

Subject: NSIP application South-East Region Botley West Solar Farm
Attachments: BWSFeffectsonHouseValues.pdf

From: David Rogers <[REDACTED]>
Sent: 17 July 2023 23:43
To: NI Enquiries <NIEnquiries@planninginspectorate.gov.uk>
Subject: NSIP application South-East Region Botley West Solar Farm

The Planning Inspectorate

Temple Quay House
Temple Quay
Bristol
BS1 6PN

Dear Sirs,

Botley West Solar Farm

I refer to the Botley West Solar Farm (BWSF) proposal from PhotoVolt Development Partners (PVDP) on behalf of SolarFive Ltd (PINS NSIPs Projects, South-East Region).

SolarFive submitted its Scoping Report for BWSF to the Secretary of State on the 15th June, and various local District Councils have, I believe, submitted responses to you, or are in the process of doing so.

Botley West Solar Farm with a nameplate capacity of 1,350MWp would be by far and away the largest solar farm in Europe and the seventh largest in the world. It is one of an increasing number of large utility solar farms being developed at present in the UK and requiring submission as an NSIP.

In its Scoping Report, PVDP/SolarFive Ltd have scoped out both the Recreational and Visual Amenity impacts of BWSF (Table 7.3, p. 49) and any impacts of BWSF on house values (Table 7.18, p. 100).

I understand that submissions you may receive from CPRE and West Oxfordshire District Council have requested that Recreational and Visual Amenity impacts should be scoped in, but neither has made any comment about house values. In the case of the District Council, I imagine this is because any impact of a development on the value of a neighbouring property is judged not a material consideration under the Planning Act 2008.

I ask you to consider that the situation is very different for utility scale solar farms of the size of BWSF. There are at least 11,000 properties within 1.5kms of the boundary of BWSF (the original footprint of BWSF, slightly extended in the Scoping Report) and the values of many of these will be affected to a greater or lesser extent. There is no other solar installation on the planet with c. 11,000 properties within 1.5kms of it. Quite simply, BWSF is unique, and it presents unique planning challenges.

Please find attached a review I conducted recently of many published examples of the impacts of solar farms on local house values. Apart from some badly analysed American studies showing a slight increase in house values, the majority of studies show a decrease in house values near to solar installations (the global examples are reviewed in Annex B of the attached). These effects are greater the larger the solar installation and the nearer is the property to the edge of the installation.

In the document, I take the analysis of Dutch data by Droes and Koster as the starting point for estimating the impact of BWSF on house values in Oxfordshire, concluding that the cumulative reduction in the value of all the affected houses is of the order of at least £150 million. The Dutch study was chosen because it provided statistically robust results. The Netherlands also happens to have more or less exactly the same population density as does England, although the Dutch seem to site their largest solar installations away from population centres (thus the numbers of houses near their largest solar farms are about one thirtieth of the number around BWSF).

Please note that the Dutch study results are by no means the extremes of those reviewed. There are other studies with greater impacts on house values.

All of the studies in the document, including the Dutch one, refer to solar farms which are very much smaller than BWSF. Given the almost universal consensus that the reductions in house values are greater the larger the solar installation, I think that PVDP/SolarFive should not be allowed to scope out the possible impact of BWSF on house values. There is likely to be a significant impact on house values if BWSF is constructed - an externality that the developers simply ignore.

Given the scale of BWSF I ask you to consider this as an example of planning blight. The Highways England document covering this at:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/864535/BED19_0151_Your_property_and_blight_2020.pdf

states the following:

"Blight is when the value of a property is substantially reduced because of a proposal to carry out public works, such as a new road or improvements to an existing road and the owners are unable to sell it at unaffected market value; this is the amount the property would be worth if the scheme did not exist, not the blighted (reduced) value".

"Properties that are on the line of the proposed route and where land is required for the scheme can be directly affected by blight; this is known as statutory blight. Blight can also affect properties that are not directly on the line of the route and where no land is required for the scheme; these properties are known as off-line. Although we are not obliged to buy off-line properties, Parliament has recognised that in certain circumstances home owners might have an urgent need to move but cannot sell their property except at a significantly reduced price as a result of the scheme."

The only difference is that BWSF is not a public works, but it is being presented as a public good.

Finally, given the uniqueness of BWSF, I would also ask you to consider the test of Wednesbury unreasonableness in this case. The decision to omit the obvious impact of a large scale solar utility installation on house values is so unreasonable that no reasonable person acting reasonably could have made it.

I therefore ask you to instruct the proposers to scope in the impact of BWSF on house values.

Yours sincerely,

David Rogers

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