

Appendix

Minute No. P13, Climate Biodiversity & Planning held on 9 January 2023

Response items submitted to Botley West Solar Farm Consultation Jan/Feb 2024 by Witney Town Council.

2) As a principle do you agree there is a need to install solar infrastructure?

I agree there is a need to install solar infrastructure.

3) Based on our updated Stage Two proposals and the information presented in our Preliminary Environmental Information Report (PEIR), what are your views on Botley West Solar Farm?

I support the proposals

4) Which aspects of the project are most important to you?

Project specific feedback

Since Phase One we have updated our proposals, the design, and the layout of site. This is based on the feedback we received and ongoing technical assessments. In the following table, please tick the topic areas you consider to be the most important issues that you would like us to consider.

- 1. Climate change and energy need**
- 2. Socioeconomics**
- 3. Local Ecology**

5) Please provide comments on our updated proposals for Botley West Solar Farm.

You may choose to expand upon your answers to the above question (your overall view of Botley West Solar Farm) and Question 4 (the topic areas you think are most important for our team to consider). In your response you may choose to refer to address specific chapters or environmental topics of interest from the PEIR.

Witney Town Council welcome this initiative. Since this scheme will primarily be supplying energy to the national grid, it might not be obvious as to how this scheme benefits the residents of Witney, however, weather phenomena like those seen recently, have caused major concern locally; residents in Witney have been rightfully concerned about rising river levels and the local response has included installation of emergency floodgates and sandbags, many of these resources have been made available since the serious flood incident in December 2020. These weather events are only going to increase, and whilst houses continue to be built and the town continues to grow, more people are going to move to Witney and more homes will be at risk of flooding. One of the few things that can be done directly and at this level is to mitigate the recurrence and regularity of extreme weather is to take steps to fight climate change, and one of those steps is a shift to renewable energy.

The focus needs to turn to renewable energy, locally, nationally and internationally. Otherwise flooding events will become annual events. We need to start taking our obligations and responsibilities seriously.

Whilst this scheme might not appear ideal to some, we cannot continue to push decisions into the future or look to move the problem elsewhere - time is running out. There may be locations within Oxfordshire for smaller schemes, and those conversations should continue, and challenges be explored with imagination and creativity for additional schemes. Climate change is not going to get any better, but we can stop it getting worse, one of the ways that we do that is in embracing solar technology. Witney Town Council support this scheme, Witney is not immune to the effects of climate change and the stakes are too high to be ignored. Greening our energy mix is beneficial to everyone.

Priority 1:

Climate change and energy need

For example, the carbon footprint of the project and the need for large-scale solar projects.

This proposal is of national importance, Witney Town Council recognise the significance of energy generation without greenhouse gas emissions - energy that does not have associated carbon dioxide. Climate change and global warming is one of its biggest concerns. While other renewables are coming forward, we are not yet in a position where other options are completely viable. This proposal is something that today we can choose to make a difference. Witney Town Council are in favour of supporting community tariffs or community ownership and would urge the developer to fully explore these options - this could provide a real financial benefit to many residents, especially those particularly affected by the development. There is precedent for this type of scheme, as shown with offshore wind projects, especially around the Thames estuary.

This proposal is a fully formed and funded project to make a massive dent in green energy, for potentially more households than there are in Oxfordshire.

Priority 2:

Socioeconomics

For example, employment, supply chain, and education opportunities.

The proposal should offer community tariffs and community ownership schemes. The last time the developer was approached about community ownership they said that a third-party company would be needed to facilitate such a scheme. This latest proposal does not appear to have produced that as an offer. Witney Town Council would like to see a greater commitment towards community benefit by way of community tariffs and community ownership, and more imaginative mitigations than those outlined in the proposals.

Priority 3:

Local ecology

For example, please suggest opportunities to improve ecology and biodiversity across the site, and / or provide us with details of existing flora and fauna you would like us to consider.

Witney Town Council acknowledge the estimated 70% gain in biodiversity through mitigation. However, members express concerns about the longer-term future of the development sites. Assurances and guarantees are sought that when the scheme has reached the end of its lifecycle, the sites and development areas are protected from automatically being deemed brownfield sites.

The developer has a duty to return the land to greenfield sites, or that the sites continue to provide renewable energy.

6) Do you have any comments on the information presented in our PEIR?

As part of our Phase Two Statutory Consultation, we have produced our Preliminary Environmental Impact Report (PEIR), alongside a Non-Technical Summary (NTS) of the information in the PEIR in less technical language. This document comprises the preliminary results of our Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) process, containing the findings of the environmental studies and surveys that we have undertaken to date. This work is across a range of environmental topic areas, and also sets out any suitable mitigation measures identified for our proposals. We used this environmental work, in addition to Phase One feedback, to inform and shape our updated proposals for Botley West Solar Farm.

In your response you may choose to refer to address specific chapters or environmental topics of interest from the PEIR.

The documents suggest that in areas where the panels are too low for grazing, undergrowth can be cut and collected for composting – there is no detail as to how or where this will be facilitated. A commitment is required to demonstrate how this will work and who is responsible for these ongoing works in the long term.

The documents suggest that the equipment will be installed using aluminium piles and galvanised steel frames – when two dissimilar metals are abutted they are likely to corrode – what measures are planned to stop corrosion?

7) Do you have any specific comments on our cable routes for the project?

Since Phase One we have explored potential cable route corridors between the three sites. This includes the two options east of Eynsham at the point where it crosses the Thames near the Swinford Toll Bridge, as well as the cable route options east of Woodstock. We have now presented you with the various cable route options between the sites.

No comment

8) Please provide any preferences for where you would like areas for community food growing to be placed.

Botley West Solar Farm is proposing areas for the community to grow food on site. We are seeking feedback on where members of the community would prefer these areas to be. This could include areas being located near to a particular residential area, or further into the site area.

These projects and their associated benefits should be maximised for those people living in the closest proximity to the sites. Witney Town Council encourage consideration of community gardening and food-growing projects, not just allotments.

9) Please provide any feedback on our approach to delivering opportunities beyond solar.

Botley West is committed to establishing an environmental and longstanding legacy across the area. We are committed to working with the community to inform what a package of community benefits could look like.

We are seeking to take a considered approach built on three key forms of community benefit: community funding, on-site benefits and helping to reduce energy bills. Please see pages 14 & 15 of our Phase Two Community Consultation Leaflet for more details.

Your response could include suggestions for the type of projects or initiatives you think could benefit from this package, including from a community benefit fund that will be similar in size to Blenheim's bursary fund of £50,000 per annum.

Witney Town Council acknowledge the community offers such as the £50k annual grants, the cycle paths and walking paths to ensure that the countryside remains accessible through development areas. However, all community offers need to be quantified, and agreements sought to ensure any promised funding and promised benefits are secured.

Local energy tariffs schemes are very much welcomed and need to be fully explored. If the scheme is to provide energy for 330,000 homes, that is more than the number of homes in Oxfordshire, and therefore all homes in Oxfordshire, including those in Witney, should be offered discounted energy rates.

As a fallback position, and very much a second choice, community ownership options could be made available.

Response ends.