

# MINUTES OF THE PARISH MEETING OF LONG SUTTON & WELL PARISH COUNCIL'S HELD ON THURSDAY 28 MARCH 2024

**Members:** Cllrs Jim Goodbourn (Chair)(JG), Mark Bartlett(MB), Roger Bright(RB), Frazer Hamilton (FH) and Sean Knight(SK).

**In Attendance:** Susan Richardson, Clerk & RFO(SR), 5 Members of the Public (Part).

<b>72/23</b>	<b>APOLOGIES</b> No apologies were received.																		
<b>73/23</b>	<b>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND APPLICATIONS FOR DISPENSATIONS UNDER s33 OF THE LOCALISM ACT 2011</b> - RB declared an interest in Agenda item 76/23(b) as his wife, Susan Bright, is a churchwarden.																		
<b>74/23</b>	<b>PUBLIC SESSION</b> <u>Village Pond</u> - Concerns regarding the village pond were raised. MB advised that the PC had received a £2,000 donation from TopSoil UK towards pond maintenance for 2024/25. Hartley Wintney PC has recently commissioned works at one of their village ponds shared their project and costings which amounted to circa £26,000. MB sourced a contractor to remove the silt build up in the middle of the pond which, due to the machinery required is circa. £8,670.00. General discussion took place on the value of such works prior to the ME site being concluded. <u>Big Meadow</u> - MB reported on the Zoom call members of the PC had with HDC on 29 February. HDC, PC and Residents all agree that an onsite meeting to include Allsop would be beneficial. <u>Highways</u> - Recent resurfacing works on the B3349 and authorised diversion routes through Long Sutton resulted in a vast volume of traffic along our narrow lanes. This increase in traffic caused chaos for residents living on these narrow country lanes and to those wishing to enter and exit the village. Additional damage to the edges of our roads has also been noted. It was AGREED that pictures would be taken of the highway damage enabling a dialogue to be opened with Hampshire Highways.																		
<b>75/23</b>	<b>ROUTINE BUSINESS &amp; ADMINISTRATION</b>																		
(a)	Ratification of Minutes of the Parish Council Meeting held on Thursday the 25 January 2024 (58/23-71/23) were APPROVED. MB Proposed, FH Seconded.																		
(b)	<u>2024 PC Meeting Dates</u> - The following PC meeting dates were noted; 25 April, 23 May, 25 July, 26 September and 28 November.																		
(c)	<u>Annual Parish Assembly</u> - confirmed as Thursday 25 April 2024. This has been advertised on PC website and village noticeboards. Format will be as in previous years.																		
(d)	<u>Annual Parish Assembly Budget</u> - It was AGREED to allocate up to £80 from the Chairman's Allowance for refreshments.																		
<b>76/23</b>	<b>FINANCE</b>																		
(a)	Payments & Receipts as listed were unanimously APPROVED.																		
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(b)	<u>All Saints PCC</u> - It was AGREED to increase the annual donation towards ground maintenance from £100 to £150. This increase will take effect from 2024. RB was excluded from discussions and decision.																		

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(c)	<u>Trees - Hayley Lane</u> - On reviewing the two quotations obtained, It was AGREED to accept the quotation from NP Tree Management for the crown lifting of the lime trees.
<b>77/23</b>	<b>PLANNING</b>
(a)	<b>To Review, Comment and/or Note PC responses on planning applications:</b>
(i)	<b>23/02591/FUL Solar Photovoltaic Farm Installation, Land at White Hill, Well</b> to note Long Sutton & Well Parish Council's objection submission which can be read in full in Appendix One.
(ii)	<b>24/00450/HOU Little Copse, The Street</b> for erection of a single storey rear extension and installation of raised patio area alongside with ramps to rear of property and new front porch. Internal layout alterations and alterations to fenestration. It was AGREED to offer no objection to this planning application.
(iii)	<b>24/00348/HOU Stavanger House, Lord Wandsworth College</b> for alterations to the existing garage to include the erection of a two-storey rear extension, removal and raising of roof, conversion to habitable accommodations, blocking up windows to ground floor side and replacement of a window with door to ground floor other side. It was AGREED to offer no objection to this planning application.
(b)	<b>Any Other Planning Matters;</b>
(i)	<b>Big Meadow update</b> - It was AGREED for the PC to reach out to HDC's Mark Jaggard and Allsop's Daniel Legge to set up an onsite meeting. Residents and PC feel that compromise might be the best option to unlock the current impasse.
(ii)	<b>Lord Wandsworth College 24/00320/PREAPP</b> - Request for Initial meeting to discuss potential future developments. HDC have confirmed that LWC have asked for an on site meeting to discuss their future planning options.
<b>78/23</b>	<b>RECREATION GROUND &amp; PAVILION</b>
(i)	<u>Pavilion Showers</u> - On reviewing the quotations sought it was AGREED to accept Phelbe General Property and Garden Maintenance for the removal of loose and failed plaster in the shower room, skim walls, tile (with tiles donated by MB) and replace shower mixer.
(ii)	<u>Pavilion External Repair</u> - It was AGREED to accept the quotation from Phelbe General Property & Garden Maintenance for the repair to the back wall of the pavilion. The contractor will be asked to undertaken during the school Easter Holidays for ease of access.
(iii)	<u>Pavilion Internal Decoration</u> - After reviewing two quotations received to complete the internal decoration of the pavilion. SK kindly offered to complete the internal decoration free of charge. Members thanked SK for his generosity, and it was AGREED that the PC would purchase the paint required.
(iv)	<u>Playground</u> - No areas of concerns are noted. SK kindly agreed to review the cost of refurbishment of the slide station. Removal of rush, repaint.
<b>79/23</b>	<b>HIGHWAYS, SID &amp; PARISH LENGTHSMAN</b>
(a)	<u>Highways</u> - Following the recent resurfacing undertaken on the B3349 in South Warnborough residents raised their concerns of the additional damage caused along the 'diversion' route through LS. It was AGREED to bring this to the attention of HCC. Also noted is Hayley Lane would hugely benefit, from a safety perspective, with the addition of white lines down the centre of the carriageway. As the junction of Hayley Lane and the B3349 has yet to be reinstated it was felt an opportune moment to raise our request with Hampshire Highways.
(b)	<u>SID</u> - FH reported that between 1 <sup>st</sup> December 2023 and 1 <sup>st</sup> March 2024 there were 55,722 vehicles entering the village in a two-month period. We cannot determine the total number of vehicles through the village but perhaps a fair estimate to assume circa. 100,00 vehicles in that period. Of these 85% are exceeding the 30mph limit as they approach the lay-by on Hayley Lane. The schools account for a doubling of traffic during term time as can be seen in the comparative two weeks in February half term.

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(c)	<u>Parish Lengthsman</u> is due in the village on Thursday 4 April. MB has requested the following works: Grass cutting around the village pond together with cut back of reed growth. Clean all the village signs (missed from last visit) to include traffic signs, road nameplates and fingerpost directional. The entrance to recreation ground car park has a large hole that requires a yard of scalplings to repair. The Millennium Orchard at the requires a path cutting through the trees and a good tidy up with the fruit trees needing a prune.
<b>80/23</b>	<b>FOOTPATH WARDEN</b> <u>Footpath Warden's Report</u> – FH reports that generally footpaths have stood up to one of the wettest February in memory. FP3 is subject to flooding after heavy rainfall this will not be a feature as progressively as we approach the spring. For the rest, there are currently no outstanding reports registered and no information received. FP& has had a concrete block placed across the entrance which has been reported to Hants who are speaking to the landowner. It may be that the blocks have been placed to deter illegal activity, however they make it difficult for horses to enter the bridleway and do not enhance the rural amenity.
<b>81/23</b>	<b>LWC &amp; OGCC Liaison</b>
(i)	<u>Lord Wandsworth College</u> – JG and the Clerk attended a regular update meeting with Baz Bennett on 13 February. JG raised the ongoing concerns of traffic volumes, size of coaches and occasions of speeding around drop off and pick up times. LWC will continue to remind parents of their responsibilities when driving through the village. LWC indicated that they would be amendable to helping purchase a second SID device. If the PC wish to try for 20MPH speed throughout the village this would be a requirement.
(ii)	<u>Odiham &amp; Greywell Cricket Club (OGCC)</u> - Nothing additional to report.
<b>82/23</b>	<b>Long Sutton Primary School (LSPS)</b> - Nothing additional to report.
<b>83/23</b>	<b>ANY OTHER BUSINESS</b>
(i)	<u>HDC Waste Collection Agreement</u> - HDC have increased the bin collection charges from £468.00 £702.00 per annum. This includes 3 bins emptied fortnightly. The Clerk compared this with an independent contractor which showed no saving.
(ii)	<u>Bin at the Pond</u> - The Clerk continues to chase HDC for a replacement bin. <b>Post Meeting Note:</b> HDC have confirmed that this is owned by the PC and therefore any replacement is at their cost. SK has kindly offered to take a look to see if it can be repaired.
(iii)	<u>Street Furniture Refurbishment</u> - Deferred to next meeting.
<b>84/23</b>	<b>DATE OF NEXT MEETING</b> is confirmed as The Annual Parish Assembly on Thursday 25 April 2024 @ 7.00 p.m. in Long Sutton Village Hall.

*Meeting Closed at 21.15*

**APPENDIX ONE - Agenda item 77/23(i)**

LONG SUTTON & WELL PARISH COUNCIL OBJECTION COMMENT TO HART DISTRICT COUNCIL:Re: PLANNING APPLICATION 23/02591/FUL: SOLAR PHOTOVOLTAIC FARM INSTALLATION, LAND AT WHITE HILL, WELL, HOOK.

Long Sutton & Well Parish Council (LS&WPC) is a statutory consultee for the above planning application, the bulk of which sits within the boundary of the parish, and wishes to register a strong objection to the application.

In the current climate emergency, LS&WPC fully recognises the importance of renewable energy in the drive towards achieving net zero carbon, and is not opposed in principle to well-designed installations which are sensitive to their surroundings and setting, and which respect the local environment and the

Chairman .....

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local community; in short, where any "harms" which may be attributable to the installation do not outweigh the benefits. But in the case of application 23/02591/FUL, LS&WPC believes that the harms associated with this proposal outweigh to a considerable degree any benefits which may be claimed for it.

## **BACKGROUND**

A substantially similar proposal for a solar farm around Long Sutton was first mooted in 2020, when the applicants, Fleet Solar, sought a screening decision from Hart DC on whether or not a separate Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) would be required to supplement a full planning application. At the time LS&WPC (and many parishioners) argued that the potential impact of the proposed installation was such that an EIA should be required and Hart DC took a similar view. In a letter dated 25 January 2021 Hart said that

*"...it is anticipated that the development will result in significant environmental effects. Accordingly, the Local Planning Authority considers that based on the information provided, the proposed development is EIA development (positive screening opinion) due to the visual impacts on the landscape, impacts on ecology, potential impacts on flooding and heritage..."*

However, at the same time Fleet Solar also submitted an EIA screening request direct to the Secretary of State, who ruled that an EIA was not required, thus overriding Hart DC's decision. Fleet Solar submitted a fresh EIA screening request to accompany this planning application in November 2023 and Hart this time determined that the application did not require an EIA but noted in a letter dated 18 January 2024 that:

*"...the proposal has the potential to affect the landscape as a result of cumulative impact of the proposal together with the existing Chosley Farm..., the impact on the visual amenity of the local communities in relation to PROWs, namely footpath Long Sutton 1, 3 and 8 and the Long Sutton Conservation Area and South Warnborough Conservation Area."*

LS&WPC considers that the present application addresses none of these issues adequately. While the current proposal has been "tweaked" from the original 2020 plans, it is substantially the same as before. In particular it continues to be less than a kilometre from the Chosley Farm site; it continues to surround on three sides much of the historic village of Long Sutton, and it continues to occupy 260 acres of good quality arable agricultural land on undulating North Hampshire Downs landscape, criss-crossed by Public Rights of Way which are much-used by the local community and visiting walkers.

## **GOVERNMENT GUIDANCE**

LS&WPC is aware of the Government guidance on renewable energy installations in the National Planning Policy Framework and the associated Guidance.

In particular, LS&WPC draws attention to those elements of the National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG) (2023) relating to Renewable and Low Carbon Energy, which it believes to be particularly relevant to this application, namely the following statements:

*"- the need for renewable or low carbon energy does not automatically override environmental protections;*

*- cumulative impacts require particular attention, especially the increasing impact that large scale solar farms can have on landscape and local amenity as the number of solar arrays in an area increases;*

*- great care should be taken to ensure heritage assets are conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance, including the impact of proposals on views important to their setting;*

*- protecting local amenity is an important consideration which should be given proper weight in planning decisions."*

The Guidance advises local planning authorities to take account of the potential impacts on the local environment and the views of local communities in considering which areas are suitable. It also guides development away from the "best and most versatile" agricultural land.

## **HART LOCAL PLAN**

Hart's approved Local Plan, policy NBE 10 (Renewable and Low Carbon Energy) states that all such applications are subject to an assessment of, amongst other things:

*"-the significance or special interest of heritage assets*

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*-the impact on high grade agricultural land*

*-the impact on residential amenity, including...noise...and visual amenity;*

*-and the degree to which the developer has demonstrated any wider environmental, economic and social benefits of a scheme as well as how any adverse impacts have been minimised."*

The Local Plan document goes on to say (paragraph 309):

*"When assessing the impacts of a proposal for a renewable energy scheme we will consider the cumulative landscape and visual impacts of the development. Cumulative visual impacts may arise where two or more of the same type of renewable energy development will be visible from the same point or will be visible shortly after each other along the same journey."*

## **PLANNING APPLICATION 23/02591/FUL**

LS&WPC considers that this application, 23/02591/FUL, when assessed against the above national guidance and Local Plan policies, should be refused for the following reasons.

- 1) Proximity to the Chosley Farm site: if this application were to be approved it would give rise to a significant cumulative impact and concentration of intensive solar farm arrays covering some 500 acres in this relatively small rural area, thus seriously damaging the landscape and its rural character.
- 2) The landscape is attractive rolling downland, which the application itself acknowledges is "a pleasing rural landscape with a level of tranquillity...looking south towards Long Sutton the impression of calm undisrupted rural landscape is dominating". This will undoubtedly be seriously harmed by an installation of solar arrays spread across 9 fields, including some 30 large transformers (2.6m high x 3.4m long), all surrounded by continuous 2.2m high fencing.
- 3) Long Sutton (and Well) are ancient settlements and it is therefore not surprising that it has a significant concentration of listed buildings (32 in total) and 2 conservation areas. A number of these buildings and areas will be visible from, and have visibility of the installation, thus impacting on their historic character and setting. The application acknowledges this, but states only that these impacts "will be the subject of further assessment". LS&WPC draws particular attention to the egregious impact of the proposed installation on Andrews Farm, a Grade 2 listed building, which would be almost completely surrounded by solar arrays. LS&WPC agrees with the conclusions of expert consultants HCUK's report (commissioned by the owner of Andrews Farm), both in respect of the impact of the scheme on Andrews Farm, and on other heritage assets in the parish.
- 4) The loss of 260 acres of good quality arable agricultural land, 90% of which is classed
- 5) as Grade 2 or 3a, deemed "best and most versatile" land. At the present time, when UK food security is very much a matter of concern, such a move seems ill-advised and in the view of LS&WPC outweighs any claimed benefits of renewable energy generation. Considering that the proposed solar farm would be in place for at least 40 years, the applicant's conclusion (in their Agricultural Land Classification and Framework Soil Management Plan) that "reversible development of a solar farm on agricultural land quality would not significantly harm national agricultural interests" seems surprising, particularly given the cumulative impact of solar farms in this rural area.
- 6) In this regard, LS&WPC notes with concern that the installation would be implemented by a Special Purpose Vehicle, which would potentially enable liabilities for land remediation and decommissioning to be evaded (as this parish is currently experiencing with unfulfilled landscape obligations at Wingate Meadow following the collapse of the developer), and draws no reassurance from the bald statement in the applicant's Design, Accessibility & Planning Appraisal document that "a decommissioning Environmental Management Plan...would be prepared to ensure the process is undertaken effectively and in accordance with the relevant policy and recommended practices at the time".



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- 7) As Hart's screening decision letter of 18 January 2024 notes, 3 x PRoWs will be affected by the proposed installation. These PRoWs have important amenity value for local residents and visiting walkers and ramblers, which enable them to enjoy views of the "pleasing rural landscape with a level of tranquillity" and the "calm undisrupted rural landscape" acknowledged by the applicants themselves. These benefits will be significantly diminished if substantial sections of the PRoWs are flanked by high fencing, bulky container-sized transformers and noise-emitting equipment.
- 8) The proposed development area provides habitat for numerous species, yet the application fails to provide any information on how the scheme will avoid a net loss of diversity, and as such does not comply with national planning policy on biodiversity. LS&WPC agrees with the report by expert consultants ACJ Ecology, commissioned by the Long Sutton Solar Farm Action Group, which recommends that the scheme should be refused on these grounds alone.

In LS&WPC's view, all of the above harms significantly outweigh any claimed benefits of the scheme; this is compounded by its adjacency to the Chosley Farm site and the fact that, if approved, the scheme would have an expected lifespan of at least 40 years, which can hardly be described as "temporary": it will impact the landscape, the local environment, and the rural character of the area for a generation.

In conclusion LS&WPC would make 2 final points:

- 1) It does not follow that the benefits of renewable energy generation should always and automatically trump any environmental or community concerns. While we of course recognise that every application has its own characteristics, we note that in 2 recent planning appeals (refs. S62A/2022/0011 (11 May 2023) and APP/F1040/W/22/3313316 (21 July 2023)) the Inspector dismissed the appeal in the first case predominantly on grounds of loss of best and most versatile agricultural land for a period of 40 years; and in the second case on the harms to "character and appearance, landscape and visual matters, the settings of designated heritage assets...loss of BMVAL, highway safety, biodiversity and noise". All of these considerations apply to the Fleet Solar Farm application.
- 2) As a parish council when commenting on planning applications, LS&WPC always strives to take a balanced view as between the merits of the individual application and the wider impact of the application on the local environment and the local community – we do not oppose everything as a matter of course - and we have applied the same approach in arriving at our views on this application. Notwithstanding, we also need to take into account the views of our local community – as indeed Government planning guidance advises planning authorities to take account of the views of local communities in considering proposals for renewable energy installations. In this regard it is important to note that not only LS&WPC objects to this application but so too do the adjoining parish councils of South Warnborough and Odiham. Moreover, of the 193 comments on this application from individuals recorded on the planning portal, 190 object to it, 2 support it and 1 is neutral.

Taking all of the above considerations in to account LS&WPC objects to this application and urges Hart DC to refuse it.