

UPLEADON PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of Upleadon Parish Council held on Thursday 9 June 2022 at Upleadon Village Hall at 7.30 pm.

Present: Cllr M Manning (Chairman), Cllr H Dunn, Cllr Mrs P Turner, Cllr Mrs P Cooke, Cllr P Dallow, Cllr Mrs W Fabian

Also present: District Cllr P Burford, County Cllr Mrs G Moseley, approximately 12 members of the public together with representatives of Pathfinder Clean Energy

Apologies: Cllr E Wood – due to illness

- 2.00 Cllr Manning welcomed everyone to the meeting and advised the public they would be given the opportunity to comment and speak following the presentation about to be given regarding a proposed Solar Farm in the Parish. He reminded Councillors that their views on the proposal should not be voiced at this stage and deliberation would come later if and when a planning application came forward.
- 2.1 Rob Shaw– representative of Pathfinder Clean Energy gave a presentation about their proposals to build a Solar Farm in Stream Lane on the periphery of the Parish. He advised proposals were at early stages but that they were keen to explore mutual benefits with the community. He gave some background to his company formed in 2017 and advised he had largely been involved for a decade in Solar energy. Following the enormous climate change they were keen to create schemes with low impact on communities and which would bring benefits for everyone. They believed unlike other sources of clean energy, solar panels are safe, practically silent, produce no emissions, enable agricultural activity to continue and create improved habitats for plants and animals. Solar energy is the easiest to deploy and the cheapest. Stream Lane was chosen as a suitable site for developing as a Solar Farm, having looked at a wide range of options across the local region and this was considered the best option they could identify. It is close to a connection to the electricity grid and sites outside of the green belt and areas of outstanding natural beauty. The project has a life-span of 40 years, after which the land would be returned to full farming use. During operation the fields would remain available for animal grazing, and still be in agricultural use. Existing trees and hedges around the site would be retained and gapped up to provide screening as well as 400m of new native hedging planted. The solar panels and equipment would be positioned low to the ground to minimise visibility from surrounding areas and new hedging will minimise visibility from Stream lane. The land under and around the solar panels will be a mix of sheep grazing and a wildflower meadow and the removal of land from intensive agriculture will allow soils to naturally regenerate. The site will be set back with wide field margins to create connectivity between habitats. At the end of the 40 year period the components could be recycled and would not go to landfill. It is possible a further application could be made at this time, but it would depend on the circumstances and whether it was considered solar would continue to be needed at that time.

The intention is to finalise the design/management plan and then it is anticipated a planning application for the proposal will be submitted to the Planning Authority (Forest of Dean District Council) later in the summer who will consult with the community and stakeholders inviting comment and feedback as part of the planning process.

Throughout the presentation a number of questions/comments were asked by members of the public. These included:-

Q. Do you use Greenbelt land? The response was that

A. They try to avoid this, as well as areas of outstanding national beauty and other environmental areas.

Q. How long will the construction period be?

A. It will take approximately 4 months to construct. There will be 4 or so HGV a day entering the compound via Hooks Lane for a number of weeks and there will be a named contact for the public to access. The site will not be lit in any way and the security fencing will be by way of post and wire. They will put in badger gates and field margins for deer to move around the site.

Q. There are concerns that as a result of this residents may not be able to sell their properties? Is there compensation available?

A. We are not aware of any solar farms reducing the value of resident's properties. The effect of them is cheaper electricity, however they are willing to talk about community benefits/projects. The Parish Council may have ideas for any projects in the area.

Q. What about screening the site – when would this happen?

A. They would plant hedging during the first planting season.

Concern was given with regard to the length of time a hedge would take to grow to effectively act as screening and how was the site going to be made invisible?

Appreciation was made of this, and that the site would not be completely invisible, however the bigger picture would see a reduction in the risks of climate change, their plans would significantly increase biodiversity providing a local environmental benefit whilst also generating renewable energy. There will be lots of positives and significant benefits for everyone.

Q. What about flooding and run off of water?

A. The solar panels will not make any significant difference.

Q. What is the cost for installation and running of the proposed solar farm?

A. It is projected at around £3/4M

Q. Will it be enlarged at any time?

A. No, we know its capacity.

Cllr Manning thanked Robin and his colleagues for attending the meeting and explaining their intentions with regard to the installation and running of the Solar farm, to the Parish Council and its parishioners.

2.2 To give consideration to Planning applications:-

P0657/22/FUL Eden's Hill Farm, Eden's Hill Upleadon
Conversion of agricultural building to a dwelling with alterations and associated works.
Demolition of existing structures

It was proposed by Cllr Mrs Fabian No Objection, however clarification is sought regarding workshop which is not shown on original application, seconded by Cllr Mrs Turner, all agreed.

P0658/22/LBC Eden's Hill Farm, Eden's Hill, Upleadon.
Listed building consent for the conversion of agricultural building to a dwelling with alterations and associated works. Demolition of existing structures

It was proposed No Objection by Cllr Mrs Turner, seconded by Cllr Dallow, and all agreed.

The meeting was declared closed at 8.10 pm.