



East Cambridgeshire District Council

Minutes of a Meeting of the Planning Committee

Held at The Grange, Nutholt Lane, Ely, CB7 4EE at 2:00pm on
Wednesday 15 November 2023

Present:

Cllr Chika Akinwale
Cllr Christine Ambrose Smith
Cllr David Brown
Cllr Lavinia Edwards
Cllr Martin Goodearl
Cllr Bill Hunt
Cllr James Lay
Cllr John Trapp

Officers:

Angela Tyrrell – Senior Legal Assistant
Jane Webb – Senior Democratic Services Officer
Simon Ellis – Planning Manager
Andrew Philips – Planning Team Leader
Toni Hylton – Planning Team Leader

In attendance:

Jake Lambert – Planning Agent (Agenda Item 4 / Minute 52)
Louise Simmonds – Barrett David Wilson Homes (Agenda Item 4 / Minute 52)
Richard Barker – Project Manager, Ridge Clean Energy Ltd (Agenda Item 5/Minute 53)
Marjorie Glasgow – Ridge Clean Energy Ltd - (Agenda Item 5 / Minute 53)
Nigel Goodhew - Ridge Clean Energy Ltd - (Agenda Item 5 / Minute 53)
Daniela Jenkins - Ridge Clean Energy Ltd - (Agenda Item 5 / Minute 53)
Cooper Csorba - Ridge Clean Energy Ltd - (Agenda Item 5 / Minute 53)
Cllr Claire Daunton – County Councillor – (Agenda item 5 / Minute 53)

Lucy Flintham – Development Services Office Team Leader
Annalise Lister – Communications Manager

49. Apologies and substitutions

Apologies were received from Cllr Holtzmann, Cllr C Whelan, and Cllr Wilson.

50. Declarations of interest

Councillor Ambrose-Smith declared an interest in agenda item 4 (20/01238/FUM, Land North of Saxon Business Park, Woodfen Road, Littleport) due to being a local Member and a Member of Littleport Town Council and confirmed she approached the application with an open mind, was interested in what her colleagues had to say and would take part in the debate and vote

51. Chairman's announcements

The Chairman made the following announcements:

- Due to a Government change in legislation (Town and Country Planning (Fees for Applications, Deemed Applications, Requests and Site Visits) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2023), as from 6 December 2023, applicants would no longer be entitled to submit a free second application after refusal; instead, the second application would be a separate application, and another fee would be charged.
- The last-minute site visit to agenda item 5 (22/01291/ESF – Six Oaks Renewal Energy Park, Newmarket Road Bottisham) had been an invaluable and worthwhile visit.

52. 20/01238/FUM – Land to North of Saxon Business Park, Woodfen Road, Littleport

Andrew Phillips, Planning Team Leader, presented a report (Y92, previously circulated) recommending granting delegated powers to approve the hybrid planning application for 180 dwellings, landscaping, sustainable urban drainage, public open space and associated primary infrastructure; and outline planning permission for up to 217 dwellings with all matters reserved except access which will be approved as part of the full application.

Members were shown slides of the location, site, proposed development plan, highways improvements and house types.

The Planning Team Leader informed Members that the site was within the village framework, connected primarily to the A10 (new roundabout included) and opposite Littleport Primary School, with industrial parks located to the north and south. A proposed roundabout on the A10 would connect the main vehicular access point to the site and be built prior to first occupation on the site. The Woodfen Road would be improved with access points added and a cycle/footpath link added from the Littleport exit to the south of the site, out to the primary school crossing at Parsons Lane.

The main considerations for the application were deemed to be:

- **Principle of Development** – This was an allocated site within the local plan Policy LIT1, allocated for up to 7 hectares of employment. 147 additional dwellings would also be provided (above allocation) and the roundabout was designed to enable a fourth arm in order that the

possibility of additional employment land could come forward in the future on the opposite side of the A10.

- **Highway Safety** – No objections had been received from the Local Highways Authority. The access point and site layout had been amended to overcome concerns from the Highways Authority. A S106 and conditions would be required for off-site road/highway improvements. Local concern had been raised around Woodfen Road and construction traffic due to the fact that Woodfen Road/Wisbech Road junction was considered dangerous when turning right. The developer had now sought an alternative construction access to avoid Woodfen Road and a CEMP (Construction of Environmental Management Plan) Condition was suggested to allow for this.
- **Housing Mix** – The scheme has been amended to reflect the concerns Members had on other sites which has resulted with the scheme now being more SMHA (Strategic Housing Market Assessment) compliant. The proposal would also include 5% self-build plots. Affordable Housing was 20% of the scheme on a 77/33 split which was considered acceptable as it followed the Council's independent market viability assessment carried out in 2019 and would be suitably spread out across the site.
- **Visual Amenity** – The conclusion of the Urban Designer comments stated "Overall, as the masterplan strategy is so strong, we consider this scheme to be acceptable and compliant with the principles of paragraphs 126 and 130 of the NPPF, the National Design Guide and Policy ENV2 of the Local Plan." In their opinion, the scheme meets the definition of 'beautiful' design, as required by the NPPF.
- **Residential Amenity** – A bund and acoustic fence was sought along the western boundary, primarily to reduce noise from the A10 but also the industrial park. Currently just one dwelling required mechanical ventilation in the outline phase, this was indicative only and could possibly be removed at a later stage. The recommended conditions from Environmental Health were added to the recommendations to ensure residential amenity was protected of both existing and future residents.
- **Flood Risk & Drainage** – The Internal Drainage Board (IDB) no longer had any concerns regarding the site and the Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA) had no objections in principle but had sought more details; this was contained within the conditions.
- **Ecology** – The Developer had worked with the Wildlife Trust in order to provide a high-level amount of biodiversity both on-site and off-site in order to reach the 10% biodiversity net gain. There was no set national requirement of 10% as this was yet to progress through Parliament, however, the Council's Senior Ecologist had stated that the data may not have been as accurate as what had been submitted and therefore this had no positive weight due to the conflicting views of the two different ecologists.
- **Open space** – The Scheme had been amended to increase the amount of equipped play space in order to better meet the needs of the residents on site and to mitigate against the demand of future residents and the wider community.

- **S106 & CIL** – A legal agreement was still being drawn up and detailed the following: affordable housing, open space, sustainable drainage systems, wheeled bins, self-build dwellings, off-site biodiversity contributions, library contributions, bus stop/service contributions, highway contributions. The County Council were seeking funding for Littleport schools from the developer; however, this was contained within the CIL list therefore the developer would already be paying CIL monies to improve the schools and it would not be reasonable to ask the developer to pay twice to improve the same schools. The County Council would need to request the CIL money in order to improve the schools to accommodate the additional children.

In summary, the principle of development was considered acceptable and on balance the proposal was considered to bring forward a significant number of dwellings on an allocated site and was therefore considered to outweigh the negatives, subject to conditions and S106 Agreement.

The Planning Team Leader pointed out to Members that following the site visit earlier in the day, it had been noted that some of the bus stops recently had been improved and therefore the conditions and S106 agreement might need to be slightly modified to accommodate the changes already carried out.

On the invitation of the Chairman, Louise Simmonds – Planning Lead, Barratt & David Wilson Homes (BDW), Cambridgeshire, for the application, addressed the committee:

“I hope that many of you will be familiar with our product, but I wanted to spend some time setting out our approach and commitment to delivering this allocation before handing over to Jake Lambert from Bidwells to discuss the planning merits of the site in more detail. BDW have been building homes since 1958 and we are incredibly proud of our industry leading reputation for quality and innovation. Our commitment to the highest standards of design and construction has enabled us to achieve a house builders federation five-star business for 14 consecutive years, meaning that over 90% of customers would recommend us, it is this quality that we want to bring to Littleport. We have worked very hard to shape the proposals before you today which we believe will ensure that the development will be a truly great place to live. The scheme has changed extensively since its inception following the feedback and comments made by officers, which we thank, and involving extensive discussions with the Council’s Urban Design Consultant, whom we have worked closely with to amend the overall scheme. We are proud of what we put before you today which will deliver up to 397 quality new homes in a range of sizes to meet the needs of local people. This includes 20 self-build plots and 79 affordable homes; all of our affordable homes will meet nationally described space standards and all bar the first-floor maisonettes will meet lifetime home standards. These homes will be delivered in a range of character areas to ensure a varied and high-quality design. In particular our house type designs have changed considerably with elevational enhancements and fenestration changes made to achieve the highest standard of design with the development and which we now believe is supported by the Council’s Urban Designer. The scheme will deliver a significant

amount of public open space, far in excess of the Local Plan standard, a neighbourhood equipped area of play will be provided opposite Littleport Community School, with a locally equipped area of play at the heart of the development and two local areas of play across the site. We have not yet had these designed as we are keen to seek the views of key local stakeholders to ensure the equipment meets the needs of the community as best as possible. In addition to these formal areas, we are also providing considerable areas of natural green space to the western and southern extents of the site, both to soften the boundary to the countryside and provide biodiversity offsetting. This in conjunction with the off-site contribution mentioned by the Case Officer, will ensure the site delivers the equivalent of a 10% net gain, which is not a statutory requirement for the application, and we feel should be afforded considerable benefit weight. We have also listened carefully to the feedback received from local residents and the local head teacher and we will be seeking to take construction access through the existing industrial estate as opposed to along Woodfen Road. We are currently working with the landowner on the required legal agreement to formalise this and we hope this further demonstrates our eagerness to work together with local stakeholders to ensure the site is brought forward in a way which benefits the wider community.”

Jake Lambert, Bidwells, then addressed the committee:

“The applicant has worked collaboratively and constructively with the District Council and stakeholders over many years to deliver an exceptional scheme for this allocated site which will provide a range of significant local benefits on top of those Louise mentioned previously. Firstly, the proposed housing mix has been carefully refined with input from your housing officers, to closely aligned with the Strategic Housing Market Assessment and to reflect other emerging housing sites in Littleport to ensure that the development provides a balanced accommodation offer for the town while delivering a significant contribution towards the district’s housing requirements to 2031. Secondly, as Louise mentioned, the development will provide significant on-site biodiversity net gain alongside an off-site contribution towards a nearby off-setting scheme to deliver an equivalent 10% biodiversity net gain in advance of legal requirements. As Andrew mentioned, this position has been agreed with the Wildlife Trust for some time. Thirdly, the applicant has worked collaboratively the Highway Authority and Education Authority to accommodate a late revision to Woodfen Road to provide a missing link between the Great Lane development site and the primary school to deliver a wider connectivity benefit to the area and to the wider town. Finally, the development will provide significant additional enhancements to local infrastructure, secured through a S106 Agreement and planning conditions. In summary, the scheme before you is one that we believe represents a very high-quality development which allies with the objectives of the site allocation, has no objections from technical consultees and provides a high-quality, residential development for approach to design, view, and enhancement, in partnership with key stakeholders. We therefore respectfully request that the Council resolves to approve this application in accordance with the Officer’s recommendations.”

Councillor Akinwale asked a number of questions and received the following responses:

- Every property would be provided with a vehicle electric charging point.
- The parking spaces for the lifetime homes units would meet the lifetime home standards.
- The affordable units within the scheme were the first-floor maisonettes which would all meet building regulations M42 which meant they would be adaptable for future use and be convertible for the installation of lifts to the first floor. The bathrooms would also have the ability to be converted to wet rooms at a later stage if required.
- The developer had worked extensively with Council Officers and the Urban Design team and made numerous amendments to the layout and house type designs and now felt that the scheme was of a high-quality which was summarised by the Urban Designer's comments who raised no overall objections.
- The lighting had been included within the conditions by the Officer. Assurance was given that the developer was committed to providing lighting where necessary.
- The developer was keen to seek the views of the school, Town Council, officers, and the open space team, with regard to the play areas to ensure that the play equipment installed would meet all the needs of the residents and wider community, including those with physical and learning disabilities. They added that they would be happy to have this added into the conditions if required.

Cllr Goodearl enquired as to why the matrix numbers within the report on page 84 differed from the overall property numbers to which the Planning Team Leader explained that the matrix numbers only included the private units and not the affordable housing homes and self-build properties. Cllr Goodearl also asked if there was a reason why the 4-bed properties had exceeded SMHA levels, yet 2-bed properties had only reached the minimum SMHA level. The Planning Team Leader explained that there was a need to ensure the development would be viable and therefore they had increased the 4-bed properties slightly to ensure it was now more SMHA compliant than the original scheme and felt this application was more in line with other recently approved applications.

Cllr Trapp enquired about the cycle paths and access points. There would be a foot and cycle connection onto Woodfen Road. The Planning Agent explained they had worked with the external Design Consultant regarding the cycle paths to deliver a continuous, uninterrupted cycle link through the centre of the scheme without contact with vehicles. Cllr Trapp added that the number of affordable houses could have been higher on the development to which the Planning Team Leader explained that 20% had been committed to affordable housing, which was in-line with the Council's viability appraisal and therefore was acceptable. Cllr Trapp also enquired about sufficient parking spaces on the development, every plot had 2 car parking spaces, some plots also had an additional garage space, cycle parking would be secured for every plot (garage/shed) plus visitor parking would be available; therefore, the scheme would be compliant with the Local Adopted Plan Policy for parking.

Cllr Hunt enquired as to what arrangements had been made for wheeled bins. Developer stated every property would have storage in the back garden and would meet the minimum bin drag distance with the S106 contributions securing payment for the wheeled bins to be provided to the properties.

Cllr Brown asked if the application was approved, would the developer adhere to the necessary timeline agreements. The developer was committed to working with officers to resolve the S106 to secure the development.

Cllr Lay enquired about the 20% affordable housing policy in Littleport when there was a higher need for these properties. The Planning Team Leader agreed that in accordance with the Single Issue Review more affordable housing was needed and explained that the Council had carried out its own Viability Assessment in 2019; this may need to be reviewed but was in accordance with the Council's current requirements.

Cllr Trapp asked where the cycle/footpaths and bus stops lay within the site; and the Planning Team Leader showed Members where the cycle/footpath were on the maps. There were no bus stops on the site but there were several bus stops available within walking distance; the main bus stop was on Gilbert Road, which was in accordance with the Transport team's requests, along with a one-off contribution to Littleport bus services of £190,000.

Members were informed that the application sought up to a total 397 units; made up of 20 self-build properties, 79 affordable properties and 298 market properties. Of the 70 affordable housing units, 36 of those were in Phase 1, with the remainder being in Phase 2 and Members were assured that the Housing Strategy Team had reviewed the split between shared ownership and affordable rent and found the Phase 1 proposals acceptable. The detailed mix of Phase 2 would be determined in a subsequent future reserved matters application.

A discussion took place between Members regarding the Council's viability assessment that had taken place in Littleport in 2019 and whether it should now be updated for the second phase via an added clause.

Cllr Hunt received clarification that £126,107 would be paid by the developer to Cambridgeshire County Council and ring-fenced for the new roundabout on the A10/A141. Cllr Hunt asked if a bund would be installed within the application, the Planning Team Leader confirmed that a bund, and an acoustic fence would be installed along the boundary with the A10 in perpetuity.

Cllr Trapp asked for reassurance that the roundabout works would be completed before the development works commenced. The Planning Team Leader stated the roundabout would be completed prior to the first occupation on site.

Cllr Akinwale enquired if Condition 31 could be amended to ensure the play areas were accessible to those with disabilities, the Planning Team Leader confirmed this could be done. Cllr Akinwale proposed the Officer's recommendation for approval of the application.

Cllr Goodearl added that the application would bring added amenities to Littleport and seconded Cllr Akinwale's proposal.

Cllr Lay asked if the amount of social housing on the second phase could be examined but was in favour of the principle of the application.

Cllr Trapp felt that more affordable housing of a smaller size was needed, and the 20% affordable housing policy was out of date for Littleport, therefore he would vote against the application.

Cllr Brown added that Members should not take a piecemeal approach to each planning application and ask each developer to provide their own viability assessment, the Council should have its own updated Viability Assessment, but he fully supported the application.

Cllr Hunt added that the decision regarding the percentages in the Viability Assessments were made at Full Council and agreed with Cllr Brown's comments, he added that any changes should be made at Full Council and today's applications should be heard under the current rules and policies. He asked if the proposer and seconder would consider the comments already made.

Cllr Lay agreed with Cllr Hunt that this should be done at Full Council but asked if the second phase could be reconsidered after the viability assessment had been reviewed.

The Planning Manager clarified that he understood Members had decided to grant Planning permission for the full first element, which contained 20% affordable housing and then seek a mechanism for a further viability review of the remainder of the site prior to the submission of the reserved matters to see if the 20% provision was still viable, or if there could be more affordable housing above 20%, which he thought was a reasonable approach.

3:17pm to 3:30pm The meeting was adjourned for a short break.

Cllr Hunt read out a resolution that was proposed by Cllr Akinwale and seconded by Cllr Goodearl, for the Members to vote on: To grant approval of the whole application subject to delegated authority granted to the Planning Manager and Director Legal to modify Condition 31 and the Bus Stops Conditions; and to include a viability review mechanism in the S106 Agreement on Phase 2 outline permission to determine the percentage of affordable housing for subsequent reserved matters only.

It was resolved (with 7 votes in favour, 1 vote against and 0 abstentions):

To grant approval of the whole application subject to delegated authority granted to the Planning Manager and Director Legal to modify Condition 31 and Bus Stops Conditions and to include a viability review mechanism in the S106 Agreement on Phase 2 outline permission to determine the percentage of affordable housing for subsequent reserved matters only.

53. 22/01291/ESF – Six Oaks Renewal Energy Park, Newmarket Road Bottisham

Toni Hylton, Planning Team Leader, presented a report (Y93, previously circulated) recommending approval of the installation of a renewable energy park comprising ground mounted solar panels; access tracks; inverters, transformers; substation and battery energy storage system; customer cabin; underground cables and conduits; perimeter fence; CCTV equipment; temporary construction compound and associated infrastructure and planting scheme.

The Planning Team Leader updated Members that several of the listed conditions were in a different numerical order within the written report, but no changes had been made to the actual conditions.

Members were shown drone footage, slides of the location, site, proposed plan, and equipment.

The main considerations for the application were deemed to be:

- Green Belt – NPPF purposes – check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas, to prevent towns merging together, safeguard the countryside, protect the setting and special characteristics of historic towns, and assist in urban regeneration. The Cambridge Green Belt Report – preserve the unique character of Cambridge, maintain the quality of its setting, and prevent communities in the environment of Cambridge from merging into one another. One of the conditions in the NPPF states, “When located in the Green Belt, elements of many renewable energy projects will comprise inappropriate development. In such cases developers will need to demonstrate very special circumstances if projects are to proceed. Such very special circumstances may include the wider environmental benefits associated with increased production of energy from renewable sources.” The very special circumstances identified in this application:
 - Location between 2 ‘A’ roads
 - Declaration of a Climate Emergency by the Council
 - Relationship with energy production
 - Provide power for 10k homes
 - Offset carbon 9480 tonnes per annum
 - 66% increase in biodiversity
 - No loss of most fertile land
 - Reversible
- Residential Amenity – Two of the three properties were separated by the A11 and A14, the third property was separated by over a mile between the site and residential property. A Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) can be conditioned as requested by the Local Highways Authority.
- Visual Amenity – Slides were shown from the roadside/public right of ways.

- Historic Environment – There is one listed building in close proximity, Spring Hall Barn. No concerns were raised from the Conservation Officer regarding the impact of the solar farm on the heritage asset.
- Highways – Further slides were shown, there is a condition that would require the access to be widened at the request of the Local Highway Authority as well as a Traffic Management Plan during the construction phase.
- Ecology – Regarding the biodiversity management, there would be enhancement to the hedgerows, skylark management, stockpile fencing to enable animals to traverse the site, bird boxes, barn owl boxes and grassland mixed species to encourage other wildlife.
- Flood Risk – The site is located within Flood Zone 1 and as this was essential infrastructure then a sequential or exception test was not required. Following amendments, the Local Lead Flood Authority had no objections, and any suggested conditions could be appended to the Decision Notice.
- Fire Safety – The Fire Service are happy to include a condition on a Fire Safety Plan. The Local Lead Flood Authority and Environmental Agency raised no objections to the condition.

The Planning Team Leader explained that the project would lead to an improvement in biodiversity, and it was considered that there were very special circumstances to allow a solar farm in the Green Belt. There were a number of solar farms across the country that have been allowed in the Green Belt. This project would produce enough energy for 10,000 homes and reduce carbon in excess of 9,000 tonnes per annum, therefore a recommendation of approval was being made.

The Planning Team Leader added that as this was considered an inappropriate development within the Green Belt, the Council would be required to go to PINS, who would have three weeks to determine whether to accept the Planning Committee's recommendation for approval or call-in the decision and be referred for an inquiry. The Officer recommended approval; on the basis that it would generate electricity for in excess of 10,000 homes with an offset of carbon of 9,000 tonnes, that the Local Authority have declared a Climate Emergency and there are substantial environmental benefits which clearly outweigh the harm to the Green Belt.

On the invitation of the Chairman, Richard Barker, Project Manager, addressed the committee.

"I would like to start by thanking the case officer for the dialogue during this application and the detailed report culminating in a recommendation for approval. There is an urgent need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and reduce the reliance on fossil fuels, this is accepted at international, national, and local levels and the Council, having declared a Climate Emergency. We also have pressure on energy security with a need for more domestic energy production. The UK is aiming to decarbonise the electricity system which requires a rapid expansion of renewable energy. At 49.9 megawatts with associated battery energy storage Six Oaks could make a significant contribution to the need for renewable energy.

The site has excellent irradiance and has secured a good connection to the local network. Each year, Six Oaks would result in an emissions reduction of over 9,400 tonnes of carbon dioxide. The site is within the Cambridge Green Belt and very special circumstances need to be demonstrated for the project to proceed. This requires that the potential harm to the Green Belt plus any other harm is clearly outweighed by other considerations. Your Officer's report discusses the Green Belt in detail and concludes that very special circumstances do exist due to the substantial environmental benefits of the scheme; we agree with this conclusion. The proposal is for a temporary, albeit a long-term period and the site would remain within the Green Belt. As stated in the report, there would be limited visual encroachment into the countryside. The site is between the A14 and A11 and has both transmission and distribution gridlines associated with it. There would be localised visual effects from the adjacent public rights of way, however this is already bounded by significant hedging which would be enhanced through the delivery of the scheme. The site would borrow agricultural land over the operational period, 85% which is moderate grade, which would be returned in a likely improved condition after being left fallow for the 40-year operational phase. During the design of the site, panels were removed from Grade 2 land to avoid the use of the most fertile land on the farm. Buffers adjacent to the public rights of way were increased from 5m to 15m to allow increased wildflower and meadow planting and new hedgerow planting is incorporated adjacent to the A14 to provide screening and to avoid any glint and glare effect. Following consultation with Cambridge Wildlife Trust, additional measures have been put in place such as skylark plots. The improvements to biodiversity include 1.1km of new hedgerow planting, 2.5km of hedgerow restorations, species-rich wildflower and grasslands planting between the rows of solar panels and in the 15m buffer between the public right of way and the solar farm, areas of grassland are set aside for ground nesting birds. Bird and bat boxes, tree planting, woodpiles for invertebrates and skylark plots in adjacent fields for nesting; these measures will be accompanied by a management and monitoring programme and these significant biodiversity improvements would result in a biodiversity net gain of 66%. We have consulted wider on the proposed project, holding public exhibitions in Bottisham and Great Wilbraham, issuing newsletters to local residents, meeting with the local parish councils and responding to their questions. The limited and very localised effects from the site resulted in a relatively small number of comments considering the size of the site and we are grateful to have the support of Bottisham Parish Council, the host parish for the solar panels and batteries. A letter from Wilbraham's environmental group, sent to the Council yesterday, stated, "thank you for keeping us up to date with the progress of this application. As a relevant community group in the affected area, we are pleased to confirm that we support the application. The applicants have been open and straightforward with us throughout and have listened to our own observations. We can see they have adapted the detail of their proposals to incorporate sensible amendments suggested by others, they have worked with our parish councils and although not directly relevant to the planning application agreements have been reached on community benefits for the life of the scheme. We hope that consent will be given tomorrow." We have engaged positively with statutory consultees, in particular on ecology, drainage and local highways, resulting in no objections from statutory consultees. Our Community Partnership Coordinator continues to build

relationships and initiatives with local groups. We urgently need to reduce the reliance on fossil fuels and secure locally produced energy. I urge you to favourably view this application.”

Cllr Brown asked for clarification regarding the local grid connection to which Richard Barker confirmed this had been secured at Cherry Hinton substation.

Cllr Akinwale enquired as to whether Cadent Gas had been consulted before work commenced to ensure safety practices and protection methods. The Project Manager confirmed they had received the consultation from Cadent Gas, and they would remain in full consultation with them to ensure they were happy with their working practices and construction methods. Cllr Akinwale also asked what conditions were in place to protect ground and surface water. The Project Manager confirmed that the Environmental Agency had proposed a condition to ensure that any spill-off was dealt with appropriately.

In response to a question from Cllr Lay, the Project Manager confirmed that the outline boundary of the site was 77 hectares (150 acres), and it was proposed there would be 28 container size batteries on the site. The latest guidance from the Fire Service (November 22), along with the necessary planning conditions would be discussed with the Fire Service to ensure that the appropriate measures would be implemented, and a water supply would need to be brought on site.

Cllr Trapp asked a number of questions and received the following responses:

- Routing for the cabling would be in a separate follow-up application, but he confirmed this would be underground.
- There would be safety measures in place regarding the battery storage; 5 metre distance between containers, fire detection, temperature detection, gas detection and the site would be monitored 24/7 (off-site).
- A geophysical survey had been carried out that highlighted several small areas where there were potential sub-surface archaeology and therefore the Council’s Archaeologist had proposed a condition for a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) and for a pre-condition intrusive works to investigate the archaeology, which had been agreed to.
- Grazing was viewed positively by the solar farm industry. The panels were set at a minimum height that allowed the sheep to wander around, the sheep would keep back the wildflowers, and it was looked favourably on as sheep used to graze in this area.

The Project Manager confirmed to Cllr Hunt that biodiversity would increase by 66%.

The Senior Democratic Services Officer read out a statement received from Bottisham Ward Councillor, Cllr Charlotte Cane, to the committee:

“I apologise that I am unable to attend in person.

For full disclosure, I am the honorary Treasurer for, and small shareholder of, Reach Community Solar Farm Limited. I do not consider that gives rise to a

pecuniary or disclosable interest, as other solar farms have no impact on the business, and I receive no payment from the business other than my annual interest payment.

I support this application, as I think the benefits of generating clean electricity outweigh the harm to the Green Belt. I support the proposed conditions, which should minimise damage and disturbance.

I would like to draw out the importance that the developer makes every effort to minimise disturbance during construction, cable laying etc and maintains dialogue with the Parish Councils throughout, so that residents are kept informed, and mitigations are put in place whenever possible.

I also urge officers to ensure engagement with consultees as well as the developer over 'ancillary' consents such as cable laying and enhancements to sub-stations."

On the invitation of the Chairman, South Cambs Ward Councillor, Cllr Claire Daunton, addressed the committee.

"I speak as County Councillor for the Fulbourn division in South Cambs. Within this division are several communities on the transport route of the proposed site, including Stow-Cum-Quy, Little Wilbraham, Great Wilbraham, and Six Mile Bottom. I am also Parish Councillor for the joint parish of Little Wilbraham and Six Mile Bottom, within which the entrance to the site is located. The Parish Council has commented on the application and supports it in principle. Members will have read the Planning Officer's comprehensive report and the detailed documentation provided by a wide range of consultees to which the report refers. I will comment principally on three aspects: transport to the site, access at the site and security at the site and the surrounding properties. During the construction phase of at least nine to twelve months, the route that serves the site, the A1303 and Wilbraham Road will see a significant increase in traffic, much of this will be HGV traffic on a road which already sees a substantial amount of this type of vehicle movement. Further, the route is fast and straight with difficult crossroads. There are residential properties on this route at various points and these will see a significant change in traffic. It is important therefore that any permission takes full account of Local Highways officers' requirements, including frequency, size, and timing of construction vehicle movements, having regard to the nature of the route and in particular to domestic dwellings. I understand that there is a condition for a Traffic Management Plan, and I would very much support that. Access to the site is off the Wilbraham Road, at a point close to residential properties, it is particularly challenging at times now to enter and exit these properties on account of the speed vehicles travel on this straight stretch of undulating road. Again, it is imperative that the recommendations to highway officers concerning the widening of the access route into the site to allow vehicles to enter and pass be fully taken into account. There can be no allowance for vehicles to be standing waiting to enter the site, further it is important to ensure effective movement, that there are control mechanisms, human or mechanical, at the entrance. Residents living immediately adjacent to the site must not feel endangered at any point and must have points of contact in

case of problems. We understand that an onsite road will be laid, and this will lead to a construction area some way from the Wilbraham Road and not immediately adjacent to neighbouring properties, there should not be any temporary buildings or facilities or parking areas immediately adjacent to existing houses and due regard must be had for the privacy and peace of residents. The position immediately adjacent to the properties is also relevant in relation to the points made in designing out crime section of the officer's report, particularly the note that such sites have recently attracted crime with violence. A construction site such as that proposed with valuable materials and in a rural area, needs to be secured, monitored, and lit appropriately and effectively, as made clear in the statement. It must not be the case that there is any invitation to criminal activity at this site for the sake of site staff and neighbouring properties. It is important to note that should permission be granted, the solar farm will need to be connected to the grid by means of cabling at Cherry Hinton. Parish Councils in the area, along with other groups, have emphasised the need for the applicant to discuss cabling routes with County Highways and with local communities and make every effort to minimise the kind of disruption to traffic and to daily life that laying cables can bring and that has occurred on similar projects."

Councillor Trapp enquired if there would be a problem with the suggested route from Bottisham Parish Council if it came from The Missing Sock Public House (formerly The Prince Albert). Cllr Daunton explained that the route came down the A14 north and the A1303 and the first exit (at The Missing Sock) was probably the most direct route.

Cllr Daunton explained that the cable routing to Cherry Hinton was a separate planning application. The Planning Team Leader confirmed this would be a separate planning application for South Cambridgeshire District Council.

Cllr Trapp asked if a condition had been placed on the access, the Planning Team Leader explained this would be part of the Construction Traffic Management Plan, which would be assessed by the Highways Authority.

The Planning Team Leader confirmed that Condition 16 contained the WSI (Written Scheme of Investigation) and reiterated the special circumstances listed in the report that allowed this project to proceed within the Green Belt area.

Cllr Goodearl asked if the application was approved, whether it would set a precedent for having to allow other developments to go ahead within the Green Belt. The Planning Team Leader explained that East Cambridgeshire District Council had a very small piece of green belt and precedent was not a reason to approve applications; there were also examples nationally of other green belt solar farms being approved due to special circumstances; plus, each application would be considered on its own merit.

Cllr Trapp added that the site was in an ideal location, between two 'A' roads, with no intrusion onto any neighbourhood or village, it was also Grade 3 land and perfect for grazing, therefore he proposed the Officer's recommendation for approval.

Cllr Hunt echoed Cllr Trapp's comments and seconded his proposal, adding that the Council would also benefit from an increase of 66% in biodiversity.

Both Cllr Goodearl and Cllr Brown echoed the above comments.

It was resolved (with 7 votes in favour, 1 vote against and 0 abstentions):

- i) That the planning application ref 22/01291/ESF be APPROVED subject to the conditions detailed in Appendix 1 of the Officer's report.

The meeting concluded at 4:29pm.

Chairman.....

Date.....

