



Dodington Parish Council

DRAFT MINUTES of the Meeting of the **Planning Committee** held at Dodington Parish Hall on **Monday 4th March 2024** at **7.30pm**.

PRESENT: Councillors Richard Evans, David Fitt, Bob Graham, Christine Howard (Chairing Meeting), Sarah Hurley, Paul Hulbert, Adrian Hutton, Sandra Jee, Jean Thomas and Chris Zapata.

Also present: Clerk – Hannah Saunders (Clerk for meeting), Deputy Clerk – Pip Tymon, 20 Members of Public (until 8.25pm) and 2 representatives from RWE and Meeting Places (until 8.25pm)

Clerk / Chair welcomed everyone to meeting – taking them through basic housekeeping and procedure for Public Participation.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND REQUEST FOR APPROVAL

NONE

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST UNDER LOCALISM ACT 2011 AND REQUESTS FOR DISPENSATIONS

Cllr Paul Hulbert declared an interest in Item 8 on the agenda – he will speak as a member of Wapley Nature Reserve.

There were no requests for dispensations.

3. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Ben Kwok from RWE gave a brief presentation on proposals for Solar Farm within South Ward of Dodington at Mousewell Farm / Poole Farm.

Details of the proposals can be found via the attached link

<https://uk.rwe.com/project-proposals/mousewell-solar-farm/>

Following presentation – there was a chance for members of public present – and councillors to address Ben and ask questions.

Full details of this can be found in Appendix 1 attached to these minutes.

Chair of Committee – Cllr Christine Howard – brought Public Participation to a close at 8:25pm – thanking everyone for attending / participating. Everyone was welcome to stay – but wouldn't be able to contribute to meeting further.

Members of Public and Ben / Ellie left at this stage – thanking members for their time – after a brief break – and moving into committee room meeting continued.

4. MINUTES OF AND MATTERS ARISING FROM THE PREVIOUS MEETING ON 11th DECEMBER 2023

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes, as printed and circulated, be confirmed as a true record. Cllr Christine Howard signed a copy of the minutes.

Matters arising – not covered during course of agenda:-

- Item 10 – Road Safety – following investigation into gritting routes and fact that they don't extend past Chipping Sodbury School – both Clerk and Cllr Chris Willmore asked Mark King (head of Streetcare) if they could be extended due to the spate of accidents along that stretch of road. Mark explained that due to savings a couple of years ago that had to be made - 2 lorries were removed from gritting fleet and current fleet is working to capacity – so an extension not possible.
- Item 13 – Parish Leases – Clerk has managed to get a contact at SGC Property Services Department – who is aware that there are leases that need renewing – and has confirmed that occupation will continue under same terms until SGC have capacity to arrange for new leases to be put in place. In order to manage our expectations – the earliest they are able to start exploring / working on these will be May 2024 (due to urgent Year End projects). Clerk is comforted that contact has been made.

5. PLANNING MATTERS

NONE

6. TERN INN CARPARK DEVELOPMENT

Since last Planning Meeting – the developer has submitted further Variations to Conditions (that members reviewed at Full Council).

Clerk has been trying to get hold of developer in order to get update regarding hedge removal / and car park.

Despite one of the Councillors being told that hedge wouldn't be removed until mid April PMN – contractors were on site on Tuesday 5th March 2024 ripping hedge out.

It had also become apparent that the convenience store (Co-op) was being marketed by Savills. Whilst members were surprised about this – it is normal practice for Co-op to sell site on as a franchise.

As Clerk hasn't been able to speak directly with developer – she has started investigating options for Car Park Management. She has spoken with SGC – and has an appointment with Creative Car Parking Solutions to see what they can offer.

Clerk will report back at next Planning Meeting. In order for car park to be managed effectively officer recommendation will be to outsource to company that has expertise – as Dodington officers don't have the time or capacity to deal with this.

7. CONSULTATIONS

There were 4 live consultations for consideration:-

- 1) Chipping Sodbury High Street Clock Tower Bus Stop.

Members had no issues with the proposals – makes sense and makes bus stop safer.

2) Sort It Centre Booking System.

Clerk pointed out that this is an ‘Engagement Exercise’ and as DPC don’t use the centre (have their own contracts in place for refuse management) perhaps this item should be looked at in an individual / personal capacity.....

After consideration – Cllr Chris Zapata suggested that include on Full Council at end of month.

3) Review of Local Planning Application Requirements.

Clerk has looked into this – most of the Planning Application Requirements have been reviewed over the course of last couple of years. There are 2 new requirements that are being included and consulted on (due to them coming into force nationally) Biodiversity Net Gain and Public Open Space. All seems to be in order. It was suggested by Cllr Paul Hulbert that council write in support of these amendments. AGREED.

4) Council Plan 2024.

It was agreed to defer this item and to cover off at Full Council on 18th March (once everyone had managed to attend one of the pop-up sessions about consultation).

8. MOUSEWELL FARM SOLAR PROPOSALS

Following drop in session (20/2/24) and presentation received earlier in meeting – members RESOLVED unanimously to make comments to RWE at this community consultation phase.

It was agreed to delegate this to Clerk / Cllr Paul Hulbert – but comments to include concerns raised about flooding / visual impact and to ask for written answers to questions.

Clerk will also include a synopsis of comments received to date by concerned residents (more than 12 have come in via email) and will signpost RWE to minutes of this Planning Committee Meeting – so they have reference to Public Participation.

9. GRANT APPLICATIONS TO CONSIDER

DODINGTON PARISH BAND – had applied for £600 to purchase new music. Clerk confirmed that monies in budget. As such – it was unanimously RESOLVED to grant £600 to Parish Band. Clerk reminded members of their forthcoming AGM on Tuesday 12th March 2024.

10. BURIAL GROUND

Clerk informed members that report / valuation from David James would be received by end of week – and as such DPC will be in a position to arrange a meeting with the various stakeholders to have last attempt at getting an agreement in principle for ‘land exchange’.

Ideally this meeting needs to be April / May time. Clerk will look to book a room at Poole Court and will arrange a Working Group meeting for members to updated.

11. NEWSLETTER SPRING / SUMMER 2024

Members reviewed draft / proof of Newsletter. There were a couple of fonts that they felt were tricky to read – and would request be changed....and a couple of colours where contrast not good enough.

CLlr Paul Hulbert will do a full proof read – to check for any errors and let Clerk / Project Officer know ASAP – so that can get amends carried out.

The overall impression was that it was an excellent newsletter – with a lot of interesting articles and members were pleased that it was being delivered at Easter time.

With regards to the survey that needs finalizing for the Speed Limit Reduction – Clerk informed members that it will be worked on over the course of next week (CLlr Marilyn Palmer is going to help – as she has been meeting with a lot of local residents recently). Clerk will have copy of this survey available for Full Council Meeting – and it will be online prior to 25th March 2024 (when delivery of newsletters is due to commence).

12. SITE SAFETY

Following up on meeting that Councillors and Clerk had with School head and business manager the previous week regarding Site Safety and possibly installation of barrier – Clerk was able to give members further information – including showing illustrations of type of barrier.

Councillors and Clerk confirmed that the barrier would only be down at peak / key times. These being 8am – 9:20am (Mon – Fri) and 2:30pm – 4pm (Mon – Fri) term time.

Should people need to gain access to the site at these times they will have several options:-

- 1) Inputting a code into keypad
- 2) Using key fob
- 3) Pressing intercom (for Council Office or School Office) and speaking with someone

Councillors and Clerk explained that intention is still to keep the gates – as these will secure the site evenings / weekends.

School have funding for barrier and aren't looking for monies – although they stated that a donation wouldn't be refused!

As it wasn't on this agenda – no decision could be made on contribution – so Clerk will include on Full Council.

In principle members happy with installation – but they would like to see a layout plan (Clerk to go back to business manager)

PMN – Clerk forwarded plan to members for review – illustrating where the barrier will be installed and where the intercom's will be.

13. QEII

Clerk updated members on progress with planning application for exercise path. Aim is to have it submitted by end March 2024 so that don't have to submit Biodiversity Net Gains report (as would need to engage an ecologist to do this – which would be an additional cost taking monies away from development of path).

In order to overcome objections already received from Kelston Close residents – fencing has been erected between Dodington’s hedge and post / wire fencing at rear of flats. Clerk updated members about meeting with Ruth from Jacob’s Wells – and fact that after Easter she would be looking to use QEII fields for afterschool sessions once a week (similar to Little Sparks that she runs for preschoolers at Wapley). It was agreed that she could have keys to changing rooms – incase toilets were required. There would be no conflict with other users – and Cllr Paul Hulbert wouldn’t hesitate in letting Ruth use facilities.

Clerk has received email from SGC Streetcare officer – regarding Dog Litter Bins that are situated in roads adjacent to QEII playing fields – and fact that they are getting very full. Question is whether members willing to pay for an uplift to empties or install an additional bin. Officer had confirmed that all bins fit for purpose and not being used for anything other than dog waste.

Clerk informed members that annual cost for uplift of empties from once a week to twice a week for the litter bins in question would be £360. This was the most economical solution for the council.

After due consideration it was APPROVED that this was best way forward – Clerk to instruct SGC accordingly

14. CLIMATE & NATURE EMERGENCY

Deputy Clerk had emailed updates out to members following the working group meeting previous week – and the Draft Action Plan will be included on Full Council agenda for adoption.

Copy of updates can be viewed in Appendix 2 attached to these minutes.

15. WORKS TO COUNCIL CHAMBERS

Clerk updated members on progress – and layout of furniture for chambers was reviewed. There was some concern that members may not be able to hear each other well enough – and whether 2 rows of chairs for public would fit....

As such after the meeting – Clerk / Deputy showed members into the chambers – so that they had a clearer idea of dimensions. This put minds at rest – and most members were pleased with progress.

PMN – sample of proposed chairs available to view / try in the temporary office.

16. FINANCE MATTERS

YTD spend against budget was reviewed – and it was noted that due to the purchase of 2 new bus shelters – on paper it looked as if all budget had been spent. However, as agreed the cost of Bus Shelters was to be covered by General Reserves – so Committee on target at end of Month 11.

17. ITEMS TO REPORT

- 1) Cllr Bob Graham was concerned about fly tipping – if the Sort It Centre did go to booking system (this can be addressed at Full Council when members review consultation).

- 2) Clerk reported that PC Angharad Baynham is leaving as Beat Officer (taking on a role at Concorde House with police) Members requested clerk write officially and thank her for all her support over the last 12 years.
- 3) Clerk has received information about survey on Age Friendly Community Strategy – and will share with members – have on Full Council agenda.
- 4) Clerk has received couple of emails from residents – one that will need to be included on future agenda about speeding on Shireway – the other was about metal barriers as you enter underpasses being tricky for cyclists (once Clerk had pointed out they were there to protect pedestrians from people cycling / skateboarding too quickly – resident understood their purpose and was okay).

The date of the next Planning Committee meeting – Monday 15th April 2024.

As there was no further business – the meeting was closed at 9.50 pm Chair apologies for running late but due to visitors at beginning of meeting – it couldn't be helped.

Signed Committee Chair
Date

APPENDIX 1

DETAILS FROM PUBLIC PARTICIPATION ON 4TH MARCH 2024 – PLANNING COMMITTEE MEETING

Clerk confirmed that 12 messages of concern had been received via email. Clerk had reassured each individual that their comments would be shared with councillors (redacted version) so that members were fully aware of issues at Planning Committee Meeting.

In brief none of the messages were in support of the Solar Farm Proposals. There was a lot of concern about loss of livery locally....but from a planning perspective their was concern about development of the Green Belt, loss of agricultural land, effect on wildlife, and the disruption such a scheme would cause both during construction and then in the years of operation afterwards.

One local resident acted as spokesperson at Planning Committee Meeting – and with their permission – transcript of their address to the council can be read below:-

4/3/2024

Mousewell Solar Farm Proposal.

On behalf of the surrounding residents and community of Mousewell farm, firstly let me thank members of the parish council for allocating sometime this evening for members of the public to discuss the proposal. I am speaking on behalf of those here, and many that are unable to attend the meeting this evening.

After receiving the initial consultation notice I went door to door to speak with those living directly adjacent to the site, and what was clear was the collective feelings of shock, concern, and the need to learn more about the impacts of such developments happening on their doorstep.

It is a proposal which will lead to an irreversible loss of a large swathe of local farmland, that will effectively lock up the land from any activity that could benefit the surrounding communities, be that from agricultural or equestrian use, for 40 years and possibly more, and given that once the site has become industrialised for energy production, it will most likely never return to its original use, with further development options instead opened up.

According to the government's energy security plan, the UK's energy mix needs to switch from high carbon emitting fossil fuels into cleaner sources of energy. Renewable energy plays an important role in this, with Wind power already providing a significant amount to the UK grid, Solar, however, contributes much less, but given recent government support and manufacturing cost reductions it has become a more profitable venture for energy providers to invest in, with ground-arrays being the cheapest installation option, when compared to roof-top systems.

What this fails to highlight is the environmental and societal impact of these 'Clean and green' technologies on the countries that are involved in their production. Reports have linked the panels used in over a third of UK solar farms to 3 main companies based in the Xinjiang province in China, where solar panel production has been tied to the forced labour of the Muslim Uyghur community. ¹The extraction and processing of rare earth elements (REEs) used in both the solar panels and lithium batteries is having a huge impact on communities around the extraction mines and production facilities, with so called "cancer villages", work related illness and leaching ponds full of toxic chemicals as far as the eye can see. Overall, for every ton of rare earth, 2000 tons of toxic waste are produced.²

With the cost for Lithium-ion cells lowering from \$1200 per kWh in 2010, to less than \$200 per kWh in 2018, the use of Lithium in megawatt-scale battery capacity is set to increase. Yet the risk of the lithium battery storage systems malfunctioning, overheating and combusting, starting fires that are difficult to put out,

producing toxic plumes of smoke and gas, contaminating the surrounding land, are not to be underestimated. There have previously been more than 65 fires and explosions reported in similar battery storage systems across the world.³

A report from CPRE has found that over half the solar panels needed to hit national net zero targets could be fitted on rooftops and in car parks, utilizing 250,000 hectares of south-facing commercial roof space, with little impact on landscape, tranquillity and cultural heritage.^{4,5}

Studies have shown that on average, photo-voltaic ground-array projects with a capacity of 20 megawatts or more used approximately 8 acres of land per megawatt of capacity, compared to the 0.46 acres per megawatt of capacity found in wind. The government has even confirmed that offshore wind will produce more than enough electricity to power every home in the country by 2030, so why use precious farm land?

More time is needed to allow for the governments solar agenda to materialise in new and existing developments, and to assess the long-term environmental and societal impacts of allowing farmland to be industrialised for photovoltaic installations while there are still other options available, rather than allowing rural communities to become victims caught up in the gold rush mentality of foreign investors and disinterested land owners.

Given that the land at Mousewell farm is within the green belt, according to the National Planning Policy Framework, renewable energy developments of this size must not be approved except in very special circumstances⁶, yet there is no proof that this proposal demonstrates that, especially given its close proximity to surrounding neighbours and scale within the surrounding landscape.

At a time of increasing food insecurity, where the UK is becoming increasingly reliant on imports within an increasingly turbulent global marketplace, the need to protect and preserve farmland is as important as ever, so be adaptable to future needs of surrounding populations.

One of the proposed mitigating statements from RWE is that sheep could graze under and around the panels, unfortunately, not only will the forage be lacking in nutrition because the majority of sun light will go to the panels, and not to the ground, there is no evidence suggesting that RWE will guarantee a grazing management plan, with routine maintenance likely carried out using machinery and herbicide. Similarly, a recent study highlighted the impact of solar farms on bats, where the lack of sunlight hitting the ground adversely affects plant biomass, significantly reducing the available habitat for insects, which in turn affected their available forage.⁷

Other environmental impacts will be more noticeable, from the disruption to the paths of travel and habitats of surrounding bats, birds, owls, bees, and newts, to the increased surface water run-off into the fields, waterways and roads surrounding the site, where long term compaction to the land from the machinery used in the construction and maintenance, directed run off from the surface of the panels will exacerbate existing problems, where flooding continues to be a serious problem in the surrounding fields and tracks, and will likely become worse as we witness unprecedented weather conditions happening year on year.

With two roads needing to be dug up to lay cable to the substation, an estimated 6-9 months of construction works going on, and an average of 8 HGV deliveries per day, there will be significant disruption to the daily lives of those living along both Sodbury lane and Wapley lane, and those that use the route to commute at a time when roads in the area are all already stretched to capacity. Sodbury lane in particular, which is constantly getting widened by HGVs attempting to pass one another and subsequently eroding the soil banks and causing the edge of the road to crumble away. The number of potholes and poor condition of the road is testament to this.

The neighbours and users of the footpaths will have no longer be able to appreciate the green and pleasant fields and open landscape, and will be left to deal with a newly industrialised landscape surrounding them, with unforeseen risks to their health from being in close proximity to high voltage cabling and electromagnetic frequencies emitted from the inverters, and if they wished to move away from it they will be faced with a reduction in property value and difficulty selling.

UK Energy firms are predicted to make in excess of £170Bn in profit between 2022 and 2024s. According to data available, if the wholesale energy unit cost was just 7p, a 22 Megawatt photovoltaic installation at this location, could produce an annual turnover in the region of £1.5 million, at 10p that would be around £2.2 million. In recent years energy prices have been fluctuating so much that the national grid has paid upwards of 70p per unit (*Following the Russia invasion of Ukraine, August-September 2022*).

At these prices the installation costs would be recouped in a few years and RWE would be set to profit for many years to come.

South Gloucestershire residents will not see any reduction in their energy bills, (which will likely only see them continue to increase), local residents will be left with a lasting legacy of intrusive security measures, surrounded by 8ft fences, several shipping container compounds and around 84 perimeter security cameras, an entire equestrian community will be displaced, with up to 55 horses having to be re-homed, and yet another farm will be lost to greed.

Local communities need a voice.

Yours Sincerely,

Concerned neighbour.

-
- 1 <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/apr/23/revealed-uk-solar-projects-using-panels-from-firms-linked-to-xinjiang-forced-labour>
 - 2 <https://hir.harvard.edu/not-so-green-technology-the-complicated-legacy-of-rare-earth-mining>
 - 3 <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0950423021001686>
 - 4 https://www.cpre.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/feb-22_CPRE_Policy-statement-on-solar-energy.pdf
 - 5 <https://www.cpre.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Rooftop-Revolution-Report.pdf>
 - 6 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/65a11af7e8f5ec000f1f8c46/NPPF_December_2023.pdf
 - 7 <https://besjournals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/1365-2664.14555>
 - 8 <https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/uk-gas-electricity-industry-may-make-170-bln-pounds-excess-profits-bbg-2022-08-30/>
-

Ben Kwok responded to a couple of points put by resident – in particular he answered the question on the **Very Special Circumstances** that would be submitted as part of the planning application.

RWE felt that scheme being able to demonstrate it could generate enough electricity to power 10,000 homes at a time when renewable energy is required was significant – and something that LPA would have to take into consideration given they too had declared a Climate and Nature Emergency in 2019.

He also reiterated that as a company RWE make ethical decisions and as such don't purchase solar panels from certain countries.

Whilst he acknowledged that residents were upset that some hadn't received notification about drop in sessions sooner – he said that RWE have been open and available to meet with residents on site – and at events such as the one being facilitated by Dodington.

He was also queried on height of deer fencing (as this didn't seem to be very clear)....No firm answer given. He thought it was 8ft.

Local residents were also concerned about the noise impact (and not just during construction phase) – but from the invertors and Ben stated that an impact assessment would be duly submitted with planning application....this was met with worry as residents had been led to believe at drop in that there wouldn't be any noise – so why is a noise impact assessment required?

Another resident was concerned about road network during the construction phase and wanted to hear how RWE were going to mitigate this for horse riders and other road users – given that the lane struggles at the moment.

Ben said that the HGV movements would be limited to a certain number each day – this would make construction phase longer – but it meant that there wouldn't be so many movements on a daily basis.

One resident felt that the screening planned (hedgerows, etc) would take a long time to establish and become effective. Ben stated that they could look at using more mature specimens or quick growing specimens to help overcome this.

Another concern was raised about contaminants on land – running off solar farm on to adjoining land and affect this would have on livestock and horses....

Ben wasn't aware of the galvanised steel causing problems (this is what the framework of the panels is constructed from) but if it did then could look at alternative framework (although didn't state what)...

Chair asked if there were any further questions – and if not – opened the floor up to council members to ask about anything that hadn't already been covered / or that was concerning them.

Cllr Paul Hulbert – also on Wapley Conservation Group Committee....had 4 questions to put to RWE, he agreed that he would email them in via Meeting Places as well – as was conscious of time – and wanting to allow his colleagues to ask any questions.....

- 1) What led RWE to look at Site(s)?
- 2) What measures are RWE looking at to mitigate flooding on the western side of the site?
- 3) How would RWE would create diverse meadows in waterlogged areas, particularly in the field nearest to the railway bridge, where the land was very compacted by Network Rail, and in the fields further west down Besom Lane that are flooded from the stream to the south?
- 4) How would RWE preserve and enhance the ditch along the boundary with Wapley Common, with its valuable habitat and its population of wetland creatures such as damsel flies?

Ben answered first 2 questions – but agreed would respond more fully at a later date re questions 3 & 4.

A1) 3 factors led RWE to look at site(s), availability of grid network capacity, planning and ecological constraints and willing land owner(s).

A2) Ben confirmed that Network Rail had been consulted on the proposals – as there is a culvert of theirs along the western side of the site – so that will be investigated and RWE will look at introducing 'swales' and additional planting to help mitigate the flooding.

Cllr Sandra Jee – wanted some surety that the electricity generated by solar farm could be for S Glos Council residents (and not residents of neighbouring local authorities).

Ben explained that due to electricity being used on demand this surety could never be given.

Cllr Sarah Hurley – asked how long the site would take to become carbon neutral following all the construction phases, etc.

Ben thought that 4 – 6 years would see the site as carbon neutral.

Cllr Richard Evans – asked if RWE were aware of another large solar farm that had recently been granted planning permission in Codrington – adjacent to the substation (so in a much better position)???

No comment.

As time was approaching 8:25pm and public participation had overrun – Chair, Cllr Christine Howard drew it to a close – and it was agreed that any further questions be emailed via Ellie at Meeting Places.

APPENDIX 2

CLIMATE & NATURE EMERGENCY UPDATES

Update from the Working Group meeting Monday 26th February 2024

In attendance: -

Councillors Paul Hulbert, Jean Thomas, Christine Howard, Sarah Hurley and Adrian Hutton
Clerk for the meeting – Pip Tymon Deputy Clerk for the Council

Also in attendance – Daisy Finniear SGC

Dodington Parish Council declared a Climate & Nature Emergency at the Full Council meeting on 1st September 2021.

It is vital for members to offer their time and support.

An introduction was given by Daisy on her role as SGC Local Climate & Nature Action Plan Officer. She works 1 day per week in this role offering support and advice to councils on any aspect of their climate and nature work.

The working group had drafted wording for the Climate Action Plan at the last meeting in August. The drafted document was reviewed by members and Daisy at the meeting on the 26th. Daisy provided some feedback which members agreed could be incorporated in the next version of the Plan.

The drafted Climate Action Plan was approved by the working group for recommendation to Full Council for adoption.

Deputy Clerk gave an update to the group on the grant application for WECA Levelling Up funding and other items following the Energy Audit as follows: -

WECA grant funding application was submitted on the 13th February for £38,870.06 to cover the cost of solar panels/battery storage and new velux roof windows with blinds. The earliest date to hear back is the 22nd March 2024. If successful, the tender for solar panels and battery storage would need to go on contract finder for a 12-week period.

Deputy Clerk is also looking at obtaining quotes for roof and cavity wall insulation together with reviewing the lighting in the parish hall plus Sava Watt devices for fridges/freezers.

Members then had a discussion on how the Local Nature Action Plan could further developed and implemented.

Following this discussion, it was agreed for the Deputy Clerk to email a copy of the current LNAP to all members to ask for their ideas/input in how they would like it taken forward. They would also be asked if they would like to get involved in the LNAP. Confirmed a 6-week period would be allowed for this review prior to a working group meeting being arranged.

Daisy confirmed she would document her discussions on an email which could be forwarded onto all members.

The next working group meeting date would be dependent on the LNAP feedback received from members.