Stop Botley West campaign – New Co-Chair

Over the summer, the campaign has been examining what is being done well, what could be improved and what the future campaign priorities should be, to make any action effective. A new Co-Chair, Alex Rogers, has been appointed and his statement is shown below.

The communities affected by the Botley West development are awaiting confirmation of the timetable for the second round of Community Consultations by the developer, Photovolt Development Partners (PVDP). Once the timetable is confirmed, SBW and Parish / Community Action groups will encourage residents of the affected communities to participate in the process.

Dear Readers,
It is a great pleasure to talk to you as a resident of West Oxfordshire, a Parish Councilor for the village of Cassington and an ecologist of more than 30-years' experience, albeit most of the time in or on the ocean.

I never contemplated becoming a campaigner against a renewable energy scheme. As a marine biologist and natural historian, I am witnessing the catastrophe brought about by climate change both to nature and people. The need to cut greenhouse gas emissions is urgent. However, all forms of sustainable development must be positive or at least neutral for climate, people, and nature. The developers of the Botley West Utility-Scale Solar Power Station claim it is absolutely necessary to meet the U.K. s need for renewable energy. However, the proposal represents a devastating violation of our Green Belt and will likely result in significant harm to the health and wellbeing of the residents of the affected Parishes of Oxfordshire as well as damage to wildlife and our heritage. These impacts arise from the massive scale of the development, 2.5 million solar panels and additional infrastructure covering 3,400 acres of land with 111 km of fences and 306 security cameras, resembling a giant prison camp. The lack of a national plan on what mix of renewable energy is needed and where it can be installed with maximum effectiveness and least impact has enabled the owners of large estates of land like Blenheim Estates (Vanbrugh Trustees Ltd.) and Merton College to cash in on this policy vacuum and attempt to convert productive farmland and countryside to solar power stations. Let s make no mistake, this is not being done for the good of the planet but for money. It is quite incredible to think that by accident of history, including the dispossession of common land from the citizens of this country by the Enclosures, we are now faced by such an undemocratic imposition on our environment and lives.

Oxfordshire has a deep sense of place which I recognised as soon as I arrived. In Cassington this year we are celebrating the 900th birthday of St Peter s Church. The land around us is saturated with thousands of years of evidence of occupation. I believe we have a unique network of communities in the region and locally I have led the development of Cassington s Local Neighbourhood Plan and Green Infrastructure Plan which were accepted through a referendum this year. These plans give us a say in local development and help us to think about how to improve our living environment. Botley West is of such a scale that it is decided upon at a national level. Local people have limited opportunities to have an influence on the proposal process for such national infrastructure which very much is in control of the developers and the National Planning Inspectorate. If we do nothing this development will steamroller us. I have therefore led our Parish s response to the initial public consultation and in commenting on the Scoping Report for the Environmental Impact Assessment. Because I feel strongly that this proposal is unacceptable because of its scale, place and impact on people and nature, as do many of my fellow Parishioners, I have accepted the role as Co-Chair to the Stop Botley West Working Group. I very much hope that you will join me and lend your efforts and experience to demonstrate that this development is wholly inappropriate for Oxfordshire.
Alex Rogers