

FURNEUX PELHAM PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Parish Council meeting held on Thursday, 1st July 2021, at 7:00 pm in the Furneux Pelham Village Hall.

Present: Cllr S Bratt, Cllr R Gale, Cllr R Rodrigues, Cllr H Smart, Cllr T Langlois and Cllr E Wills.

In attendance: F Forth, Parish Clerk and 30 members of the public.

Prior to the meeting formally starting, the Chair reminded those present of the COVID rules and that it was not a public meeting where anyone could speak at any time. For item 21/64 - Proposed Solar Farm, provided fellow Cllrs agreed, Standing Orders would be suspended to enable residents to contribute on this item and the Chair outlined the timing limitations for this as well as stating that the Parish Council would not enter into a debate on this topic. Finally, the Chair reported that Cllrs were participating in a Zoom call with the Solar Farm developers on 5th July to be briefed on the project and intended to feedback any residents' comments received at this meeting. If any resident does not get the opportunity to speak at this meeting, comments can be emailed to the Clerk prior to Monday to be passed on to the developers.

21/60) Apologies

None.

21/61) Declarations of interest or dispensation requests

None.

21/62) Chair's announcements

The Chair announced that yet another solar farm proposal had appeared on Uttlesford District Council's website: proposal covering 67 hectares between Stocking Pelham and Berden, on the same side of the road as the substation.

21/63) Adoption of previous minutes

RESOLVED that the minutes of the annual meeting held on the 6th May 2021 be accepted as a true and accurate record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

21/64) Proposed Solar Farm

The Chair recapped on the various proposals in the local area given that there were a number at differing stages:

- a. in 2016, a battery storage unit was approved by Uttlesford District Council (UDC) (ref: UTT/16/2316/FUL) in Berden parish, next to the Pelham Substation. The unit is operational but has not been screened in accordance with the planning permission given and UDC has not enforced compliance;
- b. in February 2021, a proposed "Pelham Spring Solar Farm" at Battles Farm, located in Berden and Manuden parishes, (to the north of the road from East End Furneux Pelham to Manuden,) was publicised. No part of this proposal is within this parish and no planning application has been submitted as yet;
- c. in May 2021, an application was submitted to East Herts Council (East Herts ref: 3/21/0969/FUL) for a battery storage unit, to the north of Greens Farm. To date, 88 comments from residents had been submitted, almost all objecting to the application;
- d. in June 2021, a proposal for a solar farm on the east side of Violets Lane was made public. Approximately 90% of the proposal is within this parish with the remainder in Brent Pelham. Five objections had been submitted, though no planning application has been put forward; and
- e. on 1st July 2021, the proposal mentioned earlier (ref: 21/62) between Stocking Pelham and Berden appeared on the Uttlesford website.

Standing orders were suspended to allow residents' comments on this proposal.

Residents provided a number of comments in relation to the proposed solar farm which included:

- view that the area was being deluged with proposals for solar farms and battery facilities. Cllr H Smart commented that there are two companies canvassing farmers to see who is interested. It is a national approach which the Government is encouraging. The Chair pointed out that the cumulative impact of the number of proposals being put forward is a material consideration in planning;
- battery facilities are the main issue as, to be feasible, a solar farm needs to be near one - any solar farm within 2 miles of a battery facility is really lucrative;
- in terms of screening a battery facility, the National Grid stipulates that the screening must avoid overhanging cables and there must be over 5 metres between the top of the screen and the sag points in the cables which is difficult to achieve;

- National Grid had submitted a holding objection to the battery facility proposed at Green's Farm;
- Campaign group established - "Protect the Pelhams" - which has a Facebook page and will be supported by a website. The Group considers that the Pelhams is not the right place for these installations:
 - does not fit with East Herts Council's District Plan for land in the rural area beyond the green belt;
 - Grade 2 arable land;
 - water run off issues for the Violet's Lane proposal as significantly increases the flood risk for the Brewery development;
 - access through Albury would make the roads a "death trap"; and
 - the natural environment would be affected - no wildlife will run through a solar farm;
- footpaths go through the proposed area and the removal of the fields through the installation of a solar farm would affect peoples' mental health, and pub would suffer as fewer walkers would be in the area. The Clerk highlighted that footpaths, as public rights of way, have to be maintained even if within a field of solar panels;
- reminder that Violet's Lane is the longest stream bed;
- visual impact of acres of solar panels;
- safety for those in the area as indicated by the need for CCTV and all the associated death/danger notices that would be published;
- concern that the proposal lacks transparency;
- request that the Parish Council support the campaign. Cllr H Smart highlighted that the Parish Council had a statutory duty to comment on planning applications, explaining that objections had been submitted in respect of the only planning application received to date - battery facility at Green's Farm. Reliance is placed on East Herts Council's Planners to undertake due diligence. Emotional/subjective views on an application are best placed coming from residents;
- volatility of lithium batteries highlighted together with risks associated with any resultant fire: depleted water resources in the area, noxious gases into the air, environmental damage from the fire and putting the fire out. The Chair stated that East Herts Council would consult with the Fire Service;
- consideration that renewable energy could be undertaken in different ways - for example, solar panels on roofs in industrial areas; and

- request for effective communication. All residents present agreed that their email addresses could be shared by the Clerk with the lead for "Protect the Pelhams". The Chair also confirmed that communication links with the Chairs of the neighbouring Parish Councils are in place.

Note - the background to the two objections made by the Parish Council to the battery facility at Green's Farm was covered. The initial objection was made by the Parish Council in respect of access as it was considered that the application failed on this point and therefore the entirety of the application did not work. In addition, the Parish Council was a co-signatory to an objection letter sent on behalf of the Parish Councils for Berden, Stocking Pelham, Brent Pelham and Furneux Pelham which covered the entirety of the application.

Residents were reminded that the Parish Council can only comment on planning applications. To date, there is no planning application for the proposed solar farm at Violet's Lane. In addition, the Clerk clarified that the Cllrs were receiving a briefing from the developers on this proposal and would feedback residents' views received at this meeting. It was not a formal meeting of the Parish Council therefore there would be no minutes published as a result.

Cllr Geoff Williamson (EHC) concurred that the Parish Council had been correct to focus its objection to the battery facility at Green's Farm on the key aspect of the proposal - access. Herts Highway had also objected on the basis of access and reference made to the National Grid's holding objection. He also stated that he had requested that this application be considered at the Development Management Committee so that Cllrs make the decision and not officers but there is no guarantee that his request will be granted.

The Chair thanked residents present for their contributions and reminded them to email any additional points to the Clerk by Monday.

Standing Orders reinstated.

21/65) Report on outstanding matters

An update in relation to the following outstanding matters was provided:

- pallets yard - the Clerk reported that there had been no progress that she was aware of. Cllr G Williamson (EHC) commented that East Herts Council had built up some momentum of this issue through recent site visits and the Legal Department were now looking into possible options;
- road signs and marking - the Clerk reported that Cllr G McAndrew (HCC) had provided advice that any Missing or Damaged Road Signs needed to be reported online to Fault Reporting as Ringway would then assess the further action required;

- Parish EV (electric vehicle) charging community hubs project - Cllr B Gale confirmed that the planned site visits had not yet been undertaken. This had been raised with Cllr G McAndrew (HCC) a few times but no response as yet;
- Allotment fence - the Clerk reported that quotes are still being sought for the allotment fence repair;
- Barleycroft End - the Clerk reported that Cllr G McAndrew (HCC) had confirmed that a Design/Quote for the verge opposite Millwrights Cottage had been requested from Ringway for consideration for funding in 2022/23. In terms of speeding, details of the locations where speeding was perceived to be a problem had been provided to Cllr G McAndrew (HCC) so that the survey devices can target these locations. It was anticipated that the survey would be undertaken after September - need to avoid the school holidays - but there was a backlog and Furneux Pelham was in a queue;
- Book swap shelter - Cllr B Gale reported that this had been raised with The Brewery Tap owners and they were not keen to act as the repository for the books. It was agreed that the resident who had offered would be contacted to see if still interested in helping;
Post meeting - The Brewery Tap owners were prepared to deal with the books and would undertake the necessary work to make the "book swap shelter" a reality.
- Insurance - the Clerk reported that following the last meeting, the insurance policy had been reviewed and she confirmed that it remained appropriate for the Parish Council's needs therefore the renewal process had been completed with the payment being made.

21/66) Whitebarns Lane footpath

The Chair outlined the background to this agenda item, including highlighting the following information from Cllr G McAndrew (HCC):

- Clarion have advised repairs would be completed by the end of the week, they have tasked their contractors to do this work; and
- for Herts County Council (HCC) to adopt the road as Highway and maintain it in the future, the current owners/users would need to bring it up to adoptable standards, probably by means of a S.278 agreement. It was understood that HCC's Rights of Way Team remit was to maintain a two metre strip, along the definitive line and not the whole width.

Cllr B Gale reported that the HCC's Rights of Way team had stated that, after the Clarion complete their repair, that it would be inspected regularly. In addition, further repairs would be carried out, of a similar nature to those

undertaken just before Christmas, when its condition deteriorates to the point that it did at that time.

RESOLVED to request that Herts County Council, Rights of Way, repair and maintain the access route to Whitebarns cul-de-sac, recognising it as a "functional" route, not an "optional" route.

21/67) Finance

a. Update on current financial position

The financial statement for the current position was noted.

The Clerk reported that, after the last meeting, The Brewery Tap had applied for a grant from East Herts Council to make improvements to the village playground. These improvements included adding seating under a new covered area, a litter bin, installation of lighting to extend playground use in the winter months and a mud kitchen for outdoor play. As there was no specific bank account for the village playground, at the suggestion of East Herts Council, the Chair was approached to allow any grant funds to be accounted for by the Parish Council. This was agreed and subsequently, a grant had been awarded for part of the improvements - the seating. Once confirmed with The Brewery Tap, the grant would be accepted.

b. Expenditure

RESOLVED to approve the following expenditure:

Fred Knight, Litter picking & grass cutting	£57.92
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Cheque and supporting documentation would be signed after the meeting.

c. Donation

The Clerk stated that a request had been received, and circulated with the agenda, from the Church Treasurer for a donation to support churchyard maintenance work.

Following discussion, RESOLVED to approve a donation to Furneux Pelham Parochial Church Council for the sum of £550.

21/68) Police

The Clerk highlighted that PCSO Leon de Bruyn had been unable to attend the meeting, but he had confirmed that there were no reported crimes over June. In addition, the Clerk reported that, as yet, there was no date for the next quarterly liaison meeting between the Police and local Parish Clerks.

21/69) Update from East Herts Council (EHC)

Cllr G Williamson (EHC) highlighted that the Boundary Commission were currently undertaking its review. The last review had been undertaken in 1998. One of the assessments made within the review was the number of residents per Ward Cllr and he was hoping that there would be no impact for him from this.

Following a question, Cllr G Williamson (EHC) confirmed that devolution was no longer an option within Hertfordshire. The leadership at Herts County Council had changed and the existing status quo was to be maintained.

21/70) Planning

a. Applications

The Clerk reported that since the last meeting, 1 application had been considered and 1 application granted permission.

Details of all applications are on the Parish Council's website and those since the last meeting are detailed in Appendix A.

b. Ratify decision

The Clerk reported that after the last meeting, the Parish Council decided by email to object to the planning application for a 50 MW battery energy storage system facility - ref: 3/21/0969/FUL. In addition, the Parish Council also decided by email to be a co-signatory, along with the Parish Councils of Berden, Stocking Pelham and Brent Pelham, to a letter objecting to this facility.

RESOLVED to ratify the objections submitted in respect of planning application 3/21/0969/FUL

21/71) Councillor updates

Cllr H Smart commented that the representation from the village had surpassed the norm for the last five years.

The Chair confirmed that the draft Minutes would be posted on the Parish Council website in due course, and this would be highlighted on Facebook and summarised in "The Pelhams" magazine.

Cllr E Wills was looking forward to understanding his role more as a Cllr.

In response to concerns raised by Cllr R Rodrigues, the Clerk confirmed that light and noise complaints regarding The Brewery Tap needed to be reported to East Herts Council's (EHC) Environmental Health Department. The form to complete is easily accessible on EHC's website.

21/72) Clerk's information

The Clerk reported on the following matters:

- The Queen's Green Canopy - a UK-wide tree planting initiative to mark the Queen's Platinum Jubilee in 2022 had been launched, and individuals through to organisations are encouraged to get involved. Further details are available from the Clerk for anyone wishing to get involved; and
- East Herts Council's (EHC) parish/town council engagement event - this had been held after the last Parish Council meeting and provided an opportunity to hear updates on a number of matters, majority of which the Parish Council was already aware of. EHC intend to hold twice yearly seminar/forums for Planning matters with the first being held in September, linked to the anticipated White Paper and upcoming 5-yearly review of the District Plan.

21/73) Residents comments

Whitebarns Lane

The Chair reminded those present of the work being undertaken by residents to improve the access at Whitebarns Lane. In addition, he commented that an update in relation to the complaint to the Ombudsman was expected.

A resident explained the background to raising a complaint with the Ombudsman. Following an initial response, the complaint has been passed to the investigation team who will investigate why Herts County Council ceased maintenance of this only access. A decision would be expected in 4 weeks. In the meantime, focus needed to be on the maintaining the footpath as a functional and not optional route.

Allotments

A resident highlighted that the current Chair of the Allotment Association was standing down and would be replaced by Sarah Wright. She understood the need to sort out the fencing repair and also requested that the pathway to the kissing gate was cleared. Cllr E Wills highlighted that he regularly strims this section but had been away recently.

21/74) Next meeting

Confirmed that the next meeting of the Parish Council would be held in person on 2nd September 2021 at 7pm in the Village Hall.

The meeting ended at 8.49 pm.

Planning applications since the last meeting detailed below:

3/21/0797/VAR - Variation of condition 2 (approved plans) of the planning approval 3/18/1479/FUL: Construction of 3 bedroom house: Condition removal - change to fenestration and relocation of chimneys at Land Adjoining Wych Elm Cottage, Barleycroft End: **Permission granted**

3/21/0969/FUL - Construction of a 50 MW battery energy storage system facility and associated access, landscaping and other infrastructure works at Land at Greens Farm, East End: **Application considered**