

PLANNING COMMITTEE

Minutes of the Meeting held on Wednesday, 26th August 2020 virtually via MS Teams

Present: D G Pidwell (Chair)

Councillors: S Fielding D Challinor
M Charlesworth G Freeman
G A N Oxby M W Quigley MBE
M Richardson N J Sanders
B Tomlinson

Officers in attendance: C Hopkinson, J Krawczyk, J Lavender and S Wormald.

Apologies: H M Brand
L Schuller

(The meeting opened at 6.30 pm.)

99 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors H M Brand and L Schuller.

100 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

100a Members

Councillor D Challinor declared a disclosable pecuniary interest in PA 20/00051/FUL, he left the meeting for the duration of the Item.

The Chair advised that all members of the Committee had received a communication from Sturton-le-Steeple Parish Council in relation to PA 20/00117/FUL. He also informed Members that while he was conducting a site visit he was approached by a Member of the public and informed them that he could not engage in discussion.

100b Officers

There were no declarations of interest by officers.

101 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 22ND JULY 2020

The Chair advised Members that Dylan Jones, Major Projects Planner, has now left the Authority and wished him well on behalf on the Committee in his new position at Leicestershire.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 22nd July 2020 be approved.

102 MINUTES OF PLANNING CONSULTATION GROUP MEETINGS HELD BETWEEN 13 AND 27 JULY 2020

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RESOLVED that the minutes of the Planning Consultation Group meetings held between 13th and 27th July 2020 be noted.

103 OUTSTANDING MINUTES LIST

RESOLVED that the Outstanding Minutes List be noted.

SECTION A - ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION IN PUBLIC

Key Decisions

None.

Other Decisions

104 REPORT(S) OF THE HEAD OF REGENERATION

104a Public Interest Test

The Head of Regeneration had deemed that all Items on the Agenda were of a non-confidential nature.

104b Planning Applications and Associated Items

| <u>Application No</u> | <u>Applicant</u> | <u>Location and Proposal</u> |
|-----------------------|-------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 20/00117/FUL | Elgin Energy EsCo | Land North West And South Of Field Farm, Wood Lane Sturton Le Steeple, DN22 9HU Installation and Operation of a Solar Farm Comprising an Array of Ground Mounted Solar PV Panels with Associated Infrastructure Including Housing for Inverters a Substation Compound, Point of Connection Mast, Fencing, Security Cameras, Cabling, Access Tracks and a Temporary Construction Compound. |

Members were advised that the application sought full planning permission for the installation and operation of a solar farm and associated infrastructure. The application site consists of 14 fields which constitutes 97 hectares of agricultural land with the villages of Sturton le Steeple, South Wheatley and North Leverton lying north east to south east of the site with Claborough lying to the west of the site.

Slides were used to show site plans, site layout, proposed layout, floorplans, photographs and a typical partial section of a solar panel.

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The Planning Development Manager presented the proposals and a summary of responses from statutory consultees was given. As set out in the report no statutory consultees have objected to the proposal. Sturton-le-Steeple Parish Council have submitted an objection and 27 letters of objection have been received from members of the public, the matters raised were set out within the report.

Members were advised that the decision is considered under the planning balance test as the Council's adopted Core Strategy are considered to be out of date. Under the planning balance test a scheme should be approved unless the harm arising from the scheme significantly and demonstrably outweighs the benefits. The report identifies the environmental benefit of the scheme, the proposal meets the requirements for energy generation in paragraph 154 of the NPPF and the environmental part of the tests for sustainable development. It is not considered that the proposal would result in a significant change to the wider landscape of the area and the retention of and the strengthening of the existing boundary hedging will reduce the impact of the development. It is therefore considered that the proposal meets the requirements of the relevant policies.

Councillor J Naish spoke as Ward Member for Sturton. He advised that the application has been in the pipeline for over 18 months, in anticipation of submission he submitted a survey to all households in the ward.

- 103 households responded to the survey, roughly 11% of household in the area.
- The majority of respondents, 75%, are in favour of green energy production that broadly align with the neighbourhood plan polling.
- 66% support solar energy production in the ward as the preferred method of green energy production followed by wind and biomass.
- This particular proposal has proven divisive, less than half, 43% of respondents, were either strongly in favour or in favour of a solar farm on the proposed site. 37% were strongly against or against and 27% were unsure.
- 73% of all respondents expressed concerns about the proposed development including 64% of people who previously described themselves as being strongly in favour or in favour of green energy production.
- Two things stood out, firstly the loss of agricultural land and secondly the size of development.
- There is clear appetite for green energy production in the ward with solar energy as the preferred method however with only 43% strongly in favour or in favour of a solar farm on the proposed site it is important that the concerns raised are considered.
- As a Council want to make rural residents feel valued, they live in and know the landscape.
- He asked Members to consider the written representations and consider the application in context with known resident option.

Sturton-le-Steeple had submitted a written statement which was read out to the Committee:

“ Overview of application - In terms of size and area, if granted this will be one of the biggest industrial development surrounding Sturton Le Steeple, which is supposedly situated in the Mid Nottinghamshire Farmlands. It must be noted the surrounding area also includes, the industrialised facilities of West Burton power station and Quarry site off Station Road, which totally engulfs the eastern aspect of the village. This application is based on the western aspect of the village and due to its considerable size and location will engulf most of the western view and amenity use of the village and surrounding villages as well.

This application is not with the regional or local plan and cannot be considered to be innovative as it's a not a proven resource in this location and will not contribute to the local economy.

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Flooding, the village has been severely flooded 3 times in the last decade from runoff water and further 6 flooding events over the last year. The application will only increase the frequency and severity of the flooding events without careful assessment and design intervention,

A 200-acre site with 50mm of rain in an hour will produce over 10 million gallons of water (50,000 cubic metres) or 45,000 tonnes of water per hour if calculated using current building regulation specifications. It is accepted that this rainfall would fall on the site regardless of the use, but because of the panel installation it is projected that 50% of the area will be covered 100 acres, this means that 5 million gallons (25 000 cubic metres) will be prematurely displaced and create a run off scenario. This application is on Maun Hill, but the impact will be felt in the centre of Sturton and Wheatley.

Glare, no real impact assessment included, the design details provided suggest that most residents in direct sight of the site will observe glare for around one and a half hours a day.

Amenity value, the application does not acknowledge or recognise the current use of the area, by the community for health and wellbeing, especially within a village location which is already impacted heavily by industrial development, within the application there are very large areas of land which besides the designated bridleways and footpaths are used regularly and freely by the community and contribute to the wellbeing of the village residents and wider community. The use of this area during Lockdown has been a sanctuary for many and exercise is part of the government's strategy against obesity

Environmental, the land being proposed within the application is multi award winning environmental farm

Conclusion - as stated, there is overwhelming support for renewable energy and is supported. BUT it needs to be environmental progress and inclusive of the needs of the communities it engages with. This application at best is under considered and at its worst dis-ingenuous to the local villages and really is simply offsetting the environment benefits it is trying to deliver by not fully understanding the impact something of this size and scale can cause. North facing aspect, uneven topography, sloping, tree shadowed landscape and naturally poor percolation. This translates into an inefficient site causing ill considered serious environmental impacts that are left unmanageable by this application (25 years)."

Mr and Mrs Evans submitted a written statement in objection which was read out to the Committee:

"Regarding above to the planning application referenced above I would like to formally raise our objections.

Our primary reason for this is objection is on the grounds, that as regular and frequent horse riders we fear that the amenity and recreational use of the bridle ways situated on the proposed Solar farm will create a significant change to our amenity use and safety of the provision we currently enjoy.

Secondly, is the existing wildlife we see, our question is focusing on the small herd of deer and the owls that nest in the trees as we go around. I note that deer fencing is going to be installed, which means the herd will be displaced, which is particularly concerning, as this is a breeding herd which relies on its territory as part of its herd status. The tree survey which has been submitted suggests that some trees have been omitted, does this mean we will lose nesting sites for the owls as well.

Thirdly as a migraine sufferer and one of the closest houses to the proposed facility, we have real concerns about the potential glare from the panels at certain times of the day.

We feel this application has failed to consider the current use of this area and how much the local community relies on this area for exercise, even more so in the recent lockdown.

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It provides a real flood risk as it feeds into areas which are affected by the rapid run off from such a large-scale installation to the local villages, particularly Oswald Beck which we live next to. This has flooded over 6 times last winter already to varying degrees of severity, twice onto the Wheatley Road.

The significance of this is that it is the high flow of water from Oswald Beck that stalls Wheatley Beck, which consequently as it did on the 7th of November this year cause severe flooding to the centre of the village, notably the School again. The application states it will not create a flood risk as it is not in a flood zone, clearly this is disingenuous, because it is situated on Maun Hill and feeds into the flood zones. 200 acres of solar panels is only going add to the flooding issues we are witnessing.

This is an application purporting environmental benefits but delivering environmental damage.”

The applicant’s agent, Mr A Mott, submitted an audio statement in support of the application which was played to the Committee:

- The development is a ground mounted solar farm with a capacity of 49.9mw located on agricultural land to the south west of West Burton Power Station.
- Permission is sought for a temporary period of 30 years.
- The solar farm will be fenced with deer fencing and all public rights of way will remain open and accessible.
- Substantial areas of landscaping are proposed, including nearly 1km of new hedgerows, 38 trees, 0.6ha of woodland and grassland planting including a traditional grass mix to be grazed by livestock and wildflower mix in the margins adjoin the footpaths.
- The UK is legally bound through the climate change act to reduce carbon emission by 80% by 2050, the development would contribute towards meeting these requirements and be fully supported by energy policy and facilitate the move towards a low carbon economy. The development will generate around 50,000mw hours of electricity per year the equivalent to the average annual consumption of 15,000 households.
- Considerable care has been taken over the design of the development to avoid unacceptable environmental and amenity effects. The development is not in or close to any landscape designations and does not significantly affect any heritage assets.
- The location in open countryside ensures that residential amenity effects are acceptable and the proposed grazing of the land ensures agricultural activities continue.
- The applicant held a pre-application meeting with the Council in January 2018 and a public exhibition in May 2019, the timings have allowed the design and layout to be amended flowing comments raised and various environmental assessments to be undertaken. Key design changes reduce visual impact. The applicant has continued to work with the Council and key consultees.
- A robust landscape and visual appraisal forms part of the application. The Council sought professional external landscape advice and agreed with the conclusions reached in the appraisal and supported approval of the application.
- There are no objections raised by statutory consultees.

Members asked questions/ raised comments regarding:

- If the amount of energy produced by the solar farm would replace the amount displaced by Cottam and West Burton Power Stations.
- The glare caused by the solar panels.
- The category of agricultural land.
- The loss of arable land when the country is likely to face food shortages in the future.
- The size of the proposed site.

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- The retention of public footpaths and bridleways.
- The grazing of livestock.
- Archaeological assessment.

RECOMMENDATION OF THE HEAD OF REGENERATION – Grant planning permission subject to conditions.

COMMITTEE DECISION – Grant planning permission subject to conditions.

(Councillor D Challinor left the meeting)

| <u>Application No</u> | <u>Applicant</u> | <u>Location and Proposal</u> |
|-----------------------|------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 20/00051/FUL | Gleeson LTD | Regeneration Land Off Essex Road, Bircotes, DN11 8BS Erect 120 Dwellings with Garages and/or Parking Spaces Together with Associated Roads, Sewers and Infrastructure. |

Members were advised that the application sought permission to erect 120 dwellings with garages and/or parking spaces and associated infrastructure. The application site is Greenfield land of 4.36ha which lies in the north eastern part of Bircotes directly adjacent to the built-up part of the village.

Slides were used to show the site location, proposed layout, proposed access, elevations and photographs.

The Planning Development Manager presented the proposals and a summary of responses from statutory consultees was given as outlined within the report.

Members were advised that one pre-committee question had been submitted by a member in relation to the impact of the development on surrounding footpaths. Members were informed that the development would retain the existing footpath and provide an additional link to the industrial estate and footpath to the north of the site.

(The meeting was adjourned for 5 minutes due to technical difficulties with the speakers' microphone)

Mr Gamble spoke in support of the application as Land Director of Gleeson Homes:

- In strange times but happy to sites have now reopened and building has recommenced in a covid safe manor.
- Gleeson specialise in entry level housing for first time buyers giving customers at the lower end of the housing market a chance to buy their own homes. The proposal is for the development of 120 such homes.
- Gleeson take special care in ensuring selling prices are affordable for young first time buyers.
- On this development intend to start selling prices of £125,000 for a 2 bedroom family home.
- The new help to buy scheme allow first time buyers to purchase with a mortgage sum of around £93,000 making affordable to young working couple on minimum wage. The weekly cost around £70 per week, more affordable than renting.

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- Gleeson intend all house at Bircotes to fall below new regional help to buy cap ensuring properties are truly affordable.
- Gleeson sold over 85% of properties last year to first time buyers.
- Following the pandemic Gleeson are determined to focus on selling not only to first time buyer but to those that fit government key worker definition, to do this Gleeson have a key worker priority programme that allows priority to reserve a plot ahead of the general public and six months on paid mortgage. The hope is around three quarters of future sales to this group.
- Gleeson also role out community matters programme on site.
- Pleased to conform Gleeson do not sell homes to landlord's or allow subletting to ensure homes sold to those that need them.

Members asked questions/ raised comments regarding:

- Comments from Natural England.
- Affordable housing.
- Viability.
- The previous application for 150 dwellings.
- Transport.
- The paly park provision.

RECOMMENDATION OF THE HEAD OF REGENERATION – Grant Planning Permission subject to the completion of a S106 agreement and conditions as outlined within the report.

COMMITTEE DECISION – Grant Planning Permission subject to the completion of a S106 agreement and conditions as outlined within the report.

105 ANY OTHER BUSINESS WHICH THE CHAIR CONSIDERS TO BE URGENT

As there was no other urgent business to be considered, the Chair closed the meeting.

(The meeting closed at 8.21 pm.)