

MINUTES OF HORSMONDEN PARISH COUNCIL
PLANNING COMMITTEE MEETING
HELD AT HORSMONDEN VILLAGE HALL
ON TUESDAY, 17 JANUARY 2023 AT 7:30PM

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Present:

Cllrs March, Davis, Russell, Jenkinson and Sheppard

In attendance:

Lucy Noakes (Clerk)

Anna Blyth (Assistant Clerk)

3 members of Voltalia

1 member of Thirty47

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Cllrs Richards, Larkin and Currie – Cllr Jenkinson proposed acceptance of the reasons for absence; seconded Cllr Sheppard. Unanimous.

In the absence of the Chair and the Vice Chair, Cllr Davis proposed that Cllr March should act as Chair for the meeting; seconded Cllr Russell. Unanimous.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Declarations of pecuniary and non-pecuniary interests in accordance with the Code of Conduct were invited.

None.

**3. VOLTALIA PROJECT TEAM TO PRESENT NEXT STEPS REGARDING
BOCKINGFOLD SOLAR SCHEME TO PARISH COUNCIL AND DISCUSS
COMMUNITY BENEFIT OPTIONS**

Voltalia Solar were invited to attend the meeting and deliver a project update to the PC followed by a discussion regarding community benefit options. Voltalia had prepared a short presentation which highlighted the following main points:

- The planning application for Bockingfold Solar Farm (22/02773/FULL) was decided on the 19th December 2022 and permission granted by TWBC, subject to planning conditions.
- Extensive consultation with TWBC resulted in design layout changes including keeping one section of the site free from solar panels as a designated space for the skylarks.
- One of the main concerns highlighted during the consultation period was the impact to local roads by construction traffic. In order to minimise this, Voltalia will be operating a one-way system from the A21 and construction deliveries will also be timebound to reduce the impact during rush hours.
- Voltalia will undertake a pre-condition highways survey and any damage caused to local roads as a result of the development will be rectified on completion of construction.
- The construction timeline is approximately 12 months, with the majority of deliveries occurring within the first 3-4 months.
- There are a number of community benefit options available including local bee keeping opportunities, community benefit fund, extensive educational activities, EV charging points, local jobs and business rates contribution.

The Chair thanked Voltalia for their presentation and asked Cllrs if they would like to ask any questions.

Cllr Davis asked what size HGVs will be used to transport the panels to the site. It was agreed by all Cllrs that the smaller the vehicles are the better to cope with the narrow lanes and already congested junctions on the chosen route. Voltalia took note of these comments and will be providing this information to KCC Highways.

Cllr March commented that the congestion at the crossroads in Horsmonden is already a problem and suggested that there is a backup route in place for HGVs. Cllr March also asked what kind of sanctions are in place for drivers to make sure they use the correct route. Voltalia advised that they operate a card system which has proven to be effective in the past (x1 yellow card leads to drivers being sent home and not paid). All HGVs travelling to the site will have the GPS route pre-programmed.

Cllr Russell commented that he was pleased to see that a one-way system will be in place however Voltalia should be aware that there are a number of other lorry firms who have to use Churn Lane as part of their regular routes due to where their businesses are situated. Voltalia took note of this and advised that they will contact local businesses in that area to try to work together and ensure there are no congestion problems.

Voltalia confirmed that construction is expected to start in Summer 2023 and letters will be issued to local residents so that they are aware. Cllr March suggested that Voltalia also contact the PC to let them know that dates for the start of construction so that the PC can advertise on their website / social media pages.

The community benefit options were discussed. Cllr March advised that EV charging points is an area the PC have explored in the past but there is limited space within the Parish for these. It was agreed that the Sports Ground might be a possibility and the PC will explore this option further.

The PC were pleased to hear about the community benefit fund which Voltalia are able to set up on completion of the project however, Cllr Davis commented that the Voltalia presentation states that this would only be available for communities within 2km of the development. The centre of Horsmonden would fall outside the 2km boundary so it was agreed that this would be reviewed and altered by Voltalia. Cllrs felt quite strongly that the community benefit fund should be linked closely to the parish boundaries as this development site falls wholly within Horsmonden and the loss of the agricultural land is wholly within the parish. The development of the site will not affect other parishes once construction is finished and any highways problems will be mitigated appropriately through the construction traffic plan.

Educational opportunities were discussed and Cllrs advised Voltalia that within the parish there is Horsmonden Primary Academy and Horsmonden Kindergarten and then a number of other primary educational establishments based in nearby villages that are attended by children living within the parish. Mascalls Academy is the nearest secondary school, but there are others further afield that are attended by children of the parish such as Uplands in Wadhurst and several schools in the Tonbridge and Tunbridge Wells area.

There was a brief discussion regarding the opportunity for local jobs. Voltalia confirmed that the development will create many job opportunities for local people during the course of construction. Where possible, Voltalia will be approaching local companies as part of their tendering process.

The Clerk advised that there are a number of Bee Keepers in village. Cllr Davis suggested that Voltalia contact the Bee Keeping Society in Laddingford about the opportunities for housing hives.

Cllr March raised the risk of flooding at the site. Voltalia confirmed that the risk of flooding will be no worse than before development.

Voltalia confirmed that sheep will be able to graze on the site and they will have wildflower strips between the panels and the hedgerows for the bees and butterflies. The hedgerows will be of native planting but thorny for added security. The perimeter of the site will be fenced with deer fencing. The site will result in a significant bio-diversity net gain of 130% for habitats, 55% for hedgerows and 18% for river units.

Cllr Jenkinson asked Voltalia whether they will be protecting the existing Public Rights of Way (PROW) at the site. Voltalia confirmed that all existing PROWs will remain open and will be enhanced and improved. It was suggested by Voltalia that they could put up display panels / information boards along the PROWs to inform

walkers about the operation of the site and the enhancements that have been created for the wildlife. All Cllrs were keen on this idea.

Voltalia reminded the PC that this is a temporary project for a period of 35 years. The solar panels will cause no lasting damage to the ground and once they are removed it is very easy to restore the area back to agricultural land.

The Chair thanked Voltalia for their presentation and the time taken to answer the questions from Cllrs.

All members of Voltalia and Thirty47 left the meeting at this stage.

4. PUBLIC SESSION

Members of the public have the right to speak for up to three minutes at the Chair's discretion on issues concerning the Parish providing the Clerk has prior notification.

None.

5. NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN – NEXT STEPS (AGREE FINAL CHANGES)

The Clerk advised Cllrs that Deborah Dixon from TWBC has confirmed that the only date available for the referendum is Thursday 8th June due to availability of the electoral team. It was agreed that this was disappointing as the 8th June is the first day of the HoVEC Summer Festival but Cllr March suggested that advertising for the referendum could be included in the advertising of the HoVEC event. The Clerk will contact Sara Foster (HoVEC) regarding this and Cllr March will mention at the next HoVEC meeting.

The Clerk advised that Jim Boot is still working on the Forward but as this is a separate document and it does not form part of the plan itself it was agreed that the PC can agree its content at a later date.

Cllr Jenkinson proposed that the PC accept the changes to the mapping and the text of the NH plan as set out by the examiner; seconded Cllr Sheppard. Unanimous.

6. APPLICATIONS GRANTED AND REFUSED

Granted

Application	Location	PC comment	TWBC decision	Date
22/01965/FULL	Land North of August Pitts Farm, Churn Lane, Horsmonden, Tonbridge, Kent TN12 8HW	Refusal	Granted	5 th January 2023
22/02773/FULL	Land at Bockingfold Farm, Maidstone Road, Horsmonden, Tonbridge, Kent TN12	Refusal	Granted	19 th December 2022

22/02929/LBC	Spring Farm, Goudhurst Road, Horsmonden, Tonbridge, Kent TN12 8AY	Approval	Granted	23 rd December 2022
22/03344/FULL	Swigs Hall, Maidstone Road, Horsmonden, Tonbridge, Kent TN12 8DG	Approval	Granted	6 th January 2023
22/03345/LBC	Swigs Hall, Maidstone Road, Horsmonden, Tonbridge, Kent TN12 8DG	Approval	Granted	6 th January 2023

Refused

Application	Location	PC comment	TWBC decision	Date
None				

7. OTHER PLANNING MATTERS (Discussion only – No decisions)

No other planning matters raised.

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 9.10pm.