

Botley West Solar Farm

PEOPLE who love Oxfordshire's countryside should support the plans for Botley West Solar Farm. not be fighting against it.

It's been very disappointing to see this paper publish article after article with people decrying its "environmental impact" and opposing renewable energy in the name of "food security". In fact, if we want to maintain Oxfordshire's rolling hills, agricultural production, and native wildlife for future generations, rapidly shifting to renewable energy on a large scale like this is exactly what we need to do.

We had a 30-degree heatwave this June. Last July we sweltered under 40-degree days. Does anyone remember those weird 21-degree days we had in February 2020?

The reason this July is damp and temperate is because of the same weather system that is driving record-high 40+ degree temperatures across Southern Europe. Climate change is already in the UK and, unless we move quickly to do something about it, it's only going to hit us harder year after year.

The Government's own reports cite climate change as one of the biggest risks to food security in the UK, and scientists have warned this week that heatwaves are threatening the food security of the entire planet.

A few weeks ago the Oxford Mail reported on the emergency aerators deployed to save fish in the canal from suffocation due to the heat. It's climate change that threatens to change our countryside into something more like Catalonia than the Cotswolds: it is uncontrolled climate change that is going to have more of an impact on food security than solar panels ever could.

Oxfordshire is 75% farmland. This solar farm proposal means exchanging 0.5% of that farmland for enough renewable energy to power almost every home in the county.

We could also be a trailblazer for other parts of the UK, kickstarting a real transition away

from planet-poisoning fossil fuels and onto the abundant free energy that is all around us.

I don't think the proposal is perfect. We don't know enough about the details of how it's going to work and what it's going to look like. But this is pre-application and the companies involved don't even know that yet: surveys and detailed plans will follow.

But saying "No, never! Stop!" at this stage is fundamentally failing to engage with what might be possible if we work together to deliver something that benefits our energy system, electric bills, environment, biodiversity and communities (with the promise of new public footpaths and cycle routes).

And any anti-solar farm argument which fails to engage with the context of the ongoing and worsening climate crisis is not seriously engaging with reality: we do not have time to delay. We don't have time for perfect. We only have time to do as much as we can as fast as we can.

There are many people across the county, including across the villages that will be within the bounds of the solar farm, that think Botley West Solar Farm is the right thing to do in the right place to do it.

They may wish that we weren't in the situation where it was necessary. but they recognise that the climate crisis leaves us with no other options.

Please think about that the next time someone tells you "the people of West Oxfordshire" are against it.

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