



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 5th November 2025

Present:

Cllr Chika Akinwale (left the meeting at 4:50 pm)
Cllr Christine Colbert
Cllr Lee Denney (substitute)
Cllr Lavinia Edwards
Cllr Mark Goldsack (Vice-Chair)
Cllr Keith Horgan (substitute) (left the meeting at 5 pm)
Cllr Julia Huffer (substitute)
Cllr Bill Hunt (Chair)
Cllr James Lay (left the meeting at 4pm)
Cllr Alan Sharp
Cllr John Trapp

Officers:

Patrick Adams – Senior Democratic Services Officer
Kevin Breslin – Locum Planning Lawyer
Sophie Browne – Planning Team Leader
Kevin Drane – Trees Officer
Rachel Gordon – Interim Planning Team Leader
Yole Medeiros – Major Projects Officer
David Morren – Strategic Planning and Development Management Manager

In attendance:

Tim Dobson – Developer's representative
Graeme Thorpe – Agent for the Applicant

ECDC Comms

20. Apologies and substitutions

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Christine Ambrose Smith, Cllr Martin Goodearl, Cllr Ross Trent and Cllr Christine Whelan. Cllr Julia Huffer substituted for Cllr Ambrose Smith, Cllr Keith Horgan substituted for Cllr Goodearl and Cllr Lee Denney substituted for Cllr Trent.

21. Declarations of interest

Councillor Julia Huffer declared a personal interest in agenda item 5, as the local member for the village of Kennett. She had not commented on this application at any parish council meetings and came to the Committee with an open mind.

22. Minutes

The Minutes of the meetings held on 3rd September 2025 were agreed as a correct record.

23. Chair's announcements

The Chair welcomed five new members of staff to the meeting: Kevin Breslin (Locum Planning Lawyer), Sophie Browne (Planning Team Leader), Rachel Gordon (Interim Planning Team Leader), Yole Medeiros (Major Projects Officer) and Ashleigh O'Connor (Planning Technical Support Team Leader).

24. 21/01549/OUM – Hansons Depot, Kennett

Yole Medeiros, Major Projects Officer, presented a report (AA80, previously circulated) recommending approval of a proposed development of up to 13 dwellings to include affordable houses and access.

Members were invited to ask questions to the officer.

In reply to Cllr Chika Akinwale, the Major Projects Officer explained that the Committee were being asked to consider an outline application. There was the potential for planting trees around the site to create a buffering zone but this would have to be approved in the reserved matters application and could not be approved at this stage. This energy and sustainability strategy would also have to be agreed as part of the reserved matters application. In reply to Cllr Mark Goldsack, the Trees Officer explained that trees on the edge of the proposed development had been removed for safety reasons, as they were beginning to decay.

In reply to Cllr James Lay, the Major Projects Officer explained that the only access to the site would be from Station Road and that an alternative access from Kennett Road could not be considered as it was outside the application red boundary.

In reply to Cllr John Trapp, the Major Projects Officer stated that the Council would consult with the Highways Authority at reserved matters, regarding his concerns about the width of the access road. Their response would be influenced by the exact number of units, the size of the homes and the layout of the street on which these would be built, which had not yet been determined. The Strategic Planning and Development Management Manager recommended that any concerns regarding the width of the access road

should be added as a condition to the reserved matters application and not to the outline application being considered by the Committee.

The Strategic Planning and Development Management Manager explained that this application had been submitted in 2021 and due its complexity it was only now being considered by the Planning Committee.

The Committee moved into debate.

Cllr Mark Goldsack saw no reason to object to the outline application for 13 properties. Cllr Julia Huffer agreed and stated that building homes on brown field sites was preferable to development on green field sites. Cllr Alan Sharp also supported the outline application but added that concerns regarding the access road and landscaping would have to be addressed in the reserved matters application.

Cllr John Trapp expressed concerns regarding the location of affordable housing, the access road and its proximity to the A14.

Cllr Mark Goldsack proposed and Cllr Julia Huffer seconded the recommendation in the report. A vote was taken and with 10 votes in favour, no votes against and 1 abstention

It was resolved:

- (i) **to approve** planning application 21/01549/OUM, subject to the conditions set out in Appendix 1.
- (ii) To grant delegated authority to the Strategic Planning & Development Management Manager to finalise the terms and completion of the s106 legal agreement securing affordable housing provision; as well as financial contributions towards wheeled bins, education, libraries and lifelong learning.

25. 25/00393/FUM – Anchor Lane Farm, Burwell

Yole Medeiros, Major Projects Officer, presented this report (AA81, previously circulated), which recommended the approval of an Agrivoltaics scheme, with associated infrastructure, access roads and landscaping. She explained that the proposed solar farm would provide enough power for 15,000 to 25,000 homes every year.

Graeme Thorpe, agent for the applicant, made the following statement:

“Good afternoon, Chair, Members of the Planning Committee. My name is Graeme Thorpe from PWA Planning, part of the NFU Commercial Group, and I am here today on behalf of the applicant to speak in support of the officers’ recommendation for approval.

"This application is for a 49.95 megawatt (MW) dual-purpose project that is fundamentally aligned with the Government's legal commitment under Net Zero 2050 to transition to low-carbon energy and, crucially, delivers significant local environmental benefits.

"The core principle supporting this application is the urgent need for low-carbon energy. The government's position, supported by your own Climate Change SPD, is clear: we must transform our energy system to meet our Net Zero targets. Sat alongside the previously approved Battery Storage site, this 49.95MW scheme will make a valuable contribution to that national and local objective.

"Crucially, this is an agrivoltaic scheme, designed for dual use. It is not simply a solar farm; it is a scheme that allows agricultural activity to continue in part, but also allows for the soil to rest and improve. After its temporary 40-year life, the land is returned to an improved state of cultivation. Our proposals include a firm commitment to full site reinstatement and aftercare, secured by condition and a S106 agreement.

"We understand the concerns raised by the Parish Council, the National Trust, and local residents regarding visual impact and amenity. We have worked closely with planning officers and consultees to actively mitigate these concerns.

"Considering some of the key matters, in terms of Landscape and Visual Impact, we acknowledge that the scheme will result in some visual change. However, the officer report confirms these impacts are localised and non-significant. Our comprehensive landscaping strategy, discussed with both Wicken Fen and other parties, is specifically designed to soften the development's edge, ensuring that effects will diminish further over time as the planting matures.

"Regarding ecological impacts, we recognise the site's location near to Wicken Fen SSSI and SAC. We have liaised extensively with National Trust and Wicken Fen, and they are happy with the scheme as now presented. Our submitted Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA), agreed by Natural England and the Council's Ecologist to be adopted, concludes there will be no likely significant effects on these sites.

"In fact, alongside a substantial mitigation and enhancement plan, this scheme delivers a massive ecological biodiversity net gain. Our scheme results in a 222% net gain for area habitats, which is a tangible, measurable enhancement of the site's ecology. This will be secured for 40 years through the legally binding S106.

"On the matter of Soils and Agricultural Land Quality, the Case Officer has assessed the impact on 'best and most versatile' (BMV) land. Given the temporary and 'Agrivoltaic' nature of the scheme, they accept that development is unlikely to lead to significant permanent loss of BMV agricultural land. The

solar panels are secured to the ground with limited soil disturbance and can be removed, with no permanent loss of agricultural land quality likely to occur. Indeed, we anticipate an improvement in the soil over this time due it being able to rest. Conditions are proposed to safeguard soil resources and agricultural land ensuring its reinstatement and restoration, and the applicant is committed to these.

“Environmental Health are satisfied with our Noise Impact Assessment, which confirms no adverse impact on residential amenity. Conditions are in place to control construction times and limit operational noise.

“While the site is in Flood Risk Zones 2 and 3, the Flood Risk Assessment has been reviewed and has been accepted by the Environment Agency. A full Emergency Flood Plan will be required and approved prior to the commencement of development.

“Finally, in terms of highway safety, the Highway Authority have no objections subject to the agreement of a Construction Traffic Management Plan. For any short-term impact on any Public Right of Way, standard procedure is to apply for the temporary closure of any affected route prior to works commencing. This includes a mechanism for an ‘alternative route’ scenario. We do not expect the Drove to be closed for more than 2 weeks maximum, and the applicant is committed to improvements to Newnham Drove post construction, providing better access for emergency and local vehicles including our Wicken Fen friends.

“In conclusion, the planning balance here is clear. The significant benefits of a major contribution to low-carbon energy delivery and outstanding Biodiversity Net Gain presented by this scheme fundamentally outweigh any temporary and localised adverse impacts. Any minor effects on landscape, ecology, and amenity are not significant, and can be mitigated by robust conditions, significant enhancement, a comprehensive landscape strategy, and a long-term commitment to environmental improvement.

“We ask that you endorse the officer's professional planning assessment and approve this application, subject to the recommended conditions and the S106 agreement.”

Members were invited to ask questions to Mr Thorpe and the developer's representative Mr Tim Dobson.

In response to Cllr Julia Huffer, Tim Dobson stated that he would expect the solar panels to have a life expectancy of at least 25 years. He was unsure which of the components had been imported. It was understood that there were a number of British companies producing solar panels.

In reply to Cllr Chika Akinwale, Graeme Thorpe stated that a plan would be put in place to ensure that the site was decommissioned after 40 years and a bond was in place to ensure that the land returned to agricultural use. Cllr Alan Sharp queried whether the loss of agricultural land for 40 years could be described as

temporary and whether the site would be decommissioned, as there would still be a demand for electricity. Tim Dobson explained that sheep could still be grazed on the land and farmers had been innovative in continuing to use land in and around solar farms. In reply to Cllr Mark Goldsack, Graeme Thorpe stated that there would be wide enough gaps between the panels to allow tractor access.

In reply to Cllr Lavinia Edwards' concerns about noise from construction, Tim Dobson stated that the landowners were sensitive to noise issues and lived close to the site. The Major Projects Officer stated that condition 21 required piling work to be restricted to between 9 am and 5 pm on each weekday, with none at weekends or bank holidays.

In reply to Cllr Alan Sharp, Tim Dobson stated that the battery was already in place, as were the cables, making this a sensible site for a solar farm.

In reply to Cllr John Trapp, Tim Dobson confirmed that screening would be in place around the development. The gaps in the buffer zone were due to overhead lines.

In reply to Cllr Mark Goldsack, Graeme Thorpe confirmed that the planning consultancy was owned by the National Farmers Union.

Cllr Christine Colbert asked if the supplies to the site could be brought in by the nearby waterways. Tim Dobson confirmed that this would be considered.

The Senior Democratic Services Officer read out the following statement from Mrs Susan Bailey, Clerk to Reach Parish Council:

"Reach Parish Council was not consulted when the application was originally submitted. Whilst the site of this application sits outside our parish, Reach Parish Council has grave concerns about the cumulative adverse impact of energy developments on Burwell Fen, some of which does fall into our remit. Our concerns, which reference this application and nine others at various stages in the planning process, are captured in an email exchange between Councillor Acklam and David Morren. The correspondence rests with Mr Morren's email undertaking of 24 March 2024 to 'review whether there is scope or political will to create an SPD around this area'."

Members were invited to ask questions of the officer.

In reply to Cllr Keith Horgan, the Strategic Planning and Development Management Manager, explained that it was standard practice to have a condition stating that a decommissioning method statement had to be submitted to the Council 12 months before the 40-year permission expired. He suggested that a condition could be added, that would meet the statutory tests, which could ensure that the solar farm was decommissioned at the appropriate time. The Major Projects Officer added that, if approved, any future changes to the plans approved with permission if granted would require the formal submission of an amendment to the permission or of a new planning application.

In reply to Cllr John Trapp, the Strategic Planning and Development Management Manager confirmed that the Council would liaise with the Highways Authority to manage construction traffic.

The Committee moved into debate.

Cllr James Lay supported the application as he could not see any good planning reasons to reject it.

Cllr Keith Horgan expressed his disappointment in the fact that the plan would be decommissioned in 39 and a half years and that the statutory consultee did not have to provide a certificate to prove capacity at the substation.

Cllr Julia Huffer opposed the loss of agricultural land in the area to solar farms. She concluded that this application was not right for Burwell, farming or the environment. Cllr Alan Sharp supported the construction of solar panels but not on prime agricultural land, which he doubted would ever be returned to farm land. Cllr Lee Denney agreed and expressed concern regarding the impact that this and other similar developments were having on the parish of Burwell. Cllr Lavinia Edwards asserted that this and other applications were turning a rural area into an industrial wasteland. Cllr John Trapp shared these concerns but added that this application was next to a substation, would have less impact on the countryside than other schemes already approved and other solar farms were already in the area. Its proximity to Burwell made it less damaging than other schemes in the heart of the countryside.

Cllr Lee Denney queried the 40 year lifetime for the scheme, as solar power technology was improving and the panels could end up being obsolete. Cllr Keith Horgan suggested that a decision needed to be made on the current evidence and the Committee should not speculate about what might happen in the next 40 years.

Cllr Mark Goldsack expressed sympathy regarding the loss of agricultural land and queried how the application could be said to be improving biodiversity. However, he was supportive of solar farms and this application was in a suitable location. He welcomed the involvement of the National Farmers Union in the application.

The Chair stated that the damage had already been done to the countryside and there was a clear demand for cleaner energy. He expressed his support for the scheme.

Cllr James Lay proposed and Cllr John Trapp seconded the recommendation in the report. A vote was taken and with 6 votes in favour, 4 against and 1 abstention

It was resolved:

- (i) **to approve** planning application 25/00393/FUM, subject to the conditions set out in Appendix 1, with the minor changes set out in the update sheet.
- (ii) to grant delegated authority to the Strategic Planning & Development Management Manager to finalise the terms and completion of the s106 legal agreement securing biodiversity net gains (including Habitat Management and Maintenance Plan – HMMP).

Cllr James Lay left the meeting at 4 pm.

26. TPO/E/02/25 – Tree Preservation Order – Paradise, Ely

Kevin Drane, Trees Officer, presented this report (AA82, previously circulated), which recommended that the Committee confirm the Tree Preservation Order (TPO) E/02/25 for one Tree of Heaven on the Paradise Recreation Ground, Deacons Road, Ely. It was noted that the word Littleport in paragraph 3.2 of the report should read Ely and the Tree Preservation Order score on page 84 of agenda should be 17 not 15.

In reply to Cllr Keith Horgan, the Trees Officer stated that the home owner who had originally suggested that the tree had damaged his home, had withdrawn his complaint. The objector lived on the same road, further away from the tree.

In reply to Cllr Chika Akinwale, the Trees Officer explained that Council could only be liable for compensation if it refused an application to remove the tree and no such application had been received. The Council had served a Tree Preservation Order and the Committee were being asked to confirm this. Cllr Mark Goldsack understood that the firm Sedgwick International, acting on behalf of the housing insurance company, needed to find evidence that the tree was damaging the house in question and if that was the case, ask the Council to remove the tree. In this scenario, the Council would only become liable for compensation if it refused to remove the tree. The Trees Officer confirmed that this was correct.

Cllr John Trapp proposed and Cllr Christine Colbert seconded the recommendation in the report. A vote was taken and the Committee unanimously agreed

To resolve:

to Approve the confirmation of the Tree Preservation Order (TPO) E/02/25 for one Tree of Heaven.

27. Delegation Process for Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects

The Major Projects Officer presented this report (AA83, previously circulated), which recommended that the Committee agreed to delegate authority for the

Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP) related responses and discharge of requirements for Development Consent Orders (DCO).

In reply to Cllr Chika Akinwale, the Major Projects Officer reported that all relevant communication regarding consultation on Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects would be shared with members of the Planning Committee, Local Members and Leaders of the Political Groups. These matters would always be discussed by the Planning Committee if there was sufficient time to do so but sometimes the responsibility for a response would have to be delegated to officers to ensure that a reply was made before the deadline. The Strategic Planning and Development Management Manager added that the Council could be given only 14 days to respond and this would probably make it impossible to take a report to Planning Committee in time.

In reply to Cllr John Trapp, the Strategic Planning and Development Management Manager explained that the Director of Legal had ruled that she could make the proposed change to the delegation process in the Constitution, as it was a minor amendment and so did not require a Council decision.

In reply to Cllr Julia Huffer, the Strategic Planning and Development Management Manager reported that he considered that the Council had sufficient resources to submit Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project related responses. Members could expect to be informed if this situation changed.

The Strategic Planning and Development Management Manager explained that draft responses would be sent to Local Members before submission. There was a brief discussion as to whether the reference to Local Members in paragraph (c) of the recommendations also needed to be included in paragraphs (a) and (b). It was decided that the proposed amendments were unnecessary.

Cllr Chika Akinwale left the meeting at 4:50 pm.

The Chair proposed and Cllr Keith Horgan seconded the recommendation in the report. A vote was taken and with 6 votes in favour and 3 against and no abstentions

It was resolved:

- (i) to delegate authority to the Strategic Planning and Development Management Manager and Director of Operations to submit Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP) related resources and represent the Council at examination as part of the NSIP process on behalf of East Cambridgeshire District Council and its regulatory functions, in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Planning Committee, and the leaders of all political groups on occasions where there is not enough time for a report to be delivered to Planning Committee; and

- (ii) to delegate authority to the Strategic Planning and Development Management Manager and Director of Operations to determine Development Consent Order (DCO) “requirements” as part of the DCO process on behalf of East Cambridgeshire District Council and its regulatory functions, in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Planning Committee, and the leaders of all political groups, on occasions where there is not enough time for a report to be delivered to Planning Committee; and
- (iii) to note that where delegated powers are used, draft responses will be sent to Local Members and the Members of the Planning Committee ahead of submission; and
- (iv) to note Appendix 1 setting out details of the Kingsway Solar Farm NSIP; and
- (v) to delegate authority to the Director Legal and Monitoring Officer to make the necessary changes to the Council’s Constitution.

28. Planning Performance Report – September 2025

David Morren, Strategic Planning and Development Management Manager, presented a report (AA84, previously circulated) summarising the performance of the Planning Department in September 2025. In reply to Cllr Mark Goldsack the Strategic Planning and Development Management Manager explained that it was difficult to predict when the inspectorate would be holding their appeal hearings. He agreed to consider this further and decide how best local members could be kept informed of the progress being made on appeals affecting their ward.

It was resolved unanimously:

that the Planning Performance Report for September 2025 be noted.

29. Exclusion of the Press and Public

The Chair proposed that the meeting should go into private session. It was resolved unanimously:

that the press and public be excluded during the consideration of the remaining item because it is likely, in view of the nature of the business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings, that if members of the public were present during the items there would be disclosure to them of exempt information of Categories 1, 2 and 7 of Part 1 Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended).

30. Quarterly performance in resolving planning enforcement cases

The Committee considered a report (AA85, previously circulated) which considered the Quarterly Performance in Resolving Planning Enforcement Cases. Officers replied to a number of queries from councillors regarding specific sites.

Cllr Keith Horgan left the meeting at 5 pm.

The Committee agreed that enforcement action should be taken if all attempts at mitigation had failed.

It was resolved that:

the Quarterly Performance in Resolving Planning Enforcement Cases be noted.

The meeting concluded at 5:17 pm.

Chair.....

Date.....