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Minutes of the Parish Council meeting held on Thursday 2nd November 2023 at 7.00pm in Old Wives Lees Village Hall

AGENDA

Councillors Present: G. Schofield (Chair), S. Barrett, A. Watkins, V Hutchinson, A. Webb, G Taylor & K Jeffries

Also Present: P. Coles (PC) (Clerk to the Council), and ten members of the public.

Councillor Apologies: K. Uncle (Deputy Chair), G. Meaden

Councillor Absentee: N/A

Item

- 2023/130 Apologies for Absence**
Councillor G Meaden holiday
Councillor K. Uncle personal reasons
- 2023/131 Declarations of Interests And / Or Lobbying**
Removal of crab trees, Councillors G. Schofield and A Watkins
Planning decisions, OTH/2023/1735, Councillor G Taylor
- 2023/132 Minutes of the meeting of the Parish Council**
2023/132.1 To receive and approve the minutes of the meeting held on 5th October 2023.
Agreed
2023/132.2 To receive an update on any matters arising not included in the agenda.
- 2023/131 Questions from Residents**
Question on the survey Junction of A28 - A252. No substantial change since update at the last meeting. Will be an agenda item at the next Parish Council meeting.
Question on why all Councillors do not have an official Council email account. Linked to the new website. All Councillors will have when the Council moves to the new site.
Question on logging all Freedom of Information (FOI) requests. Council confirmed that FOI requests where compliant with the act will be logged.
Question on the recording of Parish Council meetings: Some Councillors not confident about recording meetings, will be considered at a later date: **To note**, when the Parish Council considered recording meetings, this was to allow Parish residents who were unable to attend CPC meetings to be able to observe the meeting. The true record of a CPC meeting is the approved minutes.
Question on use of the Parish Magazine to promote eco-biodiversity. Promoting eco-biodiversity is being considered as part of the new environment policy.
Questions by email
Resident of Felborough close, the cul de sac and I've noted over the last 3 years parking and passing is becoming a real issue. Passed to Borough Councillor to investigate.

Would the Parish Council be able to investigate if our part of the village can receive higher speed broadband? Passed to the communications working group to investigate.
Information on the Busby Tree: The tree is going to be replaced by a Pink Hawthorn tree which is native to this country.

2023/132 Solar Farm Old Wives Lees Planning application

Case Reference: PA/2022/2415

Location: Land associated with North Court Fruit Farm, Lower Lees Road, Old Wives Lees, CT4 8AZ

Proposal: Full planning application for installation of a solar farm, including photovoltaic panels, substations, inverters, maintenance tracks, security fencing, cameras, landscaping and associated works.

Reasons: Additional Documentation Submitted - Further information under Regulation 25 of the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017 received.

Decision: Councillors agreed to submit a letter opposing the application. Appendix 3
Councillors noted that Kent Highways and Transport has approved the transport plan submitted the applicant. Councillors questioned whether this was approved without testing the validity of the plan at the peak travel time, school closing, with vehicles.
Councillors questioned why the community Orchard needed to be fenced and padlocked at night.

2023/133 Borough Councillors, Policing:
Borough Councillor on holiday

2023/134 To discuss the cutting down of Trees in Chilham on the 20th of October.

Trees were cut down during consultation period for application number NOT/2023/1828. Councillors were alerted by Councillor A. Webb. Alerted Ashford Borough Council (ABC) tree warden, Phil Cook, who stopped the work. Phil Cook is looking to put in place a Tree Preservation Order covering the trees, to be considered by ABC.

2023/135 To discuss the report on the cleanliness of Taylor Hill Toilets

Councillor K Uncle has carried out a daily inspection of the toilets at Taylors Hill since 20 September 2023 to 19 October 2023. The average rating was 7.5 for the ladies and 6.5 for the men. Councillors considered accepted the report. Thanked Councillor K Uncle for all the work he had done on compiling the report. Thanked the Councillors and J Schofield who replaced the toilet seats at Taylors Hill. Agreed the report should be shared with the contractors for comment. If the response is not satisfactory Councillors will consider what action to take including re-tendering

2023/136 To discuss Village Litter Picks

Councillors noted that the school does some litter picks as well as the Council.

Agreed: The environment working group to investigate how litter picking could be done on a voluntary basis

2023/137 To discuss the budget for the financial year 2024/25

Agreed: Councillors accepted the budget for the financial year 2024/25. The budget proposed no increase to the precept. For residents this would mean a small percentage drop in the amount they would be charged. For a band D property this would be equivalent to 1.26% on the current charge for 2023/24, £67.18 to £66.34.

2023/138 Working Groups

To receive reports

2023/139.1 Finance & General Purposes:

2023/139.1.1 Financial Transactions for Approval-Appendix 1 refers
Noted

2023/139.2 Planning

2023/139.2.1 Planning Applications

Case Reference: PA/2023/1811

Location: Sunnyside Farm, Shalmsford Road, Chilham, CT4 8BS

Proposal: Demolition of existing dwelling and construction of new dwelling

Decision: No objection

Case Reference: PA/2023/1937

Location: Soles Hill Farm, Olson Timber Buildings, Soleshill Road, Chilham, CT4 8JZ

Proposal: Conversion of existing cold store building and conversion of a former stable building to 3 terraced residential dwellings and 1 detached dwelling with vehicular access from Soleshill Road

Decision: No objection, noted no commitment to invest in public transport.

2023/139.2.2 Tree Orders

App Ref: NOT/2023/1828

Location: 9, The Bothy, Church Hill, Chilham, CT4 8DA

Proposal: Fell to ground level 39no dead/ predominantly dead (>75% of the canopy area) Ash trees majority of the trees to be removed are roadside and pose a risk to road users.

Superseded by Tree preservation Order

App Ref: NOT/2023/1910

Location: Old Vicarage, The Square, Chilham, CT4 8BY

Proposal: T6, Robinia - Fell, due to rotting in roots.

Decision: No objection

2023/139.2.3 Planning Decisions

App Ref: OTH/2023/1735

Location: Mabels Wood, Taylors Hill, Chilham

Proposal: Retrospective works to woodland for the purpose of clearing dense ground Ivy. Stripping dense Ivy Growth from Tress and the removal of a number of dead/predominantly dead trees. All dead/predominantly were felled on grounds of safety (Elm, Hazel. Sycamore, Ash. Field Maple, and Holly)

Withdrawn

2023/139.3 Communications and Information technology

2023/139.3.1 To receive a report from the Working Group on Communications

Considering how to promote what the parish Council has achieved. Asking for content for CPC newsletters.

2023/139.3.2 To receive an update on the Parish Council website.

Close to launching. Will set up a zoom call for Councillors when ready.

2023/139.4.1 Events

2023/139.4.1 To receive a report from the Working Group on Events

Halloween raised £1213.13 before costs. Surplus to be used for the D Day event.

Considering Fireworks event next year, will need to confirm Insurance cover.

Working on a Christmas event.

Erection of Tree in Chilham Square. Due to be erected on the 8th of December, lights on Sunday 10th December. Received a donation of £400 from local business. Donation of new barrier for the tree.

Request of £150 for the Christmas tree from the Parish Council. **Agreed.**

Christmas tree Festival. **Agreed** Parish Council to include a tree-theme Tree Preservation Orders.

2023/139.5 Environment & Open Spaces

2023/139.5.1 To receive a report from the Working Group
 Three quotes discussed for the removal of Crab Apple Trees in Old Wives Lees recreational ground. Quote 1) Finbury £1,440, Quote 2) Hart Lee £1,692 and Quote 3) S Fewins £1,245.
Agreed: Accepted quote from S Fewins.
Agreed: Trees will be replaced with another species

2023/139.6 Chilham Parish Youth Club

2023/139.6.1 To receive a report from the Working Group
 Two sessions held raising £230.

2023/139.7 Chilham Square

2023/139.7.1 To receive a report of the Working Group
Agreed: Parish council agreed to pay for employing a designer, at a cost of £1,068 for Chilham Square, parking proposed by Kent Highways.
Agreed: Parish Clerk to write to ASB thanking them for their suggestion regarding Taylors Hill carpark. Inform them that the Council will be following up with the proposal from Kent Highways, if this does not solve the problem the Parish Council will want to relook at parking in Taylors Hill Car park.

2023/140 Correspondence

List of items received during the period 1st November 2023 – 31st November 2023, (Appendix 2)
 Noted

2023/141 Matters for Further Discussion

Request for Support from Chilham Parish Council from Beam-deferred to the next meeting.
 Request for Support from Wealden Wheels. Differed to next meeting. Councillors to investigate whether the school holds membership of Wealden wheels. Councillor Watkins confirmed that when trying to book transport she was unable to.

2023/142 Date and Time of Next Meeting

To confirm the next meeting of the Parish Council will be held on 7th December 2023 at 7.00 pm in Chilham Village Hall

2023/143 Closed session.

Items of a confidential nature to be discussed.

Financial Transactions Appendix 1

Transaction Date	Transaction Description	Debit Amount	Credit Amount
31/10/2023	ANASTACIA WATKINS	201.11	
30/10/2023	CHILHAM PARISH COU	20000	
30/10/2023	P E COLES EXPENSES	68.54	
27/10/2023	NEST	28.26	
26/10/2023	P E COLES SALARY	931.7	
19/10/2023	F M UNCLE	33.49	
18/10/2023	MAZARS	378	
18/10/2023	MRS G SCHOFIELD EXPENSES	253.79	
16/10/2023	SPOTON.NET LTD	64.8	
13/10/2023	B.ONLINE LTD	11.94	
12/10/2023	MRS SHANISE BARRET COSY	163.25	
12/10/2023	P E COLES EXPENSES	56.16	
12/10/2023	BILTING FARM SELF	46	

10/10/2023	KENT COMMERC SERV C20791	158.57	
03/10/2023	500005		62.1
03/10/2023	P E COLES SALARY	931.7	
03/10/2023	BOURNE TO GARDEN	390	
03/10/2023	CHILHAM PARISH REC	144	
03/10/2023	VICTORY CLEANING	667.46	

Appendix 2-Correspondence

Item	Date
Chief Executive briefing - Council renews pledge to lead the way in broadband provision	03/10/2023
NHW - Our News Newsletter	03/10/2023
Bus Service Changes March and April 23	05/10/2023
Ashford Police Newsletter October Edition - Rural North	05/10/2023
KCC Highways Ashford Operations Team: Highway Steward Areas from 9th October 2023	05/10/2023
Pollinator action plans for parish councils	09/10/2023
RACE - Rural & Community Housing Enabling Service Free Online Session - 8 Nov 12:30-1:30pm	10/10/2023
M20 Moveable Barrier update	11/10/2023
KALC Annual General Meeting Notice 2023	12/10/2023
Adult Social Care Digital Roadshow: book a place at our in-person workshops or visit our info stand	12/10/2023
Chief Executive briefing - Recycle Your Electricals project	13/10/2023
Read our Community Matters newsletter	17/10/2023
RACE - Online Cohousing Session - 8th November!	17/10/2023
KALC Ashford: Agenda for meeting 01/11/23	18/10/2023
Leader's briefing - Update on the Council's Approach to Nutrient Mitigation	20/10/2023
Chief Executive's Briefing - Making the case for Eurostar services return.	20/10/2023
Consultation on the Tenterden Neighbourhood Plan - extension for comments to Monday 13 November 202	23/10/2023
Ashford Police Newsletter November Edition - Rural North	26/10/2023
Chief Executive's Briefing - New schemes launched to support businesses in the borough	27/10/2023
FW: Christmas event posters: Age UK Hythe	27/10/2023
Fwd: KALC Training opportunities	30/10/2023

Appendix 3

By email.

Date: 03/11/2023

Dear Planning and Development,

Re: PA/2022/2415

I am writing on behalf of Chilham Parish Council following the Council meeting on Thursday 2nd November regarding the application.

General points

- Chilham Parish Council OBJECT to Planning Application PA/2022/2415. We recommend that Ashford Borough Council REJECT the application. Reasons are discussed below.
- Chilham Parish Council approached the current consultation with a fresh eye and reviewed the paperwork, comments, and new information in a way that was without bias as far as possible. We are confident that as much as possible has been done to reach a conclusion in a fair and reasonable way.
- The letter sent one year ago in December 2022 by Chilham Parish Council in response to the first consultation on this Planning Application still stands and we would request that it also be taken into consideration.
- It is noted that residents' comments, public comments in general, and the comments from other consultees reflect the opinion of Chilham Parish Council in general, which is that solar power is important in the continuing development of UK infrastructure to transition to sustainable power and achieve Net Zero by 2050, and that solar parks in general are important developments contributing to that effort, but that this particular solar park (which I will subsequently refer to as 'The Scheme') is proposed in a site that is inappropriate for the purpose. Reasons are discussed below.

Reasons for objecting

There are four general areas of concern which form the basis for the decision of Chilham Parish Council. These are:

Concerns around the viability and impact of the proposed 6-month construction phase
Community, Environmental and Wildlife Impact
Concerns around Landscape and Visual Impact
Concerns around Land Use

Construction Phase

Despite revised plans that go into detail about the movement of HGVs around the Village during the construction phase, it is clear that should the scheme go ahead, the six-month construction phase would be incredibly disruptive to the village of Old Wives Lees, to the point of making it impossible for residents to continue their lives normally, particularly in light of the sheer amount of HGV traffic, and the potential devastation to village infrastructure, environment and wildlife.

Wardell Armstrong's Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) and subsequent Addendum to that document, give a lot of practical ways that disruption might be minimised, and the natural and village environment be relatively undisturbed. They also outline how HGV traffic will be tightly controlled and planned to move around the village in a way that minimises disruption on the roads. However, due to the roads around Old Wives Lees being very narrow with few passing places and certainly no space for HGVs to pass cars, we cannot see how the construction phase, as it is described, is viable.

Should the scheme go ahead, we would request that ABC ensure the following:

The time window within which HGVs are allowed to operate to be reduced from 10-4 to 10-3, in order to take account of school traffic between the times of 3 and 4 pm.

The applicant considers the possibility of swapping larger vehicles for smaller ones outside of the village for actual movement of materials around at busy times.

The applicant take part in a scheme whereby they outline the movement of HGVs each day and inform residents, either by a subscribed text message service or by liaising with the Parish Council or by some other successful method, so residents are informed about the details of construction traffic each day and can plan accordingly.

That ABC appoint an officer or independent auditor to ensure that all of the mitigation in the construction phase, particularly that which relates to wildlife, trees, hedges and biodiversity, are adhered to throughout the construction phase, and that the CEMP is adhered to at all times and any changes are agreed by ABC before they are made. If ABC does not have the resources for this monitoring, then they could require that the applicant pay for an independent environmental auditor to oversee this.

That the advice of the Tree Warden, and others who have commented on impacts to trees and hedges be adhered to in the naming and protection of specific trees that must not be affected by the construction, and that advice from Peter Vogel and the Tree Warden for ABC be followed (please see letter from Peter Vogel submitted to the Planning Portal).

Community, Environment and Wildlife Impact

The Scheme, should it be allowed to go ahead, will have an impact on the community of Old Wives Lees not only during the construction phase but during the life of the scheme. The impact on the mental health of villagers cannot be ignored and the importance of this can be seen in the residents' comment on the Planning Portal. Research has shown that mental health is supported by healthy environments and thriving wildlife, and visible destruction of such during the construction phase (particularly along the lanes in the village) and afterwards will have a palpable impact on residents' wellbeing.

The 'industrialisation' of this Landscape Character Area, and the loss of that character, will have an impact on villagers, and so we request that this impact be taken into account when considering the application. Old Wives Lees is a sociable and family-focussed village, with monthly big breakfasts bringing the village together for a cooked breakfast in the village hall on a Saturday morning, a community tea every month where villagers get together to enjoy tea and cake while raising money for charities such as Demelza and Cancer Research, and several musical groups such as the fortnightly village choir, recorder group and ukulele club, which add to the vibrant and supportive nature of the community in Old Wives Lees. A large Scheme being imposed on such a community could only have a negative impact resulting in residents feeling defeated and frustrated and less likely to undertake the kinds of charitable and social events that are so important for everyone in a largely socially disconnected world.

Should the scheme go ahead, we would request that ABC ensure the following in order to protect village life in Old Wives Lees, not only for human residents but plants and animals as well:

The applicant should consider moving the area of community orchard that is currently planned to the North of Lower Ensden Road, to a location nearer to the village.

The applicant should consider having the community orchards open to the public during daylight hours (or between certain times) every day so they may be enjoyed regularly by residents. We do not see how an 'appointment only' system would work, and it would be a shame to have community facilities which are unavailable to residents.

That the creation and completion of the two areas of community orchards as outlined on the master plan map, be a pre-construction condition, i.e., that the orchards be completed before work on the solar park begins, and that an ABC officer or independent party inspect those community areas before agreeing to solar panels being brought in.

That the applicant oversees the conversion of the footpath that connects Latin Fields with Lower Ensden Road to a bridleway, suitable for horses and bicycles, as well as walkers. This, the Working Group have considered, might form

part of an Old Wives Lees community walk/cycle, that connects the Village Green and existing Playpark to Latin Fields, and thence to the community orchard. This will encourage cycling in the village, which is difficult at the moment because of the steep hills and dangerously narrow lanes. Again, this should be a pre-construction condition.

That the applicant adds some play equipment designed for older children either to one of the community orchards (should they be open regularly), to Latin Fields, or in another area, to enhance leisure facilities in the village. The current playpark is excellent for children of preschool and primary school age, but the Working Group would be keen to see the Scheme (should it go ahead) enable the enhancement of facilities for children aged 8-15.

That more biodiversity enhancement features be included, such as wildlife ponds in scrubland or community areas.

That the applicant pays for other community projects throughout the life of the scheme in a Section 106 agreement (please see Chilham Parish Council letter from December 2022), for example, they could pay for the upkeep of various community open spaces such as the Village green, the gardens around the village hall and Latin Fields. Another possibility might be the installation of a footpath/cycle path around the village green or parts of it, or sponsoring the creation of wildflower or wild areas around the edge of the green to enhance biodiversity

That as many of the planned mitigation and enhancement features of the scheme be completed before construction as possible. All of the new woodland and scrub areas, all of the bat and bird facilities, and as much of the new hedging and screening planting as possible. Again, this should be a pre-construction condition and overseen by ABC or an independent auditor reporting to ABC

That all of the biodiversity and community mitigation and enhancement features of the scheme as it is described in the Wardell Armstrong documents be implemented (i.e., benches in the community orchards, bird boxes, bat boxes, areas for turtle doves, etc.). This should be overseen by an ABC officer or by an independent auditor on an ongoing basis for at least 5 years, paid for by the applicant if ABC does not have the resources. Any additional enhancements be considered by the applicant if they are identified as construction happens.

Landscape and Visual Impact

The Scheme, while not within an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is, nevertheless, adjacent to the AONB and is visible from it. The site of the Scheme is identified by ABC in the Local Plan as a Landscape Character Area (LCA), No.33, 'Old Wives Lees Orchards', and while LCAs do not afford the full extent of protection as an AONB, they still require any development to be carried out in a way that retains or enhances the character of the area. A solar park clearly does not fit well with this, and while the letter of the guidance in the Local Plan would not rule out the Scheme, we believe it would be against the spirit of that guidance.

In Wardell Armstrong's response to the LMS and LUC Reviews of the Landscape and Visual Chapters of the ES, they refer to mitigation in the form of planting, and to the fact that since views of the Scheme from the AONB will be 'long-distance' that visual impact will be negligible adverse, on the whole, and not significant. The Working Group acknowledges the work done to site the scheme where it will be minimally impactful, but the fact remains that there *will* be an impact on the AONB, and on the North Downs Way.

Glint and Glare, and visual considerations, remain important, and comments made in the previous letter from CPC to ABC (for example, about the colour of the power regulators) continue to be recommended.

Should the scheme go ahead, we would request that ABC ensure the following:

Consider the possibility of changing the angle of the panels to reduce glint and glare as seen from the AONB.

Investing in larger trees and shrubs as part of the LVIA mitigation, in order that screening be effective sooner than the predicted 15 years

Land Use

While the Working Group recognises that the issue of food security is important, we also recognise that energy security is important, and on a general philosophical level, the debate around this Scheme could be characterised as one against the other.

I will outline an example in the summary comments below, but the fact remains that the proposed scheme is sited where the majority of the land is Best and Most Valuable Farmland, and we believe that this will be best put to use growing food.

Should the scheme go ahead, we would request that ABC ensure the following:

That the possibility of reducing the size of the scheme be considered, combining solar generation with arable farming, possible regenerative farming tenants, new orchards, and/or other land uses that are commensurate with the setting of the site.

Conclusion and context

Debates around solar parks in general in the UK are current, relevant, and important. It is particularly important that the impacts of solar parks continue to be discussed and circulated, impacts to do with ecology, land use, landscape, visual, noise, what happens when a solar park is decommissioned, and many other technical issues that are only just being understood since solar parks in this country are relatively new. No solar parks have been decommissioned as yet, and so there is no hard and fast information about how this process works in reality.

While the proposed Scheme is too small (only 44 hectares) to go through the Development Consent Order process, which is relevant to projects over 50 hectares, it is large enough a concern *in its proposed setting* with half of the scheme *between two residential roads*, to have major impacts on the land and the people who will be near to it, impacts that may not have such negative outcomes should the Scheme be on a different site.

Chilham Parish Council's conclusions are based not only on the files provided by the applicant and subsequent reviews by various parties, but also on what we see as the duty of the Parish Council to reflect and respect the views of the residents of the Parish. The overwhelming response by commenters on the Planning Portal objecting to the Scheme (140 individuals) is not something that we can ignore. However, we also need to take into account the views of those people who commented in support of the scheme (4 individuals), and the views of the landowner who is also a resident of the Parish. With this in mind, the decisions made here and the process by which we made them were not taken lightly, and the Parish Council remain dedicated to representing all of the different views of the people in the Parish.

Yours sincerely

Cllr V Hutchinson