

# Stonesfield Parish Council

clerk@stonesfieldpc.uk

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## Botley West Solar Farm Phase One Community Consultation Feedback

### Stonesfield Parish Council's Initial Opinion

Stonesfield Parish Council recognises that this proposal is in the initial non-statutory stage of the planning process. Due to this, the information currently provided for Botley West Solar Farm at this stage lacks many of the key facts needed to make an informed opinion on the proposal.

For example, the proposal has not provided details regarding the final design, the technology to be used, the outcomes of any impact assessments, exactly how biodiversity will be increased and details of perceived benefits to the local community, while claiming that they exist. The limited information provided by the proposal suggests that every route into Bladon will be physically and visibly changed. Overwhelming public outcry against the proposal indicates that this development would result in significant net loss for the current community with an uncertain future for subsequent generations.

The lack of information means that Stonesfield Parish Council cannot determine from this proposal how the disruption and long-term changes to the landscape character of the area, which will be caused by the damage to the local biodiversity, the loss of amenity for the public, the loss of good quality agricultural land and the loss of greenbelt, can be outweighed by any benefits that might be created by the generation of solar power.

In addition, Stonesfield Parish Council questions the efficiency and value of solar power compared to other renewable energy sources. The government's stance on offshore/onshore wind (universally accepted as more efficient than solar) is evolving daily. Power from both could be fed into the National Grid in the same way that energy gathered from the Botley Power Plant would, without threatening the food security, biodiversity and mental health benefits provided by greenbelt land.

Based on the information provided so far, Stonesfield Parish Council believes that the area chosen for the proposal is not suitable for an industrialised solar farm. Solar farms should be restricted to brownfield sites or low-grade agricultural land.

Although the greatest impact felt is not by Stonesfield residents it will be felt by our close neighbours at Bladon Parish, mainly the middle section of the proposal. We strongly support our neighbouring parish views on this proposed development.

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### **We have the same comments and questions as Bladon Parish Council and would appreciate clarifications on these points:**

#### **1. General Points**

- 1.1 The consultation is not specific on the expected operational life of the proposal. How many years?
- 1.2 When is it expected that the proposal will start producing power and feed into the National Grid?

- 1.3 The investment required to improve the necessary infrastructure for energy delivery, based on existing technology and inadequacies of the National Grid, seems very large for a proposed maximum operational lifetime of 35-40 years. Where will funds be coming from to pay for the National Grid improvements required? Are there plans for updating technology as it improves, and the funding of such updates, over the operational lifetime of the proposal?
- 1.4 Being a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project within the UK, why has PVDP, a German-based company, been chosen to be the developer rather than a British company? A British company would bring benefits to the UK economy even if the development itself will not be contributing to the local or County's economy.
- 1.5 Who will actually be building and running the solar farm? Does PVDP sell on the permission?
- 1.6 To ensure that the majority of the economic benefits stay in the UK, can any guarantees be given that only UK companies will be considered, should the permission be sold on for the construction and/or operational stages?

## **2. Power Generation**

- 2.1 Will the project really be capable of powering 330,000 homes when studies of current solar farms in the UK, trade association information and government information on annual home electricity use suggest that, at best, a capability of 840 MW will only power somewhere between 200,000 to 250,000 homes?
- 2.2 In the calculation of how much energy will be produced by the proposal, it refers to the information source of how many kWh per year a household uses. It does not refer to the source for the other figures used in the calculation, such as the factors and yield estimate. Please can further details of either the source or the basis of the figures be provided?

## **3. Location and Other Options**

- 3.1 There are large areas where solar farms could be built without negatively affecting the landscapes or community. What other sites in Oxfordshire, if any, were considered? Can details be provided of the locations and why were they excluded?
- 3.2 On what basis have you chosen the various locations for this proposal?
- 3.3 Did you consider a solar farm within Blenheim Palace boundaries or on any of the properties owned by any of the other landowners including Merton College?
- 3.4 Have alternative sites for the solar panels been considered? Why not use existing and new roof space on housing, industrial and offices rather than agricultural land?
- 3.5 Why is it not mandatory for all new buildings to have solar panels on roofing instead of these solar parks?
- 3.6 Why pursue solar power when evidence shows alternative energy sources such as wind, wave and nuclear are significantly more productive than solar?
- 3.7 The proposal should not be considered in isolation but should also take into account other approved and proposed developments in the areas, including housing and non-residential proposals such as Park & Rides and other solar farms. The accumulated impact of those proposals needs to be understood when considering the impact of this proposal. For example, once built, the developments in Eynsham, Begbroke and Yarnton will surround the proposed solar farm and will remove huge areas of land which are currently shown on the plans as open countryside.
- 3.8 The developer should show visually how the proposal relates to other proposed developments in the surrounding areas.

#### **4. Land Use and Agriculture**

- 4.1 Will the planning permission, if granted, restrict the length of time the solar farm can exist or will there be no time restrictions?
- 4.2 Will the planning classification of the land be changed by the installation of a solar farm?
- 4.3 Are there any guarantees that the land will not become classified as brownfield or another classification that will enable the land to be built upon once the solar farm is decommissioned?
- 4.4 Planning guidance says development on best and most versatile (BMV) land earmarked for farming should be avoided. What percentage of the area covered by solar panels and other infrastructure is Grade 1, Grade 2, Grade 3 (a), Grade 3 (b) and Grade 4 or above?
- 4.5 The proposed land is currently mainly used for crop production. How will this loss in crop production, specifically, be compensated for?

#### **5. Hydrology and Flood Risk**

- 5.1 Will a flood risk assessment be carried out?
- 5.2 Does the flood risk assessment consider the surface water runoff, etc. from areas outside of the proposal?
- 5.3 Will the flood risk assessment consider the cumulative effect that the approved and proposed developments surrounding the proposal will have on the flood risk of the proposal?
- 5.4 What measures will be carried out to ensure that any increase in risk of flooding is mitigated?

#### **6. Equipment**

- 6.1 Will there be any battery storage and if so, what infrastructure/technology will be used?
- 6.2 Can you provide details of the type of solar panels to be used, polycrystalline, monocrystalline or thin-film?
- 6.3 Where will the solar panels and other infrastructure be sourced from? Can the developer guarantee the provenance of the solar panels and that they will be sourced from an ethical manufacturer?
- 6.4 How environmentally friendly are the solar panels and other infrastructure? What is the carbon footprint of the equipment and other resources being used?
- 6.5 Can you confirm how much of the solar panels and other infrastructure is recyclable and what elements of the panel can be recycled?
- 6.6 Does the UK currently have the facilities to recycle the type of solar panels intended for use?

#### **7. Landscape and Biodiversity**

- 7.1 The buffer zone distances have been provided for trees, hedgerows, and woodland but not residents' properties or roads. When will these distances be provided?
- 7.2 How long will it take for the newly planted buffer zones to be mature enough to provide an effective screen against the eyesore of the solar panels?

- 7.3 Where possible, especially near properties affected, will the planting of new trees and hedging take place before the start of any construction across the proposal?
- 7.4 The area between Bladon and Begbroke/Yarnton has a dense and well-used network of rights of way which include the viewpoints in both directions from Spring Hill and an open view across fields from the Bladon recreation ground. There will be many areas similar to this across the proposal, how will these existing open views be protected?
- 7.5 When will impact assessments of existing biodiversity take place?
- 7.6 When will specific proposals to protect existing flora and fauna be provided?
- 7.7 Can residents have any influence on what the mitigation measures around the protection of flora and fauna will be?
- 7.8 It is known that the Heat Island effect created under the solar panels impacts on wildlife habit and ecosystems. What measures will be used to stop or mitigate the impact?
- 7.9 When will a specific proposal be provided on how improvements to the environment and increases in biodiversity will be achieved?
- 7.10 Can residents have any influence on what the improvement measures will be?
- 7.11 Wildlife that can normally roam through all the fields unrestricted will be prevented from doing so due to the security fencing that is expected to be installed. They will have to move around the borders of the fields instead, and this will not only displace their natural pathways and affect their behaviour, but in many places will put them alongside roads. What measure will be put in place to reduce the displacement and protect the safety of the wildlife?
- 7.12 What measures will be in place to stop any glint, glare or noise from disturbing the wildlife?
- 7.13 What measures will be in place to stop birds thinking the solar panels are water?
- 7.14 During the construction phases what will be done to minimize the disturbance and damage to the existing flora and fauna?

## **8. Archaeology and Local Heritage**

- 8.1 Has the visual impact on the UNESCO World Heritage site been considered?

## **9. During Construction**

- 9.1 How long is the anticipated construction period?
- 9.2 How much noise will there be during the construction phases?
- 9.3 What do you expect the level of construction traffic to be and how will you mitigate the impact?
- 9.4 During the planned construction period a number of other developments, possibly including Salt Cross at Eynsham, and road improvements are planned for the area. Will the combined impact of these be taken into account when proposing any traffic mitigation?
- 9.5 Will there be internal access roads created to minimise the impact of the construction traffic?

## **10. After Construction, During Operation**

- 10.1 Who is responsible for finding new farmers to graze the land and what happens if nobody is interested?

10.2 Will the site have CCTV and if so, will any member of the public using the areas be seen or recorded on the system?

10.3 Will any signage relating to security, such as No Trespassing, etc., be kept to a minimum?

## **11. Decommissioning**

11.1 What will happen to the panels and battery storage, if any, once they have come to the end of their usefulness?

11.2 Will a site decommissioning plan be produced and published?

11.3 To ensure that the land can be returned back to its original state, in the future will there be a legal requirement for a bond of suitable value and wording be put in place to guarantee this?

## **12. Recreation and Amenity**

12.1 It is known that having open countryside and unindustrialised land is the key to well-being. Do you have any proposals for how to mitigate the negative impacts on the local residents' well-being?

12.2 The residents of Bladon currently have open views from the village recreation ground and these views will be impacted by the proposal. Will the impact on residents and their well-being be considered when deciding whether to site panels next to existing recreational facilities?

12.3 What measures will be implemented as part of any community benefit and how are these to be decided?

12.4 How much noise will be generated once the proposal is operational?

12.5 Has any research been carried out on the potential noise pollution caused by heavy rain on such a large number of solar panels in one area?

## **13. Rights of Way**

13.1 How does the developer propose to maintain public access to the rights of way across the proposal throughout the construction period and during its operation?

13.2 What type of fencing will be used along the footpaths and around other perimeters? How tall will the fencing be? Can you provide renderings of what it will look like?

13.3 Will there also be hedgerows along the footpaths and around other perimeters and if so at what height will these be maintained at?

13.4 If there are any gates in the fences to allow wildlife access, what will stop pets from being able to get into the enclosed areas?

13.5 Many footpaths enjoy wide views over open fields. How will you prevent the fencing or hedging from obstructing these views?

13.6 What will the minimum distance be between the fences/hedges on new and existing footpaths?

13.7 There are concerns about personal safety when walking along the corridors that will be created by the high and continuous fencing. People feel safer if even subconsciously they can see an 'exit route' and feel intimidated and apprehensive if they can't. This will stop many people walking, especially alone or at night. What mitigation measures will be offered to counteract this effect?

## **14. Oxfordshire Energy Strategy and Providing Energy Locally**

14.1 Where is the evidence that this proposal will lead the way in achieving Oxfordshire's Energy Strategy and the transition to net-zero? The Oxfordshire Energy Strategy Delivery plan 2019/20 refers to:

The need to plan to increase solar capacity by more than six-fold and to plan to manage that solar capacity across the day and across the year through the development of a local energy market

Plan to transform a highly-constrained electricity grid into a lean, smart, fit-for-purpose support for local energy trading.

How can this proposal support Oxfordshire's ambitious climate target if the energy is not being used locally or within Oxfordshire, as planned for in the 2019/20 delivery plan?

14.2 Why will all of the energy generated be used to supply the National Grid?

14.3 Have you considered supporting the local generation of energy for those residents and communities affected by the proposal?

14.4 Why not allow part of proposal to generate energy for the local communities so that the local residents and communities can benefit directly from generation of local energy at a cheaper rate, such as by creating a community solar farm within the larger farm?

## **15. Other Suggestions for Community Improvements**

15.1 If the aim of the proposal is to make a positive impact on climate change then will the developer contribute to providing energy efficiency improvements to local residents and business?

## **16. Local Economy**

16.1 It appears the benefits to the Oxfordshire economy will be minimal. It is likely that the production of panels will be outside the county, and possibly outside of the UK. The installation will most likely be carried out by a specialist installation teams based outside the area, and the site, once operational, is likely to be monitored remotely. Can you please provide more details to how you are contributing to Oxfordshire economy?

16.2 How will you be contributing to the local economies of those villages/towns who will be affected by the negative impact of the proposal?

16.3 In the long term, will there not be a net loss of jobs in the local area?

16.4 There are certain properties that will be surrounded by fields of solar panels and others who will be backing on the fields of solar panels. Will you be putting in any measure in place to help prevent the decrease in property values for properties in the area?

16.5 Will there be any compensation for any loss in value of local properties?

16.6 A proposal of this scale will make the surrounding area less attractive to visitors. For example, Bladon is on the route of a well-known and well-used circular walk which brings passing trade to the community pub; but under these proposals, the walk will be enclosed by fields of solar panels and therefore less attractive to visitors and residents alike, reducing the potential of passing trade at the community pub. This is just one example of how the proposal could affect the local businesses in the area. Will you be putting any measure in place to prevent the decrease in visitors to the area?

16.7 Will there be any compensation for any loss of trade for local business?

16.8 Does the minimal economic benefit to Oxfordshire and more so the local area outweigh the damage caused by building in the green belt?

## **17. The Consultation Process**

- 17.1 Despite the village being surrounded on three sides by fields earmarked for development in this proposal, why was there no community information event scheduled for Bladon residents?
- 17.2 The maps in the brochure were difficult to read due to their small size and the lack of naming of main roads. The maps at the community events were equally unclear with no house numbers or Road names.
- 17.3 What happens to the feedback given at Stage One and Stage Two of the consultations?
- 17.4 When will more detailed information such as land grades, maps, photomontages and visualisations be available?