

# Comment for planning application 22/01682/F

<b>Application Number</b>	22/01682/F
<b>Location</b>	Land North Of Manor Farm Noke
<b>Proposal</b>	Development of a ground mounted solar farm incorporating the installation of solar PV panels, associated infrastructure and access, as well as landscape planting and designated ecological enhancement areas.
<b>Case Officer</b>	James Kirkham
<b>Organisation Name</b>	
<b>Name</b>	Fritz Vollrath
<b>Address</b>	Upper Woods Farm, Street From Woodeaton To Beckley, Noke, Oxford, OX3 9TF
<b>Type of Comment</b>	Objection
<b>Type</b>	neighbour
<b>Comments</b>	<p>In summary: I strongly oppose this development.</p> <p>Of course, I am in favour of alternative energy sources like solar, and I understand the need for Cherwell to explore all options. However, I am deeply concerned about the siting of this particular solar panel plantation including any associated so-called 'mitigation' efforts.</p> <p>In effect, this 100 acre development site is in the curtilage of Cherwell's most important wetland and ancient 'commons' biotope, which we all should aim to restore and re-wild rather than fence in.</p> <p>Within easy cycling distance of both Bicester and Oxford, Otmoor offers residents respite from the hustle and bustle of these busy, and rapidly growing, conurbations. In this sense Otmoor has tremendous value as a new 'commons'. Many dedicated studies, assessments and reports record its biological diversity and importance. With its key location within our greenbelt, Otmoor should already be fully protected from development - also within the parameters of Cherwell District Council's own Climate Action Framework. Indeed, it is national and local policy to preserve/enhance biodiversity and support sustainable farming and carbon-capture rewilding.</p> <p>The question the assessor and the committee will have to face is this: What has greater local/national value: (i) the 100 acres of land farmed for food as at present, (ii) electricity produced by 47'000 solar panels now and in the future, day and night or (iii) the biological diversity and carbon-capture value if the land were rewilded? I note that panelling the land would prevent both food production and tree/bush planting on the site now and in the foreseeable future, and probably beyond once converted into a brown-field site. Admittedly, the proposed hedging would add something to biodiversity and so would the small set-aside wet-land. Then, again, this hedging will be against a chain link fence topped by security cameras, all for 10+ years more visible than the hedge, and afterward perhaps more felt than seen but still intrusive for ramblers, hikers and birdwatchers. In any case, the hedging/wetland are small contributions relative to the bulk of the land devoted to panelling, which is supposed to be grazed but would not be easily managed properly for biodiversity given the steel structures.</p> <p>I argue that in this particular case/site the Natural Value for the Cherwell community is greater than its value as electricity producer. Ecologically farmed (under the new UK farming directive) in combination with naturally appropriate re re-hedging and re-forestry will mitigate our carbon footprint in both an ecologically enriching and financially sustainable way. In this context I also mention the glorious experience and views over the natural Otmoor ecosystem, so appreciated by many writers and travellers. The panels will industrialise this precious landscape, however shielded by hedging, and will be visible from the footpaths and the rail-track as well as Beckley Common with its network of foot/bridle paths and its community public house/restaurant and large outdoor seating, much appreciated by locals as well as visitors to Otmoor and its RSPB reserve.</p> <p>As to the biological impact of the proposed solar panels I comment here but briefly. There is ample evidence that solar panels might indeed affect birds and also bats negatively (e.g. <a href="http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/file/6000213410447360">http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/file/6000213410447360</a>) - and I understand that colleagues are providing more details. While this evidence might at this stage still be</p>

considered controversial for this site, I note that even the possibility of dangers and risks to the bird and bats of this precious ecosystem must be taken very seriously indeed. After all, once in place it is highly unlikely that the panels will be removed - even when it turns out that they present significant risks. Here too, the for me totally unclear ownership/management relationships of the proposers does not inspire me with confidence that any longer term commitments and/or remedial actions would indeed be honoured.

Basically, you and the committee will have to balance the costs and benefits of the various options. This will be difficult, and I wish you well. As I see it, there is much farmland outside our greenbelt that offers itself to panelling, while there is no other land within the district that has such great natural value - and potential if developed appropriately.

Sincerely

Fritz Vollrath  
Prof Emeritus, Department of Zoology, University of Oxford  
Scientist, Farmer and Rewilder

**Received Date**

21/07/2022 13:22:58

**Attachments**