



A LEGACY OF LEADERSHIP

Botley West Solar Farm. A model for clean energy with community at its heart



BLenheim ESTATE

AN OPEN LETTER

Blenheim Estate has a unique opportunity to help define what fairness looks like in the clean energy transition. As the principal landowner for one of the UK's largest proposed solar farms, Botley West, Blenheim's role in shaping the level of funding the community receives could set a new national standard.

By advocating for a revenue-linked, long-term fund that supports local people and places, Blenheim can strengthen its legacy as a responsible steward and leader in rural sustainability.

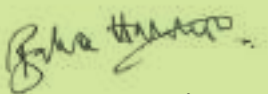
"We are writing to propose a way forward for the Botley West Solar Farm that reflects Blenheim Estate's enduring legacy, its role in the national net zero transition, and its public commitment to community leadership.

As the principal landowner in this project, Blenheim has both the influence and the opportunity to secure a better deal for the people who will live alongside the development. Whether for or against the development, the community expect fairness.

We are proposing that 2% of the project's revenue be allocated annually to a community benefit fund. That would mean funding for energy efficiency in homes, businesses and schools; investment in local facilities and community projects; and support for people in fuel poverty.

This approach is scalable, transparent, and in line with global best practice. It would also demonstrate Blenheim's role as a national leader in responsible land stewardship.

Let's set a new standard together."



Warm regards,

Dr Barbara Hammond
CEO, Low Carbon Hub

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WHY THIS MATTERS

If it goes ahead, this is a once-in-a-generation opportunity for Oxfordshire's communities

Botley West Solar Farm is one of the largest solar developments ever proposed in the UK. At its heart lies the Blenheim Estate – the principal landowner, and a trusted local institution with national reach.

Yet, local people living nearby are being offered a sum that doesn't come close to reflecting the scale, impact, or profits of the project.

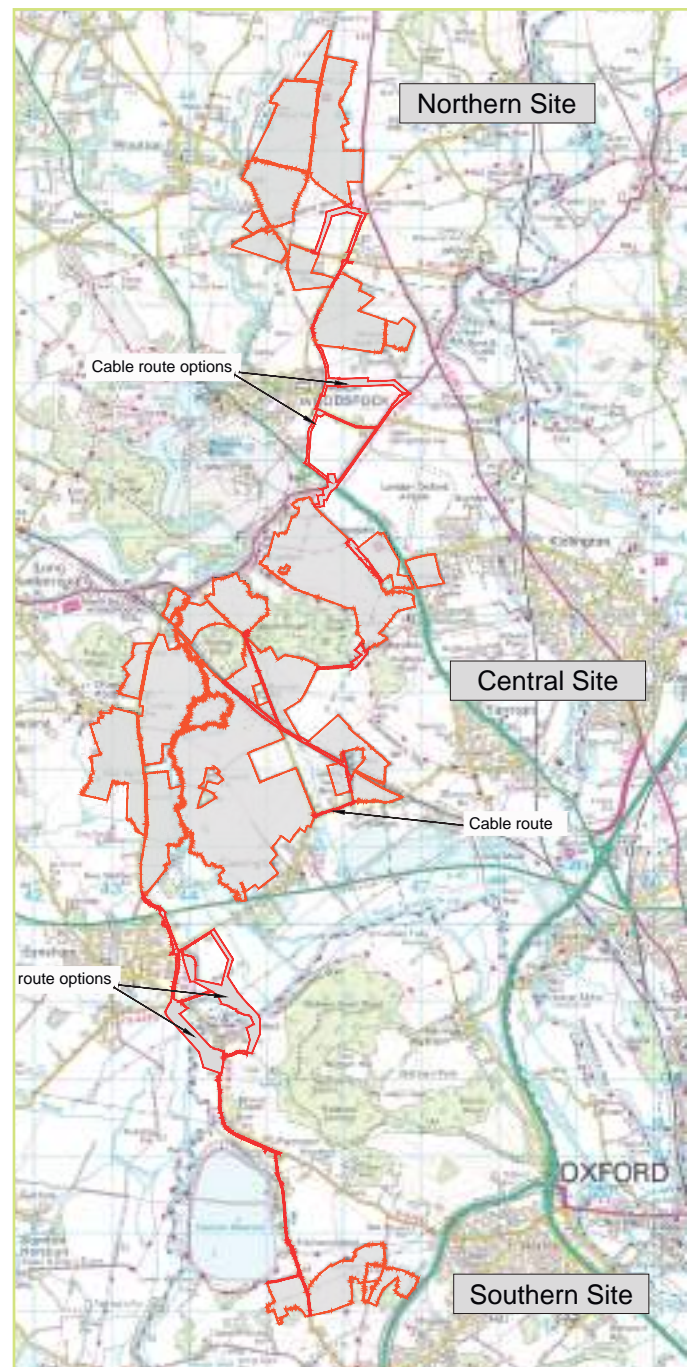
We believe there's a better way

A fairer approach would link community funding to project revenues. Based on even conservative estimates, **2% of annual revenues** would deliver at least four to five times more for local communities than the current offer.

And because it's tied to revenue, this approach grows as the project succeeds – ensuring communities aren't left behind.



Botley West would span three districts and impact over a dozen parishes



A FAIR DEAL, A STRONG LEGACY

A smarter, fairer approach to community benefit

We are proposing that 2% of Botley West's annual revenue is committed to a community benefit fund, independently managed and transparently distributed.

What this could fund

- ✓ Energy efficiency support for homes, businesses and schools
- ✓ Support for local facilities such as community buildings, transport links, and EV charging stations
- ✓ Funding for community-led projects, e.g. tree planting, nature recovery, community garden projects
- ✓ Practical support for those most affected by fuel poverty

How it could work

- ✓ An independent board with community representation ensures fair distribution
- ✓ Funding decisions shaped by local priorities and lived experience
- ✓ Transparent governance, aligned with best practice from across the UK and Europe

Why it could work

- ✓ **Fair** – communities share in the project's success
- ✓ **Accountable** – oversight ensures trust and transparency
- ✓ **Standard-setting** – a national model others can follow

A legacy through leadership

This proposal aligns with Blenheim Estate's values and mission – creating long-term, place-based benefit and showing what responsible land ownership looks like in the 21st century.

Local legacy

- ✓ Creates tangible benefits for Oxfordshire's communities
- ✓ Reinforces Blenheim's reputation as a local champion

Trust and advocacy

- ✓ Builds lasting goodwill among residents and local authorities
- ✓ Reinforces Blenheim's position as a leader in sustainable development

National leadership

- ✓ Pioneers a best practice model for community benefit to be replicated nationwide
- ✓ Influences the national conversation about community benefit and large-scale solar development in the UK

THE RISKS OF INACTION

This is a moment of choice —
and a test of leadership

The Botley West proposal is already one of the most closely watched solar developments in the country. What happens here will set a precedent, not just for Oxfordshire, but for dozens of similar projects now being planned across the UK.

Right now, the current community offer is rightly viewed by residents, campaigners and local leaders as inadequate. Without a stronger commitment to fairness, the risk isn't just a missed opportunity, but also lasting damage to trust and reputation.

“If we miss the opportunity to secure a fairer outcome for communities now, it risks eroding trust — locally and nationally.”

Dr Barbara Hammond,
CEO, Low Carbon Hub

The risks of inaction

Reputational risk

Blenheim could be seen as endorsing a deal that doesn't reflect its public commitment to community and sustainability. This risks undermining local goodwill and national standing.

Loss of trust

Communities that feel overlooked or short-changed are less likely to support future initiatives, even those designed with good intentions. Trust, once lost, is hard to rebuild.

Political and media scrutiny

Local MPs and councillors are already hearing concerns. National media interest in fairness and transparency in renewables is growing. As the landowner, Blenheim will be seen as central to the outcome.

A missed leadership opportunity

By not stepping in now, Blenheim misses the chance to shape a new national benchmark — one that shows how landowners can act as powerful advocates for people and planet.

Future opposition

If fairness isn't delivered here, it will become harder to build consensus for renewable energy projects in other communities — including ones that Blenheim may be involved in later.

HOW WE CAN HELP

A trusted partner, focused on solutions



Low Carbon Hub is a social enterprise with over a decade of experience delivering community benefit from renewable energy projects across Oxfordshire. We've developed, owned and operated solar schemes on schools, businesses, and public buildings – always ensuring profits are reinvested locally.

For Botley West, our aim is to help secure a solution that is fair, transparent, and locally rooted.

Independent

We have no ties to the developers and no financial interest in the outcome. Our only agenda is to ensure local communities get a fairer deal, one that reflects the scale of this project.

Experienced

We've delivered successful renewable energy schemes across the county, from school rooftops to business parks, and ensured the profits support community priorities like energy efficiency, education, and climate action.

Locally connected

We're already working alongside parish councils, local campaigners, and resident groups who want to see a better outcome for their communities. We understand the landscape, and the lived concerns.

Solution-focused

We bring practical models for managing community benefit funds transparently and fairly. We're not here to manage the money unless asked, but we are ready to help shape a structure that works for everyone.



WHAT NEXT

The time to act is now

Negotiations around community benefit are happening now. They will likely continue alongside the Development Consent Order inquiry that starts in May 2025. This is the window of opportunity.

Blenheim has a unique position and influence at this stage of the process. By advocating for a fairer funding model now, the Estate can help shape an outcome that truly reflects its values, and **set a national benchmark for fairness in the clean energy transition.**

This isn't just about Oxfordshire. The decision made here could guide similar developments across the country, from Norfolk to Nottinghamshire.

We believe:

- ✓ This project should set a new national standard
- ✓ Local people should share in long-term success
- ✓ Landowners like Blenheim can help define what fairness looks like

Now is the time for Blenheim to press Botley West Solar Farm to commit to a funding model that delivers long-term value for local communities.


We will work hard to positively support our local communities in the hope that you will feel proud of Blenheim and cherish where you live.

Blenheim Estate

Let's talk

about shaping a fairer deal – one that reflects Blenheim's legacy of leadership and its future as a pioneer in sustainable land stewardship.





Our vision is to be the lifeblood of the local economy, to enhance the lives of the people of Oxfordshire, to share this magnificent Palace and to conserve and protect it for future generations.

Blenheim Estate, mission statement



Blenheim Estate's role in shaping the level of funding the community receives could set a new national standard.

low
carbon
hub

Low Carbon Hub is running this campaign to ensure Blenheim Estate secures a fair community benefit deal – one that truly benefits local people.

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