well advertised
  - they should be held in easily accessible venues that are properly sign-posted
  - they should be scheduled so they can be attended by people who work normal working hours
  - they should be attended by technical experts able to answer consultees' questions
  - they should present information (including maps) in a more organized and intelligible way

Regarding the requirement that the information is easily interpretable, the repeat consultation should ensure:

- the PEIR should have a master index and a search function
- it should be as succinct as possible and avoid unnecessary repetition
- it should be written in language that is accessible to a wide audience (having a high score according to standard readability tools)

Regarding **Gunning Principle 3** (There is adequate time for consideration and response): we found that the consultation period was neither realistic nor proportionate to the proposed project given the unprecedented scale of the proposed solar farm, the size of the affected population and the range of impacts. Furthermore, despite numerous requests not to do so, the Applicant scheduled the consultation during the busy Christmas and New Year holiday period. This had a predictably serious impact on the public's ability to engage in the consultation.

The repeat consultation should:

- be a minimum of 12 weeks long
- avoid major public holiday periods
- ensure sufficient time between the publication of the PEIR and the first Information Events to enable consultees to digest the information and identify any questions they have

Regarding **Gunning Principle 4** (Conscientious consideration must be given to the consultation responses before a decision is made): following the initial informal consultation on the proposal, it appears the Applicant took little account of the public's responses. Following the statutory public consultation, our survey suggests that most consultees believe they did not have adequate opportunity to influence what is being proposed and do not believe the Applicant listened to their comments in the consultation.

At the time of writing, we do not know whether responses to the public consultation have been taken into account by the Applicant in the DCO application. We hope the Applicant gives careful, thorough consideration to the consultees' responses and we look forward to seeing this reflected in their Consultation Report.

STOP BOTLEY WEST CAMPAIGN, OXFORDSHIRE, May 2024

## ANNEX 1: SURVEY OF LOCAL RESIDENTS

### 1. Introduction

The statutory public consultation on the Botley West Solar Farm (BWSF) proposals took place from Thursday 30th November 2023 to Thursday 8th February 2024, with consultation events between 8 December 2023 and 19 January 2024. The consultation was run by the developer, PVDP.

The Stop Botley West (SBW) campaign undertook to carry out a survey of local residents to ascertain the effectiveness of this consultation. SBW worked with an independent consultant to ensure that the survey design was unbiased and that the questionnaire allowed respondents to express their views effectively, regardless of their stance on the proposals. Great care was taken to avoid leading questions, to make questions clear and concise, to provide a wide range of possible responses and to include ample space for free text responses where people wished to clarify or add to their answers. The questionnaires were made available in a variety of ways:

- in hard copy with 11,000 copies delivered to homes in the local towns and villages most affected by the BWSF proposals - with drop-off points in local village pubs/shops
- at the various consultation events, where members of the SBW team would invite individuals to complete the questionnaire as they left the consultation event
- on-line – with on-line submission

In total this produced 1,442 responses (significantly more than the 661 responses received in a similar exercise on the informal consultation conducted in November-December 2022/23).

### 2. Consultation Arrangements

#### 2.1. Awareness of the consultation

Of the 1,442 respondents, 1,345 (93.27%) were aware of the consultation on the proposals.

Of the 1,337 people who indicated how they had first become aware of the consultation, 53% said it was from SBW, nearly 16% was by word of mouth, 4.64% heard from the local council, and 5.83% by a range of other means including local village groups, posters (probably SBW), and parish councils.

Only 14.81% said they first heard about it from the developers of BWSF, which potentially indicates that the developer's efforts to advertise their consultation had been inadequate.

#### 2.2. Means of accessing the consultation

Respondents were asked how they accessed the consultation and, to reflect that some may have done a number of things to inform themselves, they were allowed to give multiple responses.

- 57.5% had read the Botley West consultation leaflet, produced by the developer
- 51% had attended in-person event(s)
- 31% had accessed information on the developer's Botley West website
- 4.5% attended the developer's community webinar
- 12% said they did not access the consultation although they would have liked to

#### 2.3. Suitability of consultation arrangements

More than half (52.3%) said they had not received adequate information before the consultation.

82 people (over 6%) said they had accessibility issues that had impacted on their ability to participate in the consultation. Nearly half of these cited mobility issues, though it is not clear to what extent this was a result of accessibility issues at the actual venue.

However, 22 people specifically said that they had not accessed (taken part in) the consultation due to “format and/or venue inadequate for my needs”, which indicates that the consultation arrangements overall were lacking in their ability to take account of the needs of those who are less able. These 22 people who had wanted to take part were effectively excluded from the consultation.

Furthermore, 77 people (which may include some or all of the above 22) said they didn’t access the consultation due to “difficulty accessing the venue/webinar” – which again indicates a level of exclusion of some groups.

In total, 594 individuals said they had not accessed the consultation for various reasons. Of these, 388 (65%) said it was because the time, date or day was not suitable. A couple of key reasons for this were frequently cited in the comments:

- the consultation ran over the Christmas period
  - Many people pointed out that this time of year is incredibly busy for everyone with family and social commitments, and lots of preparation during December. For some, it is also a busy time at work – more so in January
  - Some respondents specifically expressed their scepticism that the Christmas timing (a repeat of the timing of the informal consultation last year) was a deliberate choice by the developer to make it difficult for people to engage fully.
  - A further comment was on the length of consultation documentation – off-putting in itself, and even harder to make time to explore fully at such a busy time of year
- the timings of the consultation events made it difficult for those in ‘conventional’ 9-5 employment
  - This potentially discriminated against professional people, and others working conventional hours. Many people commented that the consultations finished too early for them to get there after work. Typical comments included:
  - “Some of us work during the day, so can't pop into the village hall in the middle of the afternoon” and “It ran over an inconvenient time, including the evening rush hour and mealtime” and “(Location) consultation could have done with being much later in the day to enable me to attend after work”.

To make this more difficult, some pointed out that the developer’s consultation leaflet – setting out the dates and venues – had landed through their letterbox quite late in the process, leaving “Not enough time/notice to organise around available events”. One even complained that the “Leaflet arrived after the in-person event had taken place in my most convenient location”.

Even the timing of the on-line event was unhelpful in this regard, as evidenced by the comments “Was travelling home from work at the time of online event” and “There was only one webinar with no alternatives for me to join at a more convenient time.”

Respondents made clear suggestions as to how the timings of the consultation events could have made them more accessible to enable higher levels of participation, including:

- later finish times, such as 8pm
- some weekend events
- avoiding the Christmas and New Year period

One person commented that the times were simply “over too short a period given the scale of the development”.

Other hindrances to attendance included:

- lack of parking (e.g. at Woodstock and Bladon venues)
- difficulty of getting there by public transport
- This is not the fault of the developer – more a reality of the site of BWSF being surrounded by, and therefore impacting on, more rural areas which are generally not well served by public transport across the county. However, this means that the availability of adequate parking is essential for consultation venues – and this was clearly not taken into account.
- lack of a local consultation venue (for example, there was no consultation event held in either Yarnnton or Tackley)

This last point, combined with the limited timing of the consultation events, made access for working people even harder.

It is worth noting that there were only 8 locations in total, and only 9 dates on which in-person consultations took place. Four of these were between 8th and 13th December, and five were between 12th and 19th January; i.e. within two relatively short windows. This seems totally inadequate for a consultation on a development of such a scale and with such wide-ranging implications.

It is also worth noting that the attendance at Woodstock – the only venue which had a consultation event on two dates - was 3 times greater on 13<sup>th</sup> January (175) than on 9<sup>th</sup> December (57). This would seem to indicate that more than one date at a location leads to an increase in attendance, and also (in this case at least) that the January date attracted more attendees than the December date, perhaps providing more evidence that the choice of December dates effectively reduced attendance rates. This is further supported by the attendance figures in December (68, 57, 46 and 80; an average of 62.75 attendees per event) being significantly lower than the attendance figures in January (195, 175, 155, 49 and 163; an average of 147.4 attendees per event).

It is highly likely therefore that the venues with only a December consultation date (Bladon, Begbroke and Hanborough), all of which are significantly affected by this proposed development, were effectively discriminated against in the consultation process, because it was harder for their residents to engage fully in the process.

#### **2.4. Coverage of the consultation**

The following table summarises where respondents live (or the village/town to which they are closest), giving a sense of the geographical spread of people engaging in the consultation. 1226 people responded.

Begbroke	30	Filchampstead	1	Swinford	3
Bladon	109	Freeland	38	Tackley	21
Botley	25	Glympton	2	Thrupp	1
Cassington	108	Hampton Poyle	1	Woodstock	107
Chipping Norton	5	Kidlington	16	Wootton	60
Church Hanborough	71	Long Hanborough	134	Worton	7
Combe	4	North Leigh	36	Wytham	0
Cumnor	130	Oxford	23	Yarnton	62
Eynsham	141	Shipton-on-Cherwell	2	Other (specify below)	50
Farmoor	30	Stonesfield	9		

### 3. Public Experience of the Consultation Process

#### 3.1. Clarity of information provided

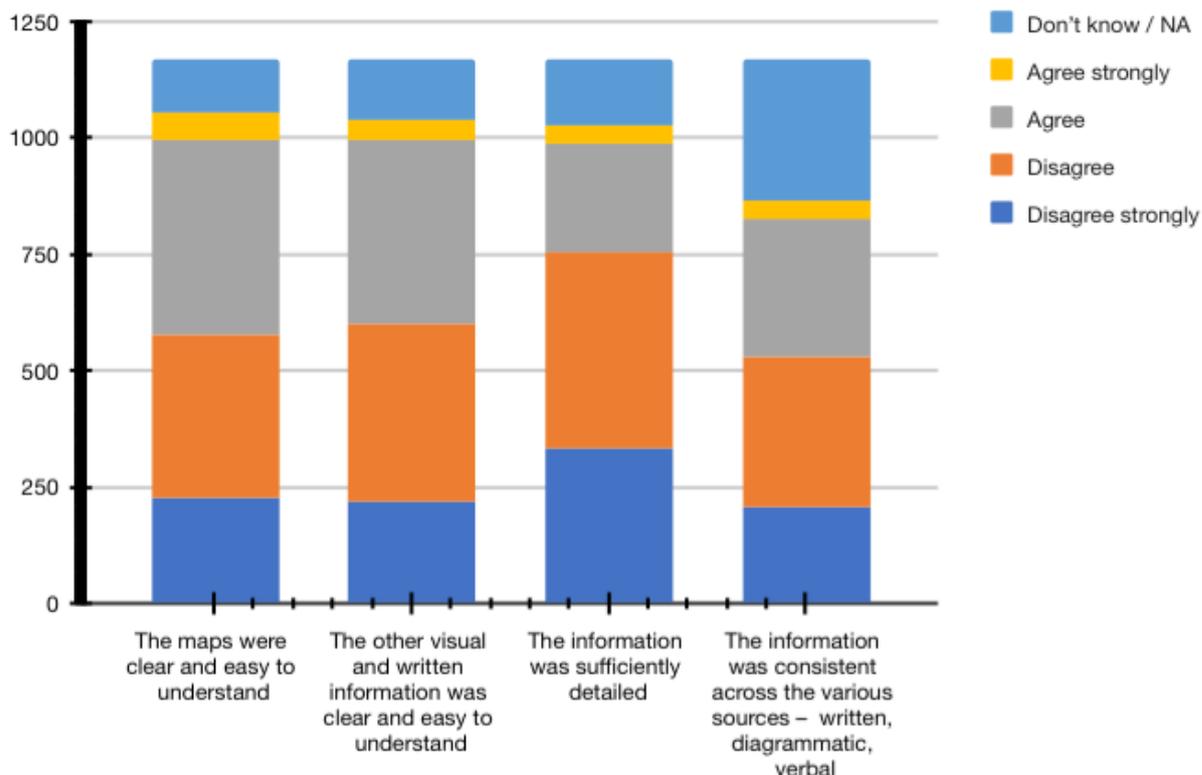
1169 people responded to four questions on this, based on the extent to which they agreed with the following 'positive' statements:

Statement	Disagreed	Agreed
The maps were clear and easy to understand	49.3% disagreed including 19.3% strongly	41% agreed including just 5% strongly
The other visual and written information was clear and easy to understand	51.3% disagreed including 18.6% strongly	37.7% agreed including just 3.9% strongly
The information was sufficiently detailed	64.5% disagreed including 28.7% strongly	23.3% agreed including just 3.3% strongly

The information was consistent across the various sources – written, diagrammatic, verbal	45.3% disagreed including 17.8% strongly	28.8% agree including just 3.3% strongly
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In each case between 10% and 26% respondents selected 'don't know'.

Thinking about the information provided by the Developer, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following:



As can be seen from the above table, in each case there is a higher (and in 3 cases much higher) percentage of people disagreeing than agreeing with these statements. Most significantly, the percentage of people strongly disagreeing is around 20% (ranging from 17.8% to 28.7%), whereas the percentage of people strongly agreeing is just 3%-5%.

So not only is disagreement greater than agreement on all these statements, this disagreement is strongly felt by many; whereas very few people strongly agreed.

Based on the balance of opinion, we must therefore conclude that:

- the maps were not sufficiently clear or easy to understand
- the other visual and written information was not sufficiently clear or easy to understand
- the information was not sufficiently detailed (the extent and strength of feeling on this is particularly clear, with 2/3 respondents identifying this as an issue)
- the information was not sufficiently consistent across the various sources

603 people provided comments to justify why they disagreed with the statements in the above table. Many pointed out the poor quality of the maps (being out of focus, very difficult to read, lacking in detail, not displayed properly, etc) and one even said that the consultants had agreed that the “map visibility was poor”.

Another said “No roads were named, no features such as churches marked so difficult to orientate oneself.”

One respondent commented that “Photos were taken from an angle to ensure the panels look smaller” and the “Height of the panels were not made obvious”.

One commented “I received two different accounts of the proposed use of CCTV and security lighting along the fences from two different reps of the consultation company. The information about the impact on wildlife was inadequate/over optimistic ie the only thing a deer fence affects is deer, otherwise birds and animals are all being taken care of by the plans of PVDP’s ecology officer and anyway, Blenheim’s responsible for the land and will continue to be so, not PVDP.”

For those who might have wanted to talk to the Ecology Officer, they were disappointed – comments included:

“There was no one there able to address my many questions on biodiversity” and from someone who had not attended an event: “Heard from attendees that experts in ecology not available at in person events, so no point in trying to attend as I have ecological questions.”

The consultants who were there apparently did not give the public much confidence in their answers:

“I asked a series of questions of one of the company representatives and they answered with phrases like I should think so or I expect this is likely. Do not inspire confidence.”

“We asked about the images showing landscapes before and after installation of the panels. There was a lack of those along the Lower Road. We were told this was because the hedges prevented them being seen. This is not true. The land rises and is visible over the hedges. Also at this time of year the leaves have fallen and the landscape is clearly visible.”

Throughout the comments made by those who had attended in-person events, there was a theme of feeling that the information was being presented in a way that deliberately emphasised the claimed benefits and skirted around the more difficult questions. There was also a theme of there being a lack of clear and substantiated facts.

One lengthy comment sums up these two themes rather well:

“At no point did I see a detailed map of the entire proposed solar farm and I believe that it is something that would make it absolutely clear how enormous this proposal is; something I think PVDP don't want people to understand. There were numerous allusions to the benefits to local communities Botley West would bring, but no facts, figures or guarantees to back up these suggestions. Certainly short on definitions of terms; e.g. upgraded footpaths, buffer zones, horizontal directional drilling and 'Botley West is committed to establishing an environmental and longstanding legacy across the area', I think we have that already and B W is poised to destroy it. Possibly if I had the time or energy to wade through the folders on the back table, (presumably the whole report,) there might have been all of the information lacking in the displays, but nowhere did I

see any assessment of the numbers of heavy plant, square footage of fencing, tons of decent topsoil removed (and sold ? ) habitats lost. Right at the end of the displays there was a simple timeline showing only the hope of a date for submitting the application for the project, I would like to know how long the area would be subjected to the construction phase.”

Some people identified very specific questions they felt remained unanswered. For example:

- “How is Biodiversity Net Gain calculated to be at least 70%?”
- “What are the exact cabling options (with their pros/cons) for the part of the route not yet finalised in the plans? I’m particularly concerned about the crossing of the Thames near Swinford given the vulnerable floodplain meadow plants in that area.”
- “Where can I find a detailed map and table with the area (hectares) of the different types of agricultural land by grade (not lumped together)?”
- “What is the evidence that bats (especially the high number of red-list/rare species) are NOT impacted by vast areas of solar panels. As this scale of solar panels hasn’t been really realised anywhere, how can you be certain that this has no effect on the acoustics used by bats. Surely large areas of smooth reflecting panels will affect how well bats can use their acoustics? I think you need to provide evidence for this, especially for the scale at which solar panels are covering the landscape. See, e.g. <https://appliedecologistsblog.com/2023/09/18/editors-choice-609-bat-activity-falls-by-overhalf-at-solar-farms/> “
- “What measures exactly will be put in place to improve water quality and reduce run-off into the Evenlode and other surface waters?”

Others identified areas where, based on their own expertise, the developers seemingly have insufficient evidence or understanding to back up their claims of adequate mitigation of impact. For example:

“The mitigation of the impact on the environment and wildlife also included 3 sentences about putting in skylarks nesting sites, bat and bird boxes and bee hives. They just stated that these will be provided. As a zoologist, I know that you can't just pop in a bird box (or bat box or skylark nest site or bee hive) and expect the local animals to move in. They have to be sited with an understanding of their behaviour, territory size, migratory patterns etc etc. 3 sentences stating that these would be present does not show any due diligence on behalf of these animals. You have not shown how the impact on these animals can be mitigated. I believe this is because it hasn't even been considered.”

Many people commented on such things as:

- “Maps scattered in a heap”
- “Large ring binders of supporting documents, some with contents spilling out, were heaped on a stage at the far end of the room, difficult to get at and peruse”
- “The number of photographs showing the existing locations for the development were very limited, overly selective and unclear”
- “Photographs are badly printed; extremely dark and with poor contrast”
- “No guide to consultation documents and cross-referencing inconsistent and confusing”

This indicates a lack of helpful organisation, making access to relevant information unnecessarily difficult. Whether by accident or design, this is not conducive to an effective consultation.

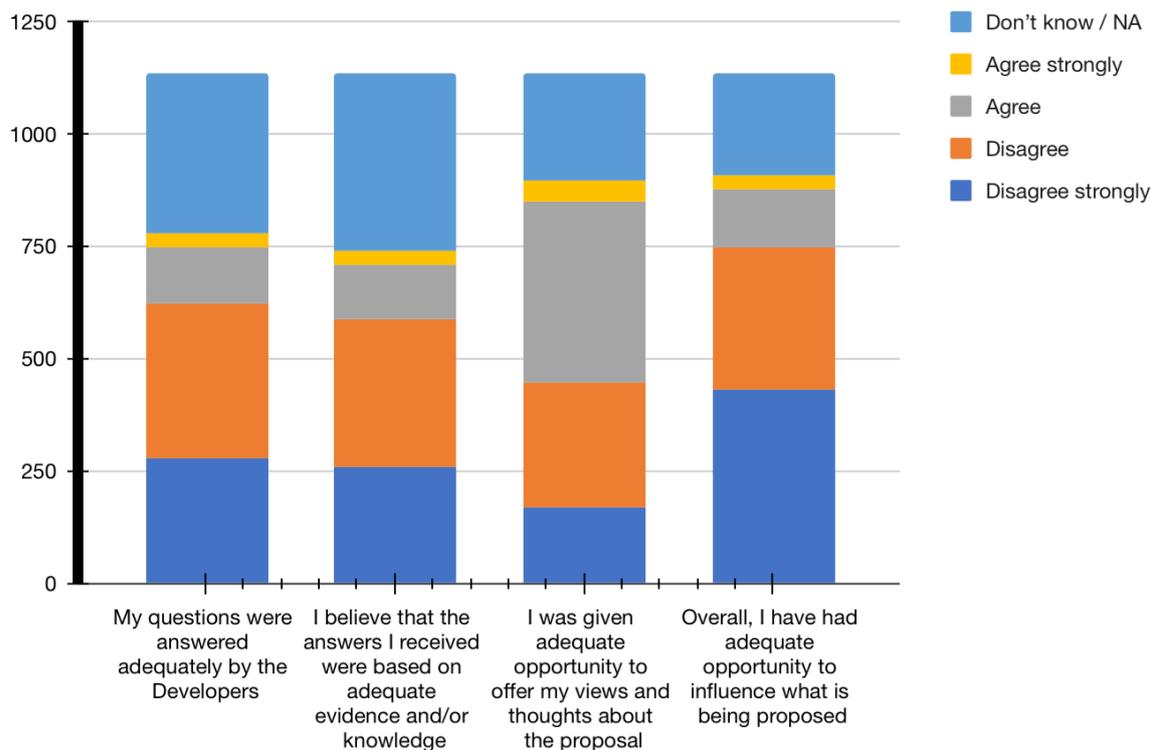
### 3.2. Adequacy of the consultation

1137 people responded to four questions on this, based on the extent to which they agreed with the following 'positive' statements:

Statement	Disagreed	Agreed
My questions were answered adequately by the Developers	54.6% disagreed including 24.6% strongly	13.8% agreed including just 2.6% strongly
I believe that the answers I received were based on adequate evidence and/or knowledge	51.6% disagreed including 22.6% strongly	13.5% agreed including just 2.8% strongly
I was given adequate opportunity to offer my views and thoughts about the proposal	39.2% disagreed including 14.8% strongly	39.5% agreed including just 4% strongly
Overall, I have had adequate opportunity to influence what is being proposed	66% disagreed including 37.9% strongly	14% agree including just 2.8% strongly

In each case between 20% and 32% respondents selected 'NA/don't know'.

Thinking about how adequately you were consulted, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following:



In relation to the question about whether they had been given adequate opportunity to offer their views and thoughts about the proposal, there was an even split, with 39.5% agreeing that they had and 39.2% thinking they had not; although significantly more people felt strongly that they had not (14.8%) compared with the 4% who felt strongly that they had.

For all the other three questions, there is a much higher percentage of people disagreeing than agreeing with these statements, and the percentage of people strongly disagreeing (22.6 – 37.9%) is very much more than the percentage of people strongly agreeing (2.6 – 2.8%).

So, again, we see a pattern where disagreement is much greater than agreement with these three positive statements, and disagreement is strongly felt by many; whereas very few people strongly agreed.

Based on the balance of opinion, we must therefore conclude that:

- questions were NOT answered adequately by the developers
- the answers received were NOT perceived to be based on adequate evidence and/or knowledge
- individuals did NOT believe they had adequate opportunity to influence what is being proposed

A very significant finding is that a massive 66% (2/3) of respondents did NOT believe they had adequate opportunity to influence what is being proposed; and more than half of these (38% of

respondents) felt that strongly. This is a severe indictment of an exercise that is defined as a 'consultation'.

602 people provided comments to justify why they disagreed with the statements in the above table, leading to the conclusions above.

Many people cited examples of where their questions were not answered adequately by the Developers. Comments included:

"Answers received were either vague or had little up to date & objective evidence provided."

"Answers to key questions have been vague, misleading or inaccurate or missing."

"Answers give very vague and focused on the benefit and not on the impact."

"No information was available on how responsibly the millions of panels would be decommissioned at the end"

"Not enough clear information about long term effects"

"Reps present were prepared and briefed with insufficient background information and unable to answer basic questions such as- why place panels on North facing slopes, and what height is the new proposed power station. Also what happens after 40 years and MANY MORE questions"

"The reps of the solar farm were advised very poorly and were not at all sure of their information"

"Developers couldn't answer my questions"

"Not enough knowledge was held by event staff."

"Concerns were brushed aside and given ridiculous answers such as "EVs will need the electricity - BW is our only option"

"The representatives listened to questions but in each case definitive answers were not given. Facts were very difficult to establish."

"Most of the developer's representatives were inadequately informed to answer questions."

"The people there to answer questions were very nice but seemed quite ignorant of the area and weren't able to answer questions .....They also seemed totally unaware of historical and ecologically vital water meadows at Eynsham where it is proposed that cable lines cross (one of the options)."

There were specific concerns about inconsistencies in the information provided:

"Some answers from different representatives were contradictory."

"At 2 different consultation locations, answers were inconsistent, too many questions were answered with "that's something we're working on", or "that's not my field". Selective research reports were quoted to support the case, when there is a plethora of contradictory evidence, especially on wildlife issues."

Several respondents had very particular interests, and possessed relevant expertise themselves; and they were clearly asking quite detailed questions about specific aspects of the proposals.

Many of these individuals felt that the answers to their questions lacked evidence of appropriate

levels of knowledge and understanding; and they were disappointed at the lack of availability of appropriate experts to address their concerns.

Comments included:

“The relevant specialists - flood, engineering and ecology - were not present as they left the meeting a few hours early.”

“Hydrologist not present. Those present were unable to understand concerns or flooding”

“No ecologist came”

“No experts present for areas of concern - biodiversity and flood risk”

“No data on flooding - I provided some to developer!

No data on Wildlife surveys - I provided data on impact “

“Some people we needed to talk to about cabling were not present”

“Did not feel that the respondents had adequate depth of knowledge in specific areas - heritage, security, biodiversity - and that their "experts" in those areas were not present.”

“Nobody with technical expertise present at consultation I attended”

“The developers have provided no evidence that wildlife will not be negatively affected. Brown hare, owls and other birds of prey use this land. Also several species on the red list including yellow hammers and field fares. The representative I spoke to was patronising and clearly did not give value to my opinion. His claim was that wildlife inhabited the edges of fields only. It is both laughable and offensive to be told that this enormous solar farm project will not cause harm to the environment.....”

“I am particularly concerned about the local ecology, biodiversity and potential increase in flood risk. When questioned about the ecology and biodiversity the representative was unable to provide any hard evidence for

“a net gain within the area of at least 70%” based on any previous studies involving industrial scale changes to the habitat.”

“I asked a scientifically based question about albedo levels, but the reply I got was highly unscientific and dismissive, along the lines of “we’ve never seen this so we’re not going to measure it”.

"Speaking to Mark Owen Lloyd I asked if he could explain how, by curious coincidence, the power output calculation 840 MW arrived at being able to power 330,000 (all the homes in Oxfordshire) houses as this was rather a unique selling point (USP). Very good marketing hype. I raised this as my own calculation backed by a Solar Research Institute showed this to be a much smaller number. He first claimed that the original reply to this question was published on their website. However, this calculation starts from the assumption that 840MW can be achieved without evidence of the underlying calculation and then by some rather dubious and opaque calculations suggests that 330,000 houses might be powered for a small instance of time in a good summer probably around midday.

He then subsequently claimed that the calculations had been checked by Blenheim (by whom?) and said the original calculations had been made by an engineer in Berlin.”

The above comment is a particularly good example of where the ‘facts’, as presented, were not substantiated when specific questions were asked; and there was obvious frustration at the

apparent lack of concern and absence of clear answers to questions relating to perceived risks. One comment captured this rather well:

“They had no answers to the flooding that we have most years if we have torrential rain!  
They said it would be looked into! Should be looked into from the beginning!!!!”

One respondent was particularly concerned that they received inadequate answers to their questions, when they had raised these same questions in the informal consultation a year earlier. He/she was not impressed.

“When I asked about the general effect on sound as panels are hard surfaces and will reflect sound differently, the effect on animals that use echo location (bats), and the noise that rain & hail would make when falling on the panels I was told they hadn’t done any work on that and to include it on my feedback form. When I pointed out that I had done that at the previous consultation feedback and obviously it had been ignored, I was told to do it again!”

In relation to the majority view that there is inadequate opportunity to influence what is being proposed, a number of comments indicated why this view prevailed:

“The whole operation of consultation seems like window dressing and a hoop to jump through for the developer. I feel they will never take our serious views and questions into account”

“The feedback form to the second consultation was as loaded as the first in terms of questions. It is geared to elicit positive responses.”

“The personnel at the consultation were not experts in the fields that I wanted to question. They were more interested in telling me about the plans than hearing my views.”

“I think the information was overwhelming and felt the representatives were glossing over those areas they did not want to discuss.”

“I wasn’t given the opportunity to express my views”

“They listened and nodded but didn't really care about villagers’ views”

“When asked about food security and loss of agricultural land Mark Lloyd said that solar panels were preferable to agriculture as they didn’t cause river pollution. He was primarily concerned with pushing the project forwards with no thought of the impact on local residents.”

“The people who presented the consultation seemed to me to be biased towards enabling the Botley soar farm. There wasn’t sufficient attention given to the damage which the solar panels would create. If my grandchildren were to ask me whether I had done enough to safeguard their future relationship with the countryside I would have to say “I tried but they wouldn’t listen”.”

“There was no 'consultation'. Just 4 planners from RPS whose agenda was seemingly to reject any compromise & push forward a very chaotic display of unconnected photos & location maps”

“issues of key importance to me were not addressed. In fact I believe they may have been deliberately sidelined.”

“None of the developers were writing down any of my questions/concerns and therefore it felt as if the consultation was a 'dead process' in terms of me being in consultation with them equally or that they were treating my views with any importance to their process.”

“Although I was spoken to politely throughout, I was made to feel like a spoiler if I did not support the scheme. I was told that basically in terms of planning considerations there will always be winners and losers and the fact that I will be a loser will not carry much weight in the decision-making. It was also asserted that BW has to be supported as there are no alternatives to achieve decarbonisation.”

“From the very early stages it was quite clear the consultation was simply a box ticking exercise and local feeling will not influence the outcome. Questions were clearly biased and designed to produce the result the developer required - of course we are all concerned about climate change, of course we all agree more renewable power is needed - but I fear these answers will be spun to indicate locals also support an inappropriately huge solar farm that will blight our lives for decades, which of course we do not.”

Perhaps the most telling comment is:

“I was one of a group of 3 people listening to the main representative. He said - quote - if 100% of people in the area are against it, it will make no difference. We have satisfied all of the government criteria for it to go ahead so it will”

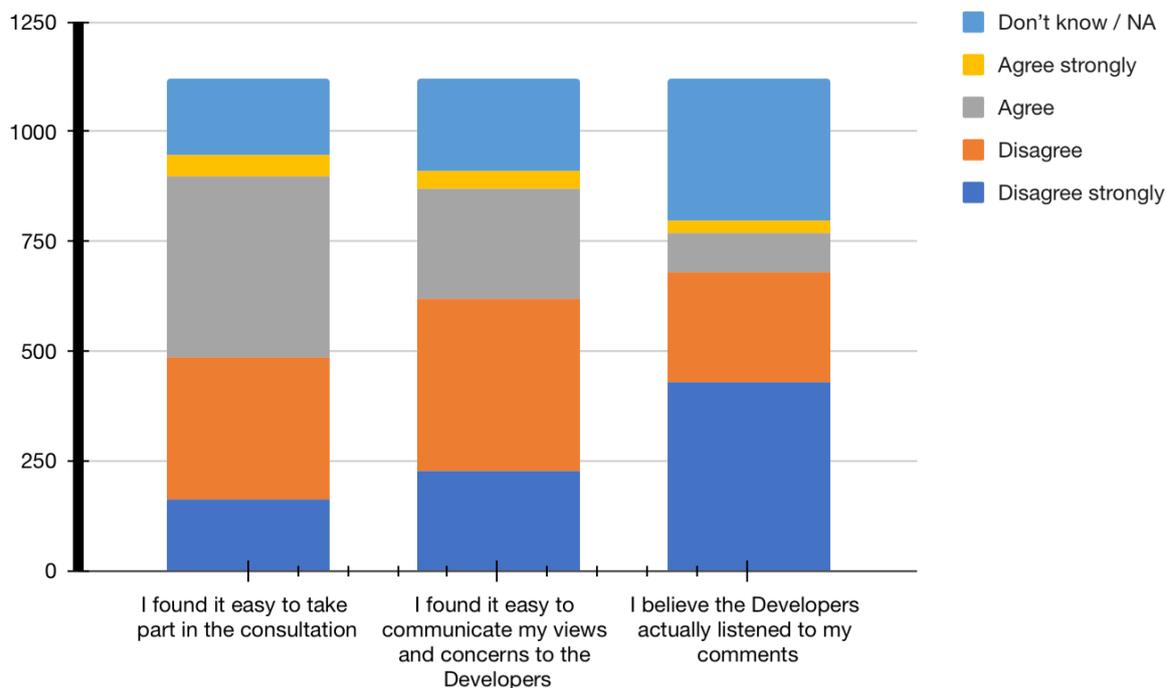
### 3.3. Ease of taking part in the consultation and communicating views and/or concerns

1122 people responded to three questions on this, based on the extent to which they agreed with the following 'positive' statements:

Statement	Disagreed	Agreed
I found it easy to take part in the consultation	43.4% disagreed including 14.5 strongly	41.9% agreed including just 4.2% strongly
I found it easy to communicate my views and concerns to the Developers	55.3% disagreed including 20.1% strongly	25.8% agreed including just 3.7% strongly
I believe the Developers actually listened to my comments	60.7% disagreed including 38.4% strongly	10.4% agreed including just 2.5% strongly

In each case between 15% and 29% respondents selected 'NA/don't know'.

We are keen to understand how easy it was to take part in the consultation and communicate your views and/or concerns. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following:



There was a fairly even split between those who reported they had found it easy to take part in the consultation (42%) and those who had not found it easy (43%), although there was a slight differentiation between those who felt strongly about this, with 14.5% feeling strongly that it was not easy and only 4.2% feeling strongly that it was easy.

Whilst the views are relatively evenly split on this, it is not a particularly good result that only 42% of the respondents found it easy to take part in the consultation, and this does raise the question of how many people may not have taken part because they didn't find it easy to do so. Whatever the precise answer to that, this won't have helped the response rate to the consultation – and, of course, we do know that the relatively small number of events, the timing of the consultation itself (over Christmas) and the restricted times of week/day of the consultation events have all been cited as problematic, even before one considers the process of actually submitting a response to the consultation.

When it comes to how easy it was to communicate their views and concerns to the developers, and whether they felt the developers actually listened to their comments, the results paint an even more unsatisfactory picture.

Over half of the respondents (55%) said they did not find it easy to communicate their views and concerns to the developer, and 36% of these (20% of respondents) expressed that view strongly.

Only just over a quarter of the respondents (26%) said they had found it easy to communicate their views and concerns to the developer, and very few of these (14% of this group; 4% of respondents) expressed this view strongly.

The results were even more stark regarding the statement “I believe the Developers actually listened to my comments”.

61% of respondents disagreed with this statement, and nearly 2/3 of those (38% of respondents) disagreed strongly. In contrast, only 10% of respondents said they do believe the developers actually listened to their comments, with just a quarter of those (a mere 2.5% of respondents) feeling this strongly.

So it is clear that the majority of those taking part in the consultation do not believe that the developers were listening to their comments, to the extent that many expressed this view strongly.

Based on the majority views, we must therefore conclude that:

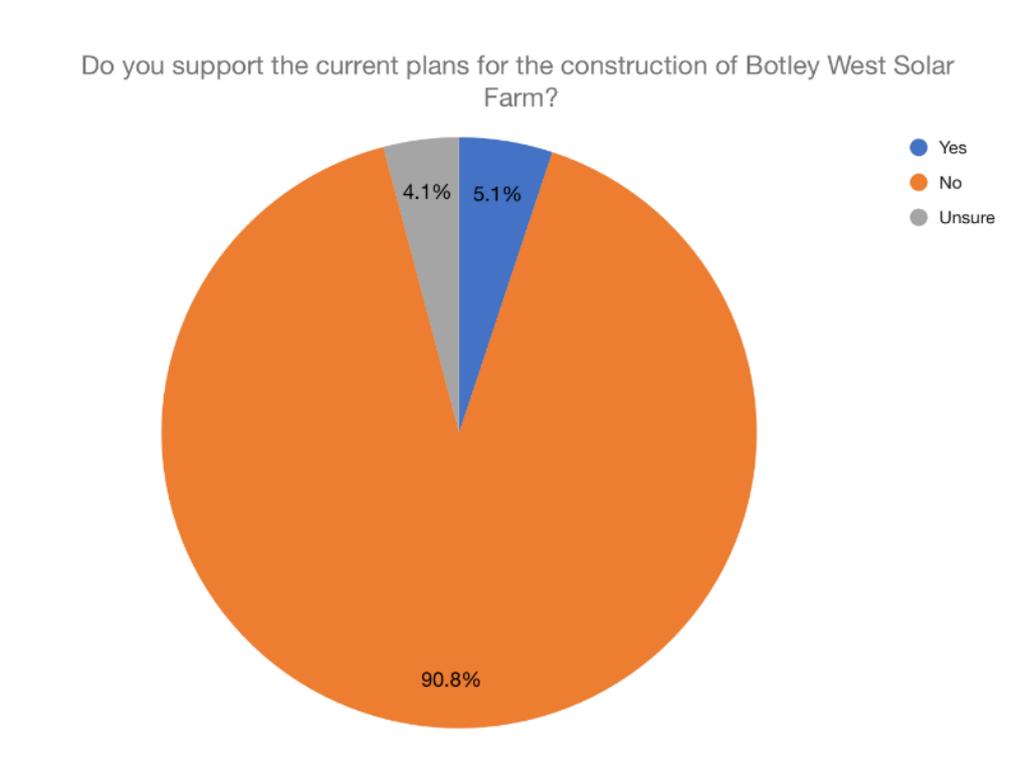
- it was not sufficiently easy to take part in the consultation.
- respondents did NOT find it easy to communicate their views and concerns to the developers
- respondents did NOT believe the Developers actually listened to their comments.

The last point is very consistent with the results in section 3.2 above, that individuals did not believe they had adequate opportunity to influence what is being proposed.

Looking at the figures, the extent and strength of feeling on those points (not being listened to and feeling unable influence) are very similar.

#### 4. Level of Support for the Current Plans

The focus of the questionnaire was specifically on the effectiveness and adequacy of the consultation, but in one simple question at the end respondents were asked a simple Yes/No question, to determine the overall balance of feeling towards the BWSF proposals. It is clear that amongst the respondents to this survey, the vast majority are against the proposals.



## 5. Conclusions

It is notable that the conclusions below, based on analysis of a survey of the public's experience of PVDP's formal consultation process from December 2023 to January 2024, bear an uncanny resemblance to the results of a similar survey of the public's experience of PVDP's informal consultation held in November to December 2022. See Appendix below for comparison.

It seems that PVDP have learned nothing from feedback on that process, as the recently conducted formal consultation is similarly flawed.

### Timing and availability of consultation events was inadequate

There were serious issues raised about the timing and availability of the consultation events.

- the consultation was held over the Christmas period, with around half the consultation events in the busy pre-Christmas month of December
- this is very similar to the timing of the informal consultation a year previously
- so we have a repeated timing issue, leading some to question if this was a deliberate attempt to discourage participation
- it is worth noting that prior to the formal consultation PVDP were asked by SBW to change the timing, precisely because of the clash with the Christmas period
- there were only 8 in-person consultation locations in total, and only 9 dates on which in-person consultations took place, and many people raised concerns about the restricted locations and timings of these, which made it difficult for people working 'conventional hours' to access them
- this seems totally inadequate for a consultation on a development of such a scale and with such wide-ranging implications

### Clarity of information provided was inadequate

- the maps were not sufficiently clear or easy to understand
- the other visual and written information was not sufficiently clear or easy to understand
- the information was not sufficiently detailed (*The extent and strength of feeling on this point is particularly notable, with 2/3 respondents identifying this as an issue*)
- the information was not sufficiently consistent across the various sources

### The consultation was inadequate

- questions were not answered adequately by the developers
- the answers received were not perceived to be based on adequate evidence and/or knowledge
- individuals did not believe they had adequate opportunity to influence what is being proposed

A very significant finding is that a massive 66% (2/3) of respondents did NOT believe they had adequate opportunity to influence what is being proposed; and more than half of these (37.9% of

respondents) felt that strongly. This is a severe indictment of an exercise that is defined as a 'consultation'.

#### **Taking part in the consultation and communicating views and/or concerns was not easy**

- it was not sufficiently easy to take part in the consultation
- respondents did not find it easy to communicate their views and concerns to the developers
- respondents did not believe the developers actually listened to their comments

Consistent with the extent and strength of the perception that there was not adequate opportunity to influence what is being proposed, 61% of respondents felt the developers were not listening, and nearly 2/3 of these (38.4% of respondents) felt that strongly.

#### **The vast majority of respondents do not support the current plans**

91% of respondents said they did not support the current plans for the construction of Botley West Solar Farm. Only 5% do, and 4% said they were unsure.

### **Appendix to Annex 1: Conclusions about the informal consultation process in November-December 2022**

- the vast majority of respondents are dissatisfied with the process, and with the extent and quality of the information provided to them
- there were an inadequate number of face-to-face and on-line consultation events
- the consultation events were not promoted effectively, with many people being unaware of them
- the design of the consultation feedback form was perceived to be biased in favour of the developers, and people found it difficult to express their views fully
- the above means that the reported consultation responses from PVDP are highly likely to artificially inflate the level of support for their scheme
- staff (representing PVDP and its partners) were unable to adequately answer questions raised
- only 6.6% of people who wrote to the developer felt that they got a helpful response

The overall conclusion must be that the consultation was inadequate in both its reach and its content.

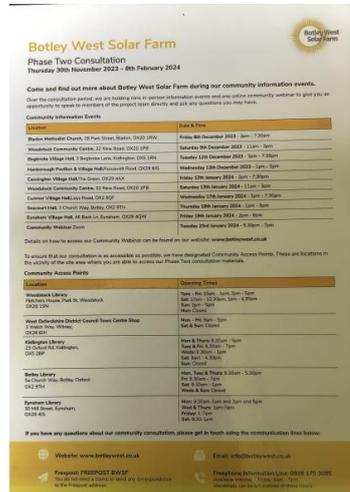
# ANNEX 2: WAS THE INFORMATION ACCESSIBLE?

## 1. Advertising and signage

In this rural area parish magazines are the primary source of local information. Many of these are published and distributed monthly during the first week of the month with a deadline for material of around 14th of the previous month.

PVDP issued their first press notification on 16th November and started the consultation on 30th November. This meant the earliest that the information could be circulated to villages in parish magazines was early January.

PVDP did not advertise ANY events locally - no posters advertising the consultation event venues were displayed at or near ANY venue, except Woodstock where a small-print A4 notice was displayed in a backstreet



pub and inside the event venue half hidden on a crowded noticeboard. SBW supplied local posters and directions to every venue except Botley which consequently had the lowest turnout of 49.

## 2. Community Consultation Leaflet

### 2.1. Entire village of Combe omitted

In the SOCC, PDVD stated: 'A Consultation leaflet will be posted to all properties in the Core Consultation Zone - an initial distance of 2km from the edge of the proposed solar development areas ...'

*'The CCZ extends beyond 2km in certain areas, eg to incorporate the whole of Kidlington so as not to bisect the village. It has been reduced in other areas where there are no property interests within a 2km limit from the boundary of the proposed development.'* A list of included PCs followed.

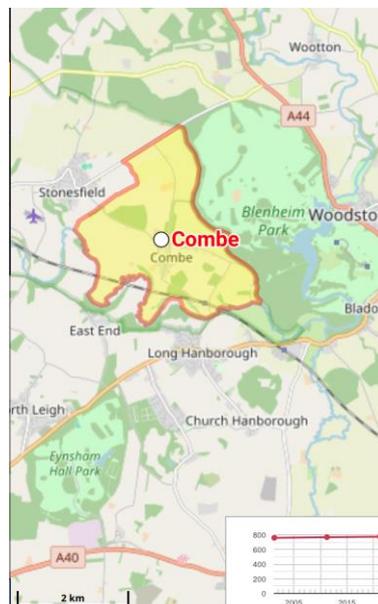
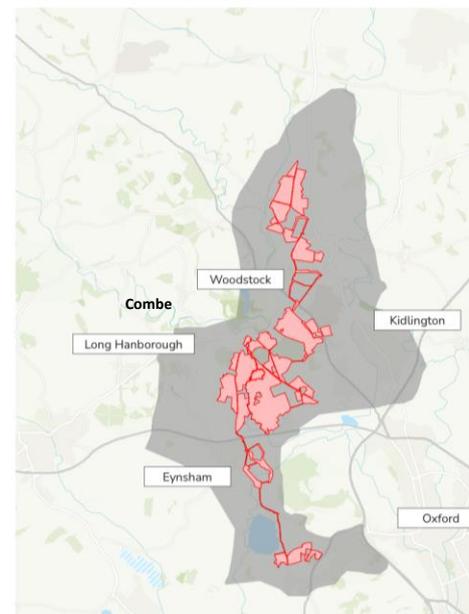


Figure 3: Botley West Solar Farm consultation zone



Despite there being significant 'property interests' in and around the area, The Parish of Combe (population 775 ) was completed excluded from the CCZ despite being with 2km of the boundary of

the proposed site - as close as nearby North Leigh and Freeland which were included, and considerably closer than areas of Kidlington and Botley.

## **2.2. Feedback from first consultation ignored**

PVDP stated 'We have also considered how our posted materials are presented to encourage engagement with them following feedback regarding the plain envelopes our phase one leaflets were posted.' However, they ignored this feedback and leaflets were delivered exactly as for the first consultation in plain envelopes with no sender's identification. Delivery was also delayed by and muddled up with the Christmas post.

## **2.3. Missed delivery**

Some areas within 2km of the site did not receive the leaflet at all and several received them late - a week after the start of the consultation and, in some cases, AFTER that area's consultation event. Examples of missing booklets as of 8 Dec included:

Bladon - Church Street; Church Hanborough - at least 2 properties omitted, including one highly affected one; Long Hanborough - Main Road, Millwood End, Oliver's Close, Regents Drive; North Leigh - Common Road; Woodstock - Manor Road, whole of Park View Estate

## **2.4. Missing or misleading information**

The leaflet failed to even mention the size of the site (3,400 acres). It made many unsubstantiated claims (eg on biodiversity net gain). It claimed that PVDP were already working with other organisations who reported they hadn't been contacted. The maps in the leaflet showed no infrastructure and minor roads through the site were difficult to see.

## **3. Information Event venues**

### **3.1. Northern section omitted**

There was NO Information Event for the entire northern section of the site. A provisional list of venues included Kidlington and Tackley but these were both removed in the later published version of the SOCC.

### **3.2. Eight parishes omitted**

Of 15 affected villages (Botley excluded), 8 were omitted from the list of in-person event venues despite being adjacent to the site. The villages of Combe, Farmoor, Freeland, North Leigh, Kidlington, Tackley and Wootton and Yarnton, comprising 20,000 residents = 61% of the total population of 32,000, were unable to attend an event in their own parish. Of these 8 parishes, 5 (Farmoor, Freeland, Tackley, Wootton, Yarnton) had no bus routes to nearby Information Events.

### **3.3. Timing in Christmas period**

Attendee numbers before and after Christmas provide evidence of the error PVDP made in ignoring the call to delay the consultation until January. The 4 pre-Christmas events were attended by a total of 252 people. The 5 post-Christmas events were attended by a total of 737 people.

### **3.4. Minimal accessibility outside working hours**

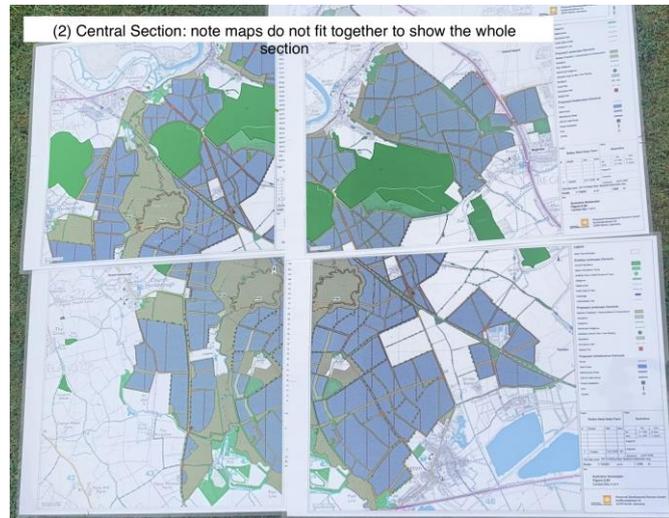
Out of 38 hours of consultation, only 6 hours were post 6pm with 8 hours on Saturdays. For the 54% of affected residents in full time work this severely limited their access to the consultation.

### 3.5. Disproportionate event length

The length of events did not correspond to the size of the population: Eynsham and Hanborough with populations of 5324 and 3503 were 30 minutes shorter than those provided for Begbroke (pop 800), Bladon (977), Cassington (794), Cumnor (830).

## 4. Displays within venues

### 4.1. Maps



- no whole site map was shown at any greater scale than 1:35,000; most were at 1:100,000
- 10 sectional maps were at scale 1:10000 (should be 1:2500)
- no plan showed how the sections fitted together (further details in Annex 1)

### 4.2. Photomontages

Very few visualisations were available and most of the key views were omitted. A handful were displayed on easels the rest piled randomly on tables with no clear indication of which area of the site they represented. One 1:100,000 map had coloured dots showing the viewpoints but these were not numbered to match the photographs. For further details see Annex 1.



### 4.3. Display boards

These contained exactly the same information as the Community Consultation leaflet using the same 'sales speak' with no objective information.

#### 4.4. Non-Technical Summary

Insufficient copies (2-5) were available. No attention was drawn to them as a source of accessible information. They were generally left on side benches mixed up with the 20 volumes of the PEIR with no room to sit and read - even though there was usually plenty of space on tables with chairs dedicated to completing feedback forms. It contained no index.

#### 4.5. PEIR

Volumes were randomly scattered on benches/tables with no seating. There was no master index. Even PVDP’s ‘experts’ were unable to find specific pieces of information requested by individual members of the public.

### 5. Information Event Personnel

#### 5.1. Missing ‘experts’

At SBW’s request, PVDP agreed to send a list of which personnel were present at which event. They failed to do so. It would appear that the hydrology/flood expert did not attend any consultation (even Cassington which is a notorious area for severe flood problems) and neither did Blenheim Estates who are supposed to be responsible for land management. The ecology expert was also a frequent absentee.

#### 5.2. Missing spokesperson

Mark Owen-Lloyd of PVDP - the key spokesperson for the entire project - promised to be and has claimed to have been at all 9 consultation events but this is not true. He did not attend Hanborough or Cumnor.

#### 5.3. Inconsistent expertise

Personnel who were present were not easily identifiable - even as to whether they were from PVDP the developers, RPS the consultants or Counter Context the PR firm - badges worn were not colour coded and were difficult to read. Counter Context could not answer any detailed question about the proposals. Even RPS ‘experts’ sometimes failed to answer questions in their own area of expertise or gave contradictory answers.

#### 5.4. Attitude of personnel

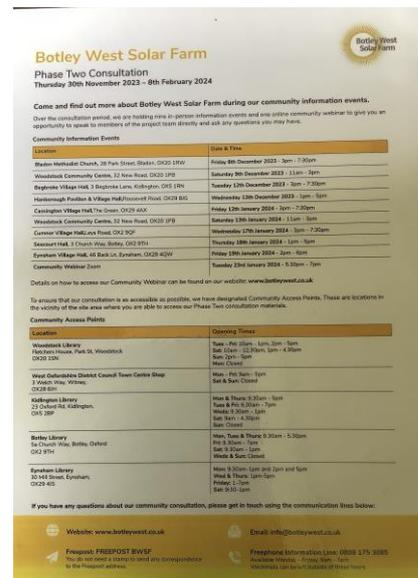
The overwhelming view of those attending events was that it was more a presentation than consultation, they weren’t being listened to, that PVDP and RPS personnel were sometimes aggressive and that nothing they said would affect the outcome.

### 6. Community Access Points

No posters or signs were displayed outside or inside any of the five Community Access Points indicating the presence of the documents. In answer to a question from SBW, PVDP said this poster was displayed at every Information Access Point but it was not - as confirmed by librarians.

No use was made of any public buildings nearer to the affected villages, though parish halls and churches would have been more convenient and spacious than the libraries and could have been used.

NONE of the five Community Access Points contained any maps bigger than A3 size and at no better scale than 1:10,000.



There was very limited access to Community Access Points outside working hours due to limited opening, apart from Botley (which had other highly significant issues) and Kidlington.

**Botley Library.** The PEIR documents were still in the 3 large boxes in which they were delivered. These boxes were in a closed room marked 'Staff Only, No Entry'. Inside this room was one small table filled by a computer and monitor and another completely covered with boxes and cleaning materials. It was more as storeroom for unwanted items than office or study area. No notice - even on the "Staff only" door in the main library advertising its presence or indeed the consultation itself.



Botley Library: Information Access Point. Behind this door. No notice advertising the documents available or the Consultation.



Botley Library: Information Access Point. In storeroom behind door marked 'No Entry'. No poster advertising it's presence or anything about the Consultation. No table space.

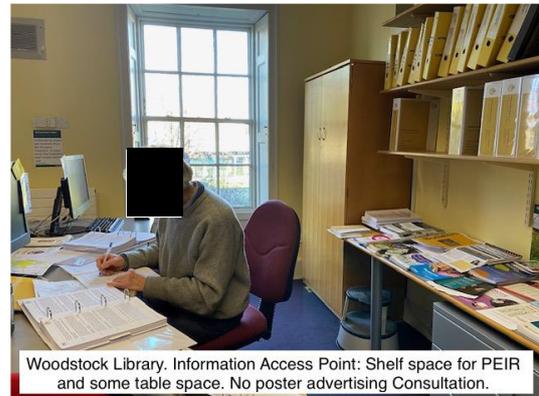
**Eynsham Library.** Only open for 2 mornings and 4 afternoons each week, closed every lunchtime. The space allocated was totally inadequate. A small desktop already holding a computer was the only table space and the 20 volumes of the PEIR were stuffed in boxes beneath the table. The librarian was apologetic and said the library was too small to provide adequate access. She had not been warned how many volumes would be lodged or how much space would be needed - no site visit had been made by the developer. On the morning the PEIR was delivered she complained that there was too much material to cope with but was simply told "you have a legal obligation to house it" and the boxes were left in a pile for her to find a solution.



Eynsham library : Information Access Point. Inadequate table space. PEIR boxed and half hidden under table. No advertising of Consultation.

**Kidlington Library** can be considered adequate in terms of space provided for reading but PEIR documents mostly still in piled up in boxes with no explanation.

**Woodstock Library.** Closed Mondays and every lunch time. Nearest to the site and can be considered adequate in terms of location with limited but just about adequate space provided for accessing and studying the PEIR documents but insufficient space to spread out map sections.



**WODC Shop, Witney.** Only open 9am-5pm Monday-Friday. 7 miles from the site.

## 7. Summary of accessibility by village<sup>17</sup>

**BEBROKE - Information Event, Tuesday 12 December 2023, 3pm-7.30pm. 46 attended.**

- No Community Access Point
- Population: 800
- No signs to direct people to the venue anywhere in Begbroke. Nothing at the entrance to the car park or on the lane leading to the venue. The car park had about 12 spaces. Nearly ALL were filled by PVDP, RPS or Counter Context's own cars.
- Many experts missing, no Ecology expert present.
- Already packing up at 7pm when some working people arrived with only a few minutes to look at the massive amount of information. Less than 50% of residents could potentially attend during working hours.

**BLADON – Information Event, Friday, 8 December 2023, 3pm -7.30pm. 68 attended**

- No Community Access Point
- Population: 977
- No parking, no disabled access, dangerous narrow pavement approach, insufficient room to display documents. Road outside extremely busy with commuter traffic on a Friday late afternoon. Not a single notice anywhere in Bladon indicating the location. Church or Primary School (in evening) would have been more appropriate venues. 57% of residents unable to attend during working hours

**BOTLEY - Information Event, Friday 18 January 2024, 1pm - 5pm. 49 attended.**

- Community Access Point in Botley Library inadequate - see 2.6(5) for details.
- Population 1370

<sup>17</sup> \*2021 Census figures for populations of Begbroke, Bladon, Botley, Cassington, Combe, Cumnor, Eynsham, Farmoor, Freeland, Hanborough, Kidlington, North Leigh, Tackley, Woodstock and Wootton, and Yarnton.

- Complete lack of advertising resulted in the lowest turnout of any event because it was the ONLY event for which SBW did not supply placards, posters or leaflets due to limited budget and location outside the red line area.
- PVDP did not advertise ANY events and it could be argued that this was a deliberate ploy to cut the numbers of those able to find and attend events. The low turnout of 49 shows what would have happened elsewhere if advertising had been left to PVDP. Turnouts averaging 170 at the other 4 January venues were entirely due to the efforts of SBW.

**CASSINGTON & WORTON – Information Event, Friday 12 January 2024, 3pm- 7.30pm. 195 attended.**

- No Community Access Point
- Population: 794
- Adequate location and accessibility. Many concerns expressed about inability of staff to answer questions. In particular, despite the well-known flooding issues Cassington has, no hydrologist was present. No Ecologist present either. Only advertising supplied by SBW outside and on the door.



Cassington Consultation: As at ALL EVENTS Advertising of venue throughout the village by Stot Botley West group. NO advertising by PVDP

**COMBE**

- No Community Consultation Leaflet delivered.
- No Information Event
- No Community Access Point
- Population of 774 completely disenfranchised

**CUMNOR – Information Event, Wednesday 17 January 2024, 3pm- 7.30pm. 155 attended.**

- No Community Access Point
- Population: 830
- No hydrologist, no ecologist. Mark Owen-Lloyd absent (though later claimed he'd been at every event) and his replacement spent quite a lot of the time in a side room away from the public, not in the hall. Consultees reported that they were met with ignorance or arrogance and that answers to their questions were unavailable, inadequate or contradictory.

**EYNSHAM – Information Event Friday, 19 January 2024, 2pm-6pm, 163 attended**

- Community Access Point: Eynsham Library see 2.6(6) for details.
- Population 5324
- A reasonably accessible venue with adequate nearby parking. Many experts missing.
- This event ran for only 4 hours despite the large population, finishing before any of the working population could attend.

**FARMOOR**

- No information Event
- No Community Access Point

- Population 1521
- Distance to nearest Information Event at Cumnor = 2 miles, no bus

### **FREELAND**

- No Information Event
- No Community Access Point
- Population 518
- Distance to nearest Information Event at Hanborough = 2 miles, no bus

### **HANBOROUGH (comprising Church Hanborough and Long Hanborough) Information Event, Wednesday 13 December 2023, 1pm – 5pm. 80 attended.**

- No Community Access Point
- Population 3503 (CH approx 250, LH 3250)
- Finally, a suitable, well known, central venue with sufficient parking resulting in higher attendance despite no signage guiding visitors to the location (other than that provided by SBW).
- However 1pm to 5pm on a weekday is not a suitable time for working people and 12 days before Christmas is a totally unsuitable date.
- Again no Ecology expert present. And, as at other venues, many people left this consultation angry or visibly upset reporting arrogance and bias among RPS experts with frequent mentions of inability of staff to answer their questions. Mark Owen-Lloyd of PVDP was absent (though later claimed he'd been at every event)



### **KIDLINGTON**

- No Information Event held
- Community Access Point: Kidlington Library see 2.6(7) for details.
- Population 14,644
- This is the largest village adjacent to the site, yet it had no information event.
- Distance to nearest Information Event at Begbroke = 2.2 miles, no bus

### **NORTH LEIGH**

- No Information Event
- No Community Access Point
- Population: 1733
- Distance to nearest Information Event at Hanborough = 2.4 miles, half-hourly bus

### **TACKLEY**

- No Information Event
- No Community Access Point
- Population: 1073

- Distance to nearest Information Event at Woodstock = 5 miles, no direct bus

**WOODSTOCK - Information Events Saturday 9 December 2023, 11am - 3 pm. 57 Attended.  
Also Saturday 13 January 2024, 11am - 3pm. 175 attended.**

- Community Access Point: Woodstock Library (see section 6 above for details)
- Population: 3521
- Inappropriate venue with very limited parking - the Community Hall is on a narrow residential cul-de-sac, with just 4 parking spaces outside and a further 6 spaces in the car park behind (all used by staff running the consultation). The date chosen was a Saturday just 2 weeks before Christmas - clashing with many local events and opportunities for working people to do their Christmas shopping.



Severe traffic congestion and very limited parking at Woodstock Consultation Event venue



Woodstock Consultation Event. As at all venues, roadside advertising provided by Stop Botley West, only a small notice on the door provided by Developer

- The Town Hall, better known and central, would have been a far more appropriate location. Not a single notice in Woodstock advertised the event or advised the location. Several complaints from people who had difficulty finding the location and were then unable to park.
- As they left, several people were close to tears of frustration and desperation that their questions weren't answered and that their concerns and objections had been ignored. The mood was of resignation that the consultation was meaningless and that the project would go ahead regardless same issues apply as to the 9 Dec event. Traffic chaos. No Hydrologist, no Ecologist.

## WOOTTON

- No Information Event
- No Community Access Point
- Population: 602
- Distance to nearest Information Event at Woodstock = 2.5 miles, no bus

## YARNTON

- No Information Event
- No Community Access Point
- Population: 3227
- Distance to nearest Information Event at Begbroke = 1.3 miles, no bus

## 8. Contradictions with Statement of Community Consultation (SoCC)

In the Statement of Community Consultation November 2023 in Section 7, 'How will we Consult?', PVDP stated:

'The consultation activities described in this section of the SoCC ensure inclusive, meaningful and open consultation. The activities include a range of methods **to ensure our consultation can be accessed by all members of the community.**'

'These events will be held on different days of the week including weekends, with varied hours to **accommodate different availability within the community.**' [our emphasis]

However, it is patently clear that PVDP's Provision of the Statutory Consultation for the 43,632\* members of the population who would be impacted by the proposal, has been totally inadequate. It has failed significantly to ensure that the consultation could be accessed by all members of that population, or 'to accommodate different availability within the community.'

In the SOCC, Section, PDVD stated: 'A Consultation leaflet will be posted to all properties in the Core Consultation Zone - an initial distance of 2km from the edge of the proposed solar development areas ...' Despite this, consultation leaflets were not delivered to the village of Combe (pop. 774) just 2km from the site.

In summary, regarding adequacy of making the consultation accessible to all, PVDP failed to:

- ensure that residents in full-time employment would be able to attend Information Events
- ensure that those in the northern section of the site had access to an Information Event in their area
- ensure that residents of all parishes would be able to attend Information Events in easily accessible venues
- ensure that all residents received Community Consultation Leaflet in time or at all
- ensure sufficient advertising in the rural communities - such advertising was provided only by Stop Botley West
- provide any evening events extending beyond 7.30pm
- provide Community Access Points with sufficient room to study all PEIR Documents
- provide Community Access Points with adequate opening times

## 9. References:

Transport Statistics: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/transport-statistics-great-britain-2022/transport-statistics-great-britain-2022-domestic-travel#:~:text=How%20we%20commute,->

[Data%20Source%3A%20TSGB0108&text=The%20average%20usual%20commuting%20time,broadly%20similar%20to%20previous%20years.](#)

Time Use Statistics:

[https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/personalandhouseholdfinances/incomeandwealth/bulletins/timeuseintheuk/march2023#:~:text=The%20pattern%20of%20daily%20time,and%2018%20minutes%2C%20respectively\).](https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/personalandhouseholdfinances/incomeandwealth/bulletins/timeuseintheuk/march2023#:~:text=The%20pattern%20of%20daily%20time,and%2018%20minutes%2C%20respectively).)

UK Labour Market Statistics:   


## ANNEX 3: READABILITY OF COMMUNITY CONSULTATION LEAFLET AND NON-TECHNICAL SUMMARY

### 1. Community Consultation Leaflet: Summary of findings

The consultation leaflet is difficult to read for a number of reasons. Scores on The Gunning Fog Index or the Flesh Kincaid Reading Test are significantly high. Texts for a wide audience generally need a fog index less than 12. Texts requiring near-universal understanding generally need an index less than 8. The lowest score in THE Community Consultation Leaflet is 15.28. The highest (the Introduction) is 17.59.

The text is inaccessible to a wide audience not solely because it contains a high density of polysyllabic words. As the edited sections of the text show (pasted after the table), words of 3+ syllables are often clumped together.

The text is heavy with compound noun phrases which do not have a clear referent (see table). Processes are represented with noun phrases which delete agency of performance and obscures exactly what is being done when, where, and by whom.

There is a heavy use of plurals which obscures precise detail. There are very few finite verbs in the text. Instead, there is a heavy use of modal verbs (incomplete conditional actions), and verbs which are present continuous: i.e. no specific action has been completed or recorded.

Clear time-specific syntax is conspicuous by its absence. Finite verbs are suppressed. This, alongside dense abstract polysyllabic vocabulary and a high degree of complex word formation results in a consultation document that is neither accessible nor proportionate in communicating the scope of the project to the communities that the booklet is designed to address. Interestingly, the Gunning Fog Index score is actually lower in the sections of the PEIR Non-Technical Summary we have scanned.

#### Fog Index Reading Level By Grade

17: College Graduate  
 16: College Senior  
 15 : College Junior  
 14: College Sophomore  
 13: College Freshman  
 -----D A N G E R L I N E-----  
 12: High School Senior  
 11: High School Junior  
 ---Easy Reading Below This Line---  
 10: High School Sophomore  
 09: High School Freshman  
 08: 8th Grade  
 07: 7th Grade  
 06: 6th Grade  
 05: 5th Grade

## Results

Flesh-Kincaid Grade Level: **14.3**

Flesch Reading Ease Score: **26.6**

Reading Level: **College graduate** ( Very difficult to read )

Average Words per Sentence: 19.2

Average Syllables per Word: 1.9

Sentences: 128

Words: 2460

Score	Estimated Reading Grade Level
90 to 100	5th grade
80 to 90	6th grade
70 to 80	7th grade
60 to 70	8th and 9th grade
50 to 60	10th to 12th grade (high school)
30 to 50	College
<b>0 to 30</b>	<b>College graduate</b>

Results for 70+% of the text in the Community Consultation Leaflet on the Flesh-Kincaid Scale (<https://goodcalculators.com/flesch-kincaid-calculator/>)

## TEXT ON PAGES 4-5: THE GUNNING FOG INDEX IS **17.59**

- The number of major punctuation marks, eg [.], was 30
- The number of words was 738
- The number of 3+ syllable words, [highlighted in blue](#), was 150

The need for Botley West We need to take action against climate change[.] We also need to improve the UK's [energy security](#)[.] Botley West can support this by providing [affordable](#), [renewable](#), and [home-grown electricity](#)[.] Phase Two [Community Consultation](#) Leaflet Botley West Solar Farm 2 Met Office, 'Record breaking 2022 [indicative](#) of future UK climate', July 2023 3 IEA, 'Net Zero Roadmap Update', [September 2023](#) 4 Solar [Energy](#) UK, 'Solar farms and food [security](#)[:] the facts', [September 2022](#) 5 UK [Government](#), 'PM [recommits](#) UK to Net Zero by 2050', [September 2023](#) 6 UK [Government](#), 'British [Energy Security Strategy](#)', April 2022 Local climate targets [Oxfordshire](#) has set [ambitious](#) climate targets for the county, which Botley West would [contribute](#) to[.] The [Oxfordshire Energy Strategy](#), signed up to by all councils within [Oxfordshire](#), agreed a target of a 50% [reduction](#) in carbon [emissions](#) by 2030, and 100% net zero carbon [emissions](#) by 2050[.] 9 The need for [home-grown energy infrastructure](#) As gas prices rise and [energy](#) bills increase, the UK is in need of a more [reliable](#) and secure supply of [energy](#)[.] This is [essential](#) in making us more [resilient](#) against [potential](#) blackouts, meet growing [energy](#) demands and improve our [energy security](#)[.] It can be [achieved](#) by increasing our own [generating capacity](#) and number of [generating](#) assets, through [renewable energy](#) projects such as Botley West[.] Building [infrastructure](#) where it is needed most Within [Oxfordshire](#), there is a need to increase [electricity generation](#) to support demand[.] The county is committed to [extensive](#) growth and

intends to lead on [energy innovation](#).<sup>9</sup> These targets lead to a need to increase the [capacity](#) of [electricity generation](#) within [Oxfordshire](#). This includes both the [development](#) of connecting [infrastructure](#), through [substations](#) built by [National Grid](#) and other [electricity suppliers](#), as well as new [generating](#) stations, such as [Botley West](#).<sup>1</sup> [Botley West](#) has secured a [grid connection](#) with [National Grid](#) in close [proximity](#) to the site, allowing for supporting both [Oxfordshire's ambition](#) to increase their solar [generating capacity](#) from 300 MW to 1900 MW by 2030, as well as supplying [electricity](#) to an [area](#) where the demand is growing and where there is [capacity](#) to [accommodate](#) it.<sup>2</sup> Impacts of climate change The effects of climate change can be seen around us, both [nationally](#) and [globally](#).<sup>3</sup> Wildfires have broken out more [frequently](#) across Europe and our own weather has been more [temperamental](#).<sup>4</sup> 2022 was the first year in which a [temperature](#) above 40C was recorded in the UK.<sup>5</sup> To tackle climate change the [International Energy Agency](#) (IEA) has highlighted that [renewable electricity](#), in [particular](#) solar, is key in reducing carbon [emissions](#) and [achieving](#) 2030 targets.<sup>6</sup> Climate change poses one of the most [serious](#) threats to food [production](#) in the UK.<sup>7</sup> The [Department](#) for [Environment](#), Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) has [estimated](#) that climate change could reduce the UK's stock of high-grade [agricultural](#) land by three [quarters](#) by 2050.<sup>8</sup> The need for ground-mounted solar The UK has set [ambitious](#) and [legally](#) binding targets to [eliminate](#) carbon [emissions](#) and [achieve](#) net zero carbon [emissions](#) by 2050.<sup>9</sup> [Large-scale](#) solar [development](#) is [recognised](#) as having an [important](#) role to play in helping [achieve](#) this target.<sup>10</sup> The British [Energy Security Strategy](#), published in April 2022, outlined the aim to increase the UK's solar [capacity](#) fivefold by 2035 – [equivalent](#) to around 70 [gigawatts](#) (GW) total [generation capacity](#).<sup>11</sup> To [achieve](#) this, the UK must install an [average](#) of 4.<sup>12</sup> 15 GW in solar [capacity](#) per year.<sup>13</sup> Whilst rooftop solar is also part of this [solution](#), projects such as [Botley West](#) are [essential](#) to be able to reach these targets, due to its [ability](#) to produce power on a much more [efficient](#) scale.<sup>14</sup> The [affordability](#) of solar Solar is the most [affordable](#) form of [electricity](#) in the UK,<sup>15</sup> which means that it can help to reduce [household energy](#) bills caused by the [continued](#) use of gas.<sup>16</sup> [Botley West](#) could reduce our [reliance](#) on foreign gas imports, providing an [equivalent](#) amount of [electricity](#) for up to 330,000 homes.<sup>17</sup> The [Department](#) of [Energy Security](#) and Net Zero (DESNZ) has [identified](#) solar as being central to the future of [electricity generation](#) in a recent report, with solar [estimated](#) to be roughly 35% cheaper than costs predicted for [combined-cycle](#) gas turbine power plant in 2025.<sup>18</sup> 7 Solar [Energy](#) UK, 'Everything Under the Sun'.<sup>19</sup> The Facts About Solar [Energy](#), March 2022

## TEXT ON PAGES 14-15 THE GUNNING FOG INDEX IS 15.28

- The number of major punctuation marks, eg [.,], was 32
- The number of words was 562
- The number of 3+ syllable words, [highlighted in blue](#), was 116

[Opportunities](#) Beyond Solar [Botley West Solar Farm](#) is committed to [establishing](#) an [environmental](#) and longstanding [legacy](#) across the [area](#).<sup>1</sup> We are committed to working with the [community](#) to inform what a package of [community benefits](#) could look like.<sup>2</sup> We are seeking to take a [considered](#) approach to [delivering community benefits](#) through [Botley West](#).<sup>3</sup> Our proposed approach is built upon three key forms of [potential community benefit](#):<sup>4</sup> 1.<sup>5</sup> [Community funding](#): we are committed to ensuring funding is [available](#) to support local [initiatives](#) for each year that the solar farm is [operational](#).<sup>6</sup> 2.<sup>7</sup> [On-site benefits](#): we are proposing to [deliver benefits](#) to local [communities](#) through the design the project, such as by increasing [connectivity](#) through new footpaths and providing areas for [community food production](#).<sup>8</sup> 3.<sup>9</sup> [Helping to reduce energy bills](#): in [addition](#) to the wider effect that increased solar [capacity](#) may have on UK [electricity](#) prices, we are [actively](#) exploring [potential mechanisms](#) through which the project could [directly](#) supply [electricity locally](#) at a discounted rate.<sup>10</sup> During and since the last phase of [consultation](#), the project team has been in [discussion](#) with a number of local groups to [understand](#) how best the project can [benefit](#) the local [community](#).<sup>11</sup> We have engaged with:<sup>12</sup> We are exploring [various](#) on-site [benefits](#) that [Botley West](#) could [deliver](#) to local [communities](#).<sup>13</sup> As part of our approach to [deliver community benefits](#), we are committed to supporting the local [community](#) by:<sup>14</sup> Phase Two [Community Consultation Leaflet](#) [Botley West Solar Farm](#) [Establishing a Community Benefit Fund](#) - As part of [Botley West's objective](#) to [establish a legacy](#) across the [area](#) through working with the [community](#), we are committed to exploring making a fund [available](#) that will be [similar](#) in size to [Blenheim's bursary](#) fund of £50,000.<sup>15</sup> We are seeking feedback on the [potential](#) projects and [initiatives](#) that this fund could support.<sup>16</sup> Local [Agricultural Groups](#) – [allocating](#) areas of the site for [community](#) arable farming and [community allotments](#).<sup>17</sup> [Blenheim Estate](#) – becoming the [environmental](#) steward for the site to maintain the [legacy](#) of the [area](#) and ensure that [environmental benefits](#) are [delivered](#).<sup>18</sup> The Estate has a [wellestablished](#) track record of [delivering](#) green projects and their own Green Report reflects the same visions as the project.<sup>19</sup> The findings from the Estate's [monitoring](#) data will ensure the [accountability](#) of any [environmental commitments](#).<sup>20</sup> Local [Farmers](#) – [understanding](#) the [opportunities](#) for sheep to graze the land.<sup>21</sup> [Cherwell Collective](#) – an [organisation](#) looking to [empower](#) those who may struggle to live [sustainably](#) by providing [locally](#) grown food to [communities](#).<sup>22</sup> [Cutteslowe Community Larder](#) – seeking to provide food to the [community](#) at low or no cost to combat food [poverty](#) and reduce food

waste[.] Biodiversity Net Gain - aiming to create a [standard-setting environmental legacy](#) with a [minimum biodiversity](#) net gain of 70%[.] More details about our [biodiversity](#) plans can be found on page 17[.] Increasing [Recreational Use](#) – Botley West is exploring [improvements](#) to [connectivity](#) across the site through working with Blenheim and new proposed footpaths and cycle tracks[.] More details about our [recreational](#) plans can be found on page 18[.] Exploring [Community Energy Opportunities](#) - The team also [appreciate](#) that [energy](#) bills are becoming a real burden for many people[.] Botley West is exploring the creation of a retail [energy company](#) to sell part of the [energy generated](#) by Botley West to the local [community](#) at a discounted rate[.] 14 | [Opportunities](#) Beyond Solar [Opportunities](#) Beyond Solar |

## TEXT ON PAGES 16-17: THE GUNNING FOG INDEX IS 15.48

- The number of major punctuation marks, eg [.] , was 36
- The number of words was 596
- The number of 3+ syllable words, [highlighted in blue](#), was 132

[Environmental Impact Assessment](#) (EIA) As part of our [Development Consent Order \(DCO\) application](#), we are [undertaking](#) an [Environmental Impact Assessment](#) (EIA) to inform our [proposal](#) and the design[.] This is a process that involves [various](#) studies being [undertaken](#) and [mitigation](#) measures proposed to reduce or remove any [significant environmental](#) impacts that are [identified](#)[.] The EIA process is helped by feedback received through [consultation](#)[.] The process is split into three main areas[.] the EIA scoping report, the [Preliminary Environmental Impact Report \(PEIR\)](#) and the [Environmental Statement \(ES\)](#)[.] We submitted our EIA Scoping Report to the Planning [Inspectorate](#) (PINS) on 15th June 2023[.] PINS consulted with [statutory consultees](#) and published their Scoping [Opinion](#) on 24th July 2023, which will guide our EIA work[.] We are now consulting on a [Preliminary Environmental Information Report \(PEIR\)](#) which provides the [initial](#) findings of these [assessments](#) to help [consultees develop](#) an informed view of the [potential environmental](#) impacts of Botley West and our proposed approach to assessing and [mitigating](#) them[.] This has built upon the [initial](#) EIA scoping report, the Planning [Inspectorate](#) (PINS) Scoping [Opinion](#) and [environmental assessments](#), in [addition](#) to the [consultation](#) feedback[.] 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[.] Phase Two [Community Consultation](#) Leaflet Botley West Solar Farm 16 |

[Environmental Impact Assessment](#) [Environmental Impact Assessment](#) | 17 Landscape and [Visual](#) As part of the ongoing EIA process, we have been assessing the [potential visual](#) impact of the site upon the local [area](#)[.] Therefore, we have [developed](#) a Landscape [Masterplan](#) which includes the landscape and [ecological strategy](#) for [implementation](#), longterm [maintenance](#), and [management](#) of the Project site[.] We have been exploring the [potential](#) of the following [mitigations](#)[.] • Creation of woodland belts[.] • Planting of lengths of new [hedgerows](#) along lengths of PRoWs and [reinforcement](#) of existing field [boundary hedgerows](#)[.] • Meadow grassland to [perimeter](#) of solar array areas and areas of [enhancement](#)[.] • Planting of [individual](#) trees where [appropriate](#)[.] We've taken [several](#) steps to [mitigate visual](#) impacts[.] This includes expanding the [minimum](#) buffer zone to 25 metres between the solar arrays and any building and increasing buffer zones near [residential](#) areas[.] An [area](#) of solar [development](#) has been removed to enhance [safety](#) for Oxford Airport[.] Furthermore, there will be no [permanent operation](#) of [security](#) lighting, instead there will be infrared sensors, which provide no visible light, and [manually operated](#) lighting will only be in the [vicinity](#) of [transformers](#)[.] [Visualisations](#) of how Botley West could look can be found on the project website ([www\[.\] botleywest\[.\] co\[.\] uk](#)) [.]

Local [Ecology](#) and [Biodiversity](#) In assessing the local [ecology](#) and [biodiversity](#) of the project site we have been [undertaking site-specific](#) surveys, [investigated habitats](#), and [studied](#) the [various](#) species in the [area](#)[.] There are [mitigation](#) measures that the project [incorporates](#) to ensure the effects on [ecology](#) is [minimised](#)[.] These include[.] • [Establishing](#) a [minimum](#) 5m buffer zone for [hedgerows](#), trees, ponds and woodland, an 8m buffer for [watercourses](#) and 15m for [ancient](#) woodland • No [removal](#) of [hedgerows](#), woodland, [waterbodies](#), or [watercourses](#)[.] • [Establishing](#) new skylark plots between the solar arrays[.] • Creating a new [landscape-scale corridor](#) along the River [Evenlode](#)[.] To [deliver](#) this, PVDP is working with Blenheim Estate to ensure there is long term [environmental stewardship](#) in place, with the [primary](#) goal of supporting the project to [achieve](#) a [substantial biodiversity](#) net gain within the [area](#), of at least 70%[.] This could include[.] • [Establishing](#) bee hives on the site[.] • Providing log piles and other [refugia](#)[.] • Putting bird and bat boxes on trees[.]

## TEXT: PAGES 18-19: THE GUNNING FOG INDEX IS 15.45

- The number of major punctuation marks, eg [.] , was 34
- The number of words was 605

- The number of 3+ syllable words, highlighted in blue, was 126

Land Use and Agriculture In assessing land use and agriculture, we have been conducting a number of Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) surveys[.] From our initial assessments, approximately 62% of the surveyed land falls under the category of lower-quality Subgrade 3b agricultural land, while 38% consists of Best and Most Versatile (BMV) agricultural land (ALC Grades 1-3a), with the majority of that land classed as 3a, which represents pockets of land across the site[.] The ALC Survey Map can be found in Figure 17[.] 3 of the PEIR[.] Botley West intends to implement a comprehensive Outline Soil Management Plan[.] At the end of Botley West's operational life, a comprehensive decommissioning plan, commencing two years before the lease concludes, will be executed[.] Our commitment is to remove all infrastructure except public highway cables, keeping the National Grid substation[.] The land will return to its original use, and not become brownfield land, with a dedicated reserve to cover decommissioning costs[.] We will be working with landowners and relevant stakeholders to explore how particular features of our proposals – such as planting, landscaping, and permissive access – could provide continued benefits by remaining in place beyond the life of the solar farm[.]

Recreation and Amenity In accessing the recreation and amenity of the site, the Botley West team have been exploring ways to increase the connectivity of the site through proposing new footpaths and cycle tracks[.] As a part of this, we will establish a new footpath to connect Cassington and Church Hanborough[.] Additionally, we are enhancing the existing footpath connecting Bladon to Campsfield, located near the airport north of Begbroke, to transform it into a dedicated cycle route[.] Furthermore, we are exploring more opportunities where we can facilitate new routes and upgrade current ones[.] Regarding the current Public Rights of Way, our primary aim is to preserve them without disruption[.] While temporary diversions may be necessary for safety during construction, our objective is to minimise inconvenience to users[.] Throughout operation, all existing routes will remain unaltered[.]

Hydrology and Flood Risk Solar farms provide the opportunity to reduce the flood risk of an area[.] Botley West is actively exploring ways to mitigate the potential impacts of the project on hydrology and flood risk during construction and operation[.] This includes conducting hydrogeological risk assessments for sensitive areas[.] The mitigation measures we have already put in place include[.] • Incorporating a drainage strategy in various project components to mitigate surface water runoff and flood risk[.] • Establishing temporary haul roads[.] • Planting seeded vegetation between solar PV modules to manage surface water and erosion[.] • Implementing shallow channels with seeded vegetation along the perimeter to capture excess water after heavy rainfall[.] • Employing trenchless methods for crossing watercourses and flood defences[.] • Maintaining a 10m buffer zone between watercourses and project development[.] In addition to these mitigation measures, we are developing Pollution Prevention Plans, an Infrastructure Drainage Strategy and a Code of Construction Practice which follow environmental guidelines[.]

Traffic, Access, and Construction Botley West is committed to reducing traffic and construction impacts[.] We've actively worked with Oxfordshire County Council Highways to address traffic concerns[.] To minimise disruptions, we'll include a detailed Construction Traffic Management Plan (CTMP) in our Development Consent Order application[.] This CTMP will be produced collaboratively with Highway Authorities and set out routing and traffic controls[.] Additionally, we'll create a travel plan for our construction staff to minimise local road traffic[.] The materials used for the construction and the lifetime of the project will be as recyclable as practically possible[.] Up to 99% of materials in a solar panel are recyclable, and there are well-established industrial processes to do this[.]

## 2. Analysis table for Community Consultation Leaflet

ANALYSIS TABLE FOR LANGUAGE USED IN COMMUNITY CONSULTATION BOOKLET

Page	Statement	Modal tense (actions which may, or may not happen)	Non-finite tense (action not completed, or guaranteed)	Process and agency unclear	Vocabulary without a clear referent
2	could deliver 840 MW of clean...affordable power	could			Affordable (see also pp.4) (no calibration of scale of affordability – or to whom)
3	proposed environmental enhancement measures		Proposed Has been proposed	Proposed environmental enhancement measures (who is going to do what and where?)	Enhanced (from what to what? – deletion of framework to make statement accountable)
10	proposed mitigation measures		Our proposed approach New proposed footpaths Proposed approach		
16	proposed a new cycle route				
3	Potential impacts on the environment and local communities	Potential Potential Community benefit Potential environmental impacts		<b>proposed</b> mitigation measures (14, 16, 17 x3, 20) mitigation and enhancement areas (11) (enhancement of what?) <b>mitigation</b> OED mitigation (n) 2a) extension or palliation of an offence, fault, etc., abatement or minimization of the loss or damage resulting from a wrongful act. <b>in mitigation (Law):</b> by way of extenuation or palliation (esp. of an offence) in order to obtain a favourable modification [of judgment, a penalty, damages], (the use of the word <b>mitigation throughout suggests that some harm or damage will result from the project</b> )  (no agency and scale to calibrate what is being mitigated. Measure(s) plural hides what exactly is to be done) <b>See also pp.6,16 x2 and 17</b>	New recreational connectivity (code for extending a footpath between Cassington and Church Hanborough along a route lined with solar panel fencing. What is being connected?)  Boosting connectivity (10) Between what and/or whom? Increasing connectivity (14)
4	Climate change could reduce the UK's stock of high-grade agricultural land	could			Home-grown electricity (re-wording of UK energy supply that implies that solar panels are a nutrient grown in people's back gardens)
5	Its ability to produce power on a more efficient scale				
5	Has secured			When and who are the parties?	
5,10	In close proximity to the site capacity			Where exactly?	
5	Agreed local viewpoints			Of what?	
6	The project may look	may		Agreed by whom?	
6	Has an agreement			(with whom and when)	Mitigation measures (see comment for p.3)

Page	Statement	Modal tense (actions which may, or may not happen)	Non-finite tense (action not completed, or guaranteed)	Process and agency unclear	Vocabulary without a clear referent
7	Enough electricity for the equivalent of 330,000 homes				Omits quantity – actually only for 3 hours per day
7	Affordable power				Unspecified claim – affordable (how), and to whom?
7, 17 x3, 20	Increased minimum buffer zone distances				Plural and nominalisation masks the precise distance
7	Significant increases to the buffer zones See also p.16 significant environmental impacts				Plurals hide quantity of increase and no calibration of significant.
7			seeks to		
7	Increase recreational use and access across the site				How is increase measured? What is the baseline? What kind of recreational use?
7	New footpaths and cycle paths				Plurals hide quantity and mask those already in existence. See comments on maps pp.8-12
7 17	Minimum biodiversity net gain of at least 70% See also p.17				What is the baseline and how has this figure been calculated. There is a reference to p.16 of the booklet but p.16 does not unpack the figures
7	Removed solar development directly south				Development not present in first booklet
7 9			is exploring (?) we are exploring (9) (no firm commitment)		Dynamic (active)? forceful? effective? Word sounds punchy but lacks any precise referent) and wide-ranging community benefits package. (ref to p.15 but all details prefaced by phrase 'is exploring'. No guarantees
8	Mitigate against visual impacts				See comment p.3. What are visual impacts?
9	All public rights of way... will remain open following the construction of Botley West		(sequence of tenses is unclear, and construction doesn't have time specificity. Text obscures the fact the theses routes will be closed for unspecified periods of time while BW is under construction)		
9	Areas for community food growing				What does this mean – and which areas? IS this something the 'community' has asked for?
9	skylarks				Why these birds?

Page	Statement	Modal issue (actions which may or may not happen)	Non-finite tense (action not completed, or guaranteed)	Process and agency unclear	Vocabulary without a clear referent
10	Buffer zones				<b>OED</b> <i>buffer</i> 2. <i>figurative</i> ; spec. used attributively to designate a state, zone, etc., lying between two others, usually owing allegiance to neither, and serving as a means of preventing hostilities between them.
10 16	Potential and visual impacts	Potential Potential of the following mitigations			Impacts (on what- and what are these impacts?)
10			We are offering to assist (No specific guarantee or timescale)	We are offering to assist (when – and how)	
10	Salt Cross... and Hamborough railway station				So far as I can see from the map the 'new cycle path' does not extend to the railway station
11	Upgrade a footpath between Blason and Bigoke ... New circular walk near Cassington		We are proposing x2  With new planting proposed underneath		
12	Approximately 30% of the site				How much of 30% is approximately?
12	It is intended to cross existing features		We are considering It is intended		A number of cabling options (how many – and what are the options) Features such as the river Presumably River Thames? And what are the other features?
12	National Grid is likely to locate their substation visualisations		is likely to (no firm commitment)		Within or directly next to (which is it? – and what does directly next to mean?)
13, 14, 17		Could look (no guarantee that this is how they will look			Photographs? Drawings – who has created these and from whose perspective? How vivid are they?
14			We are seeking to talk	Local initiatives (who has initiated them?) Committed to ensuring funding is available (from where and how much?)	

Page	Statement	Modal tense (actions which may, or may not happen)	Non-finite tense (action not completed, or guaranteed)	Process and agency unclear	Vocabulary without a clear referent
14	In addition to the wider effect that increased solar capacity may have on UK electricity prices ....	May have	We are actively exploring (i.e. not inactive)! – and no firm commitment to this		<p>Helping to reduce energy bills</p> <p>UK electricity prices</p> <p><b>This is extremely misleading and fails to account for the market-driven mechanisms for establishing electricity prices</b></p> <p>The marginal producer of electricity in the UK is most often gas because it is one of the most expensive sources, so is chosen last in the 'merit order' on the spot market. But it serves a vital role because gas-fired power stations can be easily switched on and off at short notice to make sure that supply balances to meet demand. Renewable energy sources, on the other hand, are unpredictable due to changes in weather, while nuclear energy provides a fairly constant source of power that is difficult to turn on and off.</p> <p>This means that, although generation methods that have low marginal cost (including renewables and nuclear) produce the majority of UK electricity, the price that is paid for it in both wholesale and retail markets is set much higher, at the marginal cost of generating electricity with gas</p> <p><a href="https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/article/explainer/electricity-market#:~:text=Electricity%20suppliers%20buy%20the%20electricity-ahead%20market">https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/article/explainer/electricity-market#:~:text=Electricity%20suppliers%20buy%20the%20electricity-ahead%20market</a></p>
14	Seeking to provide food to the community at low or no cost to combat food poverty and reduce food waste	May struggle to live sustainably	Allocating areas (not delivered) Looking to empower (not achieved) Seeking to provide food (not done)	We have engaged with (doesn't guarantee agreement of specific proposals) Understanding the opportunities (doesn't commit to precise action) Seeking to provide food to the community at low or no cost to combat food poverty and reduce food waste (how?)	
15	Green projects		We are exploring Will ensure the accountability Aiming to create	Findings...will ensure the accountability (findings is vague, and findings have no agency in ensuring accountability. Accountability to whom?)	Various onsite benefits Environmental benefits <b>Reflects the same visions (in reverse – what visions – green is a blanket term</b>
15		Fund could support	Exploring the creation of a retail	That will be similar in size to £50,000 (imprecise) Studies being undertaken That are identified (by whom?)	To sell part of the energy generated by Botley West (how large or small a part)
16	That are identified				
17	Bee hives, log piles and other refugia bird and bat boxes	Could include			<i>Refugia is undefined. There are only 2 attested examples in OED – hence not very accessible vocabulary to use – and misleading. I don't think log piles can be classed as refugia. Where do the logs come from?: An isolated area forming a natural refuge (refuge n. srf) for plants and animals. In later use also: a managed, artificial, or legally protected habitat of this type</i>

Page	Statement	Modal tense (actions which may, or may not happen)	Non-finite tense (action not completed, or guaranteed)	Process and agency unclear	Vocabulary without a clear referent
17	No removal of ..... waterbodies				Waterbodies is a coinage. It ought to be water bodies. The coinage occludes exactly what kind of topographical water is included in this designation.  An area or mass of water, esp. as forming a topographical feature (lake, river, sea, etc.); a body of water (see <a href="#">body n. V.18a</a> ). Aren't wetlands water bodies? If so, how does this statement account for drilling cables in Swinford Meadows? <a href="#">wetland. n.</a> An area of land that is usually saturated with water, often a marsh or swamp
17	No permanent operation of security lighting				Is this only in the vicinity of Oxford airport or does this apply to the whole site?
17	Infra-red sensors, which provide no visible light				To humans, perhaps, but what about bats – or even some species of birds?
18	Outline Soil Management plan		Intends to implement		
18	The land will return to its original use				How is this possible for land classed as 3a)
18	At the end of BW's operational life.... A comprehensive decommissioning plan		Will be executed		Why can there be no plan at the start at the operational life of the site? Two years before the end of the lease keeps everyone in the dark
18	Dedicated reserve				dedicated to what? And what will it reserve?
18	To its original use		Land will return		How is this possible with grade 3a land.
18			Not become	Not become brownfield Negative results in non-specification of what it will become	Why not say outright the land will be classed as greenfield?
18	New routes and upgrade current ones		We are developing		Referent unclear
18	Temporary diversions..... safety	May be necessary			Diversions where? And for how long? Safety of whom?
18	Minimise inconvenience to users		Our objective is to Not identical to 'we will not'		What kind of inconvenience and who are the users? And what are they using?
19	Pollution Prevention Plans Infrastructure Drainage Strategy Code of Construction Practice		We are developing		Surely a drainage strategy needs implemented before consultation especially given flooding in area. Merton has recently been denied permission to build 500 homes in Yarrton because of the village's history of flash flooding
19	Drainage strategy				In various project components Which ones? And what are the components

Page	Statement	Modal tense (actions which may, or may not happen)	Non-finite tense (action not completed, or guaranteed)	Process and agency unclear	Vocabulary without a clear referent
19			We have already put in pace	Incorporating, Establishing, Planting, Implementing, Employing, Maintaining <i>Present participles are incompatible with past tense of 'already put in place' – especially seeded vegetation</i>	
19	Seeded vegetation				What on earth is this?
19	Construction Traffic Management Plan		We'll include		
19	Up to 90% of materials in a solar panel are recyclable				<b>A solar panel?</b> What about the particular materials of the solar panels they intend to use. What happens to the 'nearly' 10% of the other materials? What about the other materials used in construction such as cables, concrete etc?
19	Well-established industrial processed			<i>Established by whom and what are the processes? Where will they be carried out?</i>	
19	CTMP		Will be produced collaboratively		
19	Travel plan for construction staff		We'll create		
20	Heritage Impact Assessment			Have also been commenced <i>When, and by whom?</i>	
20	to achieve this				What is antecedent of this?
20	May employ a no-dig approach	may			
20	Could utilise 'concrete shoes'	could			How is this calibrated, and by whom?
20	Significant .... Less significant				What kinds of effect?
20	Effects on heritage assets			Are considered reversible <i>By whom? And what exactly does reversible mean</i>	
20	Are deemed insignificant			<i>How is significance measured? And by whom?</i>	
20	Environmental mitigation				What does this mean?

### 3. Results for a sample of text from two sections of the Non-Technical Summary on the Flesh-Kincaid Calculator

**Results**

Flesh-Kincaid Grade Level: **12.1**

Flesch Reading Ease Score: **32.3**

Reading Level: **College** ( Difficult to read )

Average Words per Sentence: 13.6

Average Syllables per Word: 1.9

Sentences: 71

Words: 967

Score	Estimated Reading Grade Level
90 to 100	5th grade
80 to 90	6th grade
70 to 80	7th grade
60 to 70	8th and 9th grade
50 to 60	10th to 12th grade (high school)
<b>30 to 50</b>	<b>College</b>
0 to 30	College graduate

#### Fog Index Reading Level By Grade

17: College Graduate  
 16: College Senior  
 15 : College Junior  
 14: College Sophomore  
 13: College Freshman  
 -----D A N G E R L I N E-----  
 12: High School Senior  
 11: High School Junior  
 ---Easy Reading Below This Line---  
 10: High School Sophomore  
 09: High School Freshman  
 08: 8th Grade  
 07: 7th Grade  
 06: 6th Grade  
 05: 5th Grade

#### TEXT ON PAGES 1-2 : THE GUNNING FOG INDEX IS **13.61**

- The number of major punctuation marks, eg [.,], was 44
- The number of words was 535
- The number of 3+ syllable words, highlighted in blue, was 117

1 Introduction 1[.] 1 Purpose of this Non-Technical Summary 1[.] 1[.] 1 This Non-Technical Summary provides an overview of the Preliminary Environmental Information Report (PEIR) prepared for the Botley West Solar Farm[.] The PEIR has been prepared by RPS for Photovoltaic Development Partners GmbH (PVDP) on behalf of the Applicant, SolarFive Ltd[.] (SolarFive)[.] SolarFive is a licence holder under the Electricity Act 1989 and also a registered company in England and Wales (company no[.] 12602740)[.] 1[.] 1[.] 2 This Non-Technical Summary forms part of the documents submitted by the Applicant in support of the application for development consent for the Botley West Solar Farm (hereafter referred to as 'the Project') and has been written in a non-technical language and summarises the information contained within the PEIR[.] 1[.] 1[.] 3 The purpose of PEIR is to present the preliminary findings of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) being undertaken for the Project, for the purposes of statutory consultation in accordance with Sections 42 and 47 of the Planning Act 2008 (PA 08)[.] PA 08 was introduced to provide a new development consent regime for 'Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects' (NSIP)[.] 1[.] 1[.] 4 The Project is classed as a NSIP for the purposes of PA 08 and requires an application for a Development Consent Order (DCO)[.] The Applicant therefore intends to submit an application for development consent to the Secretary of State via the Planning Inspectorate (PINS), as required under PA 08[.] 1[.] 1[.] 5 The PEIR has been published as part of the consultation process, which also includes a series of community consultation events in accordance with the process set out in the Statement of Community Consultation (SoCC)[.] 1[.] 1[.] 6 For access to the full PEIR, please refer to the National Infrastructure Planning Website[.] Botley West Solar Farm[.] Details of how to view the full PEIR and its volumes, or to obtain further copies of this NTS, are provided at the end of this document[.] 1[.] 2

Overview of the Project 1[.] 2[.] 1 The UK Government has legislated to commit the country to achieving net zero carbon emissions by 2050, and to de-carbonising electricity by 2035[.] The Government's 'British Energy Security Strategy' (April 2022) also expects a five-fold increase in solar power generation, to 70GW, by 2035[.] These commitments mean that the UK urgently needs more renewable forms of electricity to be produced[.] The Project's generation output will be vitally important if the Government's commitments are to succeed, significantly helping to deliver the transition to net zero[.] 1[.] 2[.] 2 The Project is formed of three separate but related solar farm areas with interconnecting cables, which together would generate renewable power through photovoltaic (PV) panels[.] The Project aims to deliver approximately 840MWe of power to the National Electricity Transmission System (NETS), Botley West Solar Farm Preliminary Environmental Information Report [.] Non-Technical Summary [.] November 2023 Page 2 providing secure and clean energy of an equivalent level to meet the needs of approximately 330,000 homes[.] 1[.] 2[.] 3 The Project's solar arrays (comprising all the mounting structures, frames and foundations) will be connected by underground electrical cables within each section of the site, and via underground electric cable to the substation at the grid connection point[.] The interconnecting cable route will largely follow the public highway, but some parts will cross land controlled by the Applicant[.]

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### TEXT ON PAGE 17 :THE GUNNING FOG INDEX IS 14.31

- The number of major punctuation marks, eg [.] , was 28
- The number of words was 400
- The number of 3+ syllable words, highlighted in blue, was 86

Operational Development 5[.] 5[.] 1 During the operational phase, activity on the Site will be minimal and will be restricted principally to landscape and ecology management, equipment/infrastructure maintenance and servicing including cleaning and replacement of any components that fail, and monitoring to ensure the continued effective operation of the development[.] Operational and maintenance staff may require access to the Site during daylight hours, seven days a week[.] 5[.] 5[.] 2 The undeveloped areas of the site will be designed and managed to enhance the landscape and ecological value of the area[.] The Applicant and the landowners are keen to secure these and any other benefits that the local community and other stakeholders may wish to promote[.] Discussions are advanced in respect of allowing land to be given over to community groups for small scale food production, and for some parts of the site to be given over to sheep farming[.] Further details in respect to these elements will continue to be developed and refined, including the relevant management plans for these and other areas of the site[.] The intention is to report this information within the Environmental Statement that will accompany the Applicants' DCO submission[.] 5[.] 5[.] 2[.] 1 For clarity, the Project does not incorporate any battery storage[.] Energy generated by the Project will be stored, as required, by Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS) that are connected to the Grid elsewhere, including the EDF 50MW BESS located at Cowley substation[.] 5[.] 6[.] 1 The consent being sought by the Project is a temporary one[.] The Project will have a 35 year lease with the option to extend to 42 years[.] Within this timeframe the Project will be constructed, become operational and be decommissioned[.] Decommissioning is anticipated to start 2 years before the end of the lease and is expected to be completed in that time[.] All infrastructure associated with the development is anticipated to be removed, and exception to this is assumed to be all cables in the public highway (as it could either remain in situ or removed as part of decommissioning)[.] The National Grid substation will however remain and the remaining land will revert back to its previous use[.] 5[.] 6[.] 2 A decommissioning and enhancement plan, to include timescales and transportation methods, ecological and landscape enhancements and other environmental improvements, will be developed in consultation the local planning authority, local community and key stakeholders and form an integral part of the DCO application.