

Application 22/01682/F, Solar Farm Proposals, land North of Manor Farm, Noke.

Objections from:

M Vermaase, Orchard House, 11 Church Street, Beckley, OX3 9UT

As a long-term (since 1987) resident of this area, I have enjoyed Otmoor's open spaces, and frequently make the beautiful walk from Beckley to Oddington and back along the ancient bridleway/footpath that incidentally connects 2 areas of the RSPB Otmoor Nature Reserve and is therefore used by many walkers. This footpath skirts the proposed site for some distance.

The site will also adversely affect the much-used public footpath between Noke and Oddington.

I do not consider this a sensible place to locate a solar farm, and object strongly against these proposals, for the reasons outlined below. Most of these points were taken from a round-robin email to Beckley residents. As I wholeheartedly agree with the arguments made, I have copied them here.

1 - We need to consider the longer-term future. The present application is to cover about half of Manor Farm with solar panels. If this is successful, it's not implausible that a second application will follow in later years to cover the remaining half of the farm (another 120 acres / 49 hectares). In future, all the area covered by panels will be considered 'brownfield land' and would be ripe for re-development with something else such as housing. At all events, any land that is used for the solar farm now will certainly never be green again. Having seen off all the threats to Otmoor in recent decades (including the M40 and the Expressway), a massive solar farm is not what we now want.

2 - Otmoor represents one of the largest undeveloped spaces that remain in Oxfordshire. It is a mere 4 kms from the Oxford ring road, offering a rare and accessible place of freedom and escape. There are proposals to make the whole of the Otmoor/Bernwood/River Ray catchment area (one of the last remaining traditional floodplain meadows in England) a regional park, with some of the best-preserved natural environments in southern England. Putting any sort of development in such an area, would spoil it irretrievably.

3 - Ecological impact: we are particularly concerned about the proximity of the solar farm to the RSPB Bird Reserve on Otmoor, where cranes bred successfully for the very first time last year. The site is also home to bitterns, turtle doves and marsh harriers. The solar farm would be less than 400metres away from the Bird Reserve and only just over 1 km away from the permanently flooded area within it. Wetland birds and insect life are attracted to the large shiny surfaces of water bodies. **Over 100 acres of shiny panels could disorient migrating and other birds.** The Ecological Survey carried out for the developer concentrated on the wildlife recorded within the solar farm area and concluded that "impacts to any off-site designated sites are highly unlikely due to distances and nature of the work". This is an unsubstantiated opinion for which there is absolutely no evidence at all. Both Friends of the Earth and the **RSPB recommend that solar farms should avoid wildlife sites.**

4 - Green Belt: the solar park would fall entirely within the Green Belt. Para 151 of the NPPF (National Planning Policy Framework) states that **renewable energy projects are inappropriate developments** on Green Belt land, and should only be allowed in 'very special circumstances' – which we do not believe apply here. Otmoor is no sunnier than any other patch of land in southern England. Electricity can be generated anywhere and distributed everywhere through the existing electrical distribution network. [the Green Belt is already under assault like never before. SODC has agreed to release 1,900 acres / 770 ha for housing development in its Local Plan to 2035 - and that's just in the SODC section of the Green Belt.]

5 - Amenity value of the area: As mentioned above, a stand-out feature of Otmoor and the surrounding area is its **open, undeveloped character**, a rare **haven for wildlife and humans** alike, with ancient footpaths running along the boundary of the proposed site. 108 Acres of panelling would subvert its character considerably. If a solar farm is allowed here, in such a unique habitat, solar farms could be allowed anywhere. We welcome solar farms as part of our zero-carbon future. Our challenge is to meet that environmental priority while not trampling on other ones: the preservation of precious landscapes and protection of fragile biodiversity.

