

Smeeth Parish Council
Minutes of the Meeting
Held on Wednesday 8th September 2021 at 6.00pm at Brabourne Baptist Church.

<p>9 members of the public attended the presentation.</p> <p>Cllr Herrick welcomed everyone to the meeting.</p> <p>1. To receive a presentation regarding the Solar Farm Proposal by James Lyons (EDF Renewables).</p> <p>James Lyons from EDF Renewables introduced himself. James circulated a copy of a PowerPoint document and promised a pdf copy would be sent to the Clerk for distribution.</p> <p>EDF aim to de-carbonise their energy mix. This will be a 49.9 MW scheme which will be able to power 17,000 homes. 102 hectares of land are part of the project but not all land will be covered with panels, possibly about 80% of land coverage. EDF develop, build, and manage their own assets.</p> <p>If approved, EDF will provide a £20,000 Community Trust Fund which will be allocated locally.</p> <p>The proposed site has no designations and is close to Sellindge sub-station where grid connection exists and the site also has good irradiation levels. The proposals will minimise any impact on Public Rights of Way.</p> <p>EDF are open to comments and can be contacted. There will be further consultation in Autumn 2021, a planning application will be submitted in late 2021, and installation will take about 9 months after permission is granted.</p> <p>The 1st consultation covered approximately 2,500 properties.</p> <p>Questions were welcomed (marked in italics)</p> <p><i>Who will the landowner be?</i> EDF will rent the land for 40 years. Then the land will be decommissioned and returned to its original state.</p> <p><i>Lots of work has been undertaken on-site in the past few years which has meant there has been a lot of digging up of roads, is this to be expected?</i> There will be some disruption when laying the cable, but EDF will be looking to minimise this as much as possible.</p> <p><i>Will there be a technology upgrade on this site over the course of time?</i> Possibly, but we are limited by technology and planning.</p> <p><i>The solar installation, on the nearby existing site since 2015, is very well screened, will this one be screened too?</i> There are plans to screen the site as much as possible. Although this site is on a hill so will be visible from further away.</p> <p><i>Have you considered the wild boar population?</i> We are unaware of any wild boar but will follow that up.</p> <p><i>Why is the plan for 40 years?</i> Because that is the lifespan of the panels.</p> <p><i>Would the solar farm be extended beyond 40 years?</i> Planning consent would be required to change the length of time on site.</p> <p><i>Is there an Environmental Impact Assessment for this planned development?</i> This is required by the Planning Authority and will be submitted with the application.</p> <p><i>What would happen if you found something unsuitable during this assessment?</i> It would depend on what it was that was found. We could work around it, or we might have to withdraw from</p>	<p>Action:</p>
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the site if it cannot be suitably mitigated.

I object to the use of this site, not to the green principle. This is prime agricultural land, and this is such a huge loss. It would be more expensive and thus less profitable to provide solar panels over warehouses/hangars at airports. Agricultural land is used because it is the cheapest option. This is Politically led. EDF does work with big companies to put solar panels on their roofs - we are working with Tesco for instance.

Are you working with Otterpool? EDF are in preliminary talks with Otterpool.

What sort of screening will you undertake? We will most likely improve hedgerows.

What is the green area on the map? This is where the Pivot Power batteries will be.

Why do you need batteries? To keep the grid uploaded.

What is the physical size of the batteries and how many will be needed? They are the size of a shipping container, and we would need about 20.

What happens to the batteries at the end of their life? The life span is 30 -35 years for a battery, and we would recycle as much as possible.

Do the batteries pose any fire risk? Also this area does flood at times. We will not build on the area likely to flood and the batteries are built with extensive fire suppression included.

What area is covered by the Community Fund? The parishes affected - we would need to discuss this in detail with the parishes and agree what this fund would look like and how it would work.

What would happen if EDF were bought out? The contracts would still stand as they would be robust enough to cover this eventuality.

Would this lead to any job creation? Some new contracts could be awarded locally, i.e., fencing/gates, grass cutting between panels.

We need to protect our farmland, or we could end up with lots of electricity but no food. Could sheep be grazed on the land too? Yes - the projects are steered away from putting panels on the highest grades of farmland. This site is grade 3.

How will the hedgerows be maintained? They would not be cut back in the same way as the farmers cut theirs. It would be arranged with a contractor.

James was thanked for attending the meeting. The Parish Council will be submitting some initial comments forthwith.

The Parish Council wish to see the site remain with a secondary agricultural use.

The Environment Impact Assessment needs to be looked at, but the PC wishes to see pollinators on site and that the site is environmentally friendly.

The Clerk will draft a list of comments for confirmation by Councillors prior to submission to EDF.

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2. To note those present.

Cllr Herrick (Chairman) (DH), Cllr Mrs Alford (HA), Cllr Mrs Morey (JM), Cllr Mrs Moo (YM), Cllr Mrs Pereboom (VP) Cllr Roger Baker (RB), 4 members of the public and Mrs Block (Clerk) (TB).

3. To receive and approve apologies for absence.

Apologies for absence had been received from Cllr William Howard (ABC).

4. To receive declarations of interest (Disclosable Pecuniary Interests and Other Significant Interests). The nature as well as the existence of any such interest must be declared.

There were no declarations of interest to be made.

There was no PCSO report. Cllr Moo explained there had been an issue with off-road bikes and was advised to report this through the official channels.

12. To receive an update on the future of the Newsletter

No progress has yet been made. VP requested further representation from Smeeth. VP is looking to pass the baton on and bow out of the newsletter responsibilities and therefore needs a representative to take this on for Smeeth. RB, YM, and VP will all attend the meeting with Brabourne Parish Council representatives to discuss the newsletter.

13. To receive the KALC Representative Report

The Ashford Area Committee of the Kent Association of Local Councils met on Wednesday 1st September via zoom.

The Chief Executive of Ashford Borough Council, Tracey Kerly, attended.

A report was given by Chief Inspector Sparks on behalf of Ashford Police. CI Sparks urges all crime to be reported.

Among other topics discussed were:

1. The major project for replacement/development of the ABC Planning Portal, including difficulties experienced by some parishes when Ashford Borough Council removed from the public portal comments made by members of the public in previous planning applications but which the local Parish considered relevant to current planning applications. It was noted that in such circumstances a Freedom of Information Request by Parish Councils might be needed to obtain access to such comments if ABC continued to remove the old comments from public view.
2. The forthcoming Local Council Forum due to take place on 13th September (which JM plans to attend) is likely to be via zoom but it is hoped that the next Forum in November would take place in person as presentations and discussion via zoom were rather limited.
3. It was felt that the format of the ABC Corporate plan consultation document was difficult to read, and it was suggested that it could be put into a different format which might be more “user friendly” and easier to understand.
4. The LGA paper on joint working and the cost implications to Parish Councils engendered by schemes caused by transfer of ‘unwanted’ assets to parishes. The amenity lighting project and the cost to any Parishes assuming responsibility for the lighting poles, including legal agreements required in the event of a transfer of ownership, insurance necessary for any accidental damage caused to poles in traffic accidents etc. and the inevitable cost in due course of time of replacement of the poles. Wittersham Parish Council had discovered ownership of some streetlamps had been incorrectly recorded on the KCC lighting map and warned other Parishes may find similar inconsistencies.

JM

14. To discuss the streetlights in Smeeth, highlighted by Ashford Borough Council as not safety critical and decide on next actions as appropriate.

Those Councillors who had walked the village and assessed the streetlights were disappointed by the state of the poles on the list for taking over/removal.

There was a discussion around how much responsibility we would have if something untoward occurred because we had not taken on the streetlight, and it had been removed. This could create a liability issue. Following further discussion, the Parish Council suggested listing (in an eNewsletter item) the streetlights to be kept following the decision to streamline streetlighting by Ashford Borough Council.

VP is to look at the streetlights that would be retained and report back to the next meeting.

VP

15. Footpaths and Highways

The stones reported on Woolpack Hill have been moved back from the Highway edge. DH has not yet visited Sandy Place. Emergency closures had occurred over recent months and the water

DH

leak on the A20 was noted.

A member of the public expressed increasing concern over the parking on the corner of Sandy Place/on Woolpack Hill. DH explained that the PCSO had said this was not illegal parking - the PC has historically resisted yellow lines. The Clerk will ask Kent Highways for advice and add the issue to the Highways Improvement Plan.

Damage to the triangle at The Ridgeway was also discussed - the Clerk is to ask Kent Highways to evaluate this issue.

The Clerk is to ask the Caretaker to maintain the footpath from Canterbury Road to Prospect Way.

TB

TB

TB

16. Planning matters: to authorise a response to any application(s) and to note any recent planning decisions by Ashford Borough Council or any correspondence on planning matters.

The Planning Report had been circulated.

The Piggeries (Andrews Garage site) – an appeal has been submitted.

There is some confusion over the planning application for the new entrance at Cherry Trees (Plain Road) as the PC had an email to say it had been refused but the portal shows the application as undecided.

It was noted that Bog Farm Woods may be sold.

The application for the telecommunications mast at Bower Road was discussed. The Parish Council raises no objection but will ask that the Officer considers comments raised by the neighbouring properties.

17. Financial matters:

a) To note the Parish Council's financial position as at 31/08/2021

The current financial position of the Parish Council was noted. The Parish Council has a balance of £82,664.88 as of 31st July 2021.

b) To authorise any payments

The following payments were authorised:

T Denne and Sons	£108.00
HMRC	£420.66
Paul Rodway	£1533.98
KCC Pension	£623.43
Lister Wilder	£72.20
P Rodway (mobile payment)	£25.00

B Podd	£213.84
HMRC	£135.20
Tracey Block (August salary)	£270.73
Tracey Block (September salary)	£270.73
PKF Littlejohn LLP	£360.00
Kent County Council	£285.00
T Block (expenses)	£105.34

c) To note the end of Audit report received from PKF Littlejohn LLP

The Clerk reported that the audit was complete with no comments from the Auditor.

<p>18. Correspondence</p> <p>The Clerk had received a communication from a gentleman who lives next door to 4 Ramstone Close. This property is empty, and the neighbour is troubled by the brambles/weeds coming through from the unkept garden. The Clerk will write to the letting agent in the hope that this will resolve the issue.</p>	TB
<p>19. To receive an update regarding the Playing Field Association</p> <p>There is a PFA Zoom meeting (AGM) on 27 September - the meeting scheduled for 9 September has been cancelled. A copy of recent meeting minutes has been circulated. It is hoped that some accounts will also be circulated - the Clerk will contact the PFA Treasurer to request a copy.</p>	TB
<p>20. To receive an update regarding the Village Caretaker Scheme</p> <p>The Village Caretaker scheme continues well. If there are any matters within the Parish that require the attention of the Caretaker, please let the Parish Clerk know.</p> <p>The Caretaker is well liked and respected.</p> <p>21. To receive an update regarding Speed Watch</p> <p>Speedwatch have had no further sessions since the last meeting.</p>	
<p>22. To receive an update regarding the Community Led Plan</p> <p>Mr Hinchliffe (CLP Group Secretary) has not been well, so the extension of fencing to the basketball area at the Playing Field has not yet been erected.</p> <p>23. Any Other Business (for information purposes only):</p> <p>The Royal British Legion are moving ahead and working towards both the poppy appeal and the traditional memorial service (which is at Smeeth Church this year).</p> <p>An enquiry was received as to whether the Spitfires must always use the same flightpath as at peak times the noise from them could be tiresome. It was agreed that the Clerk would contact Ashford Borough Council (Environmental Protection) and the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) regarding this matter.</p> <p>Brabourne Baptist Church has confirmed dates for the PC meetings.</p>	
<p>24. Determining the time and place of ordinary meetings of the Council up to and including the next annual meeting of the Council.</p> <p>Wednesday 10th November 2021 at Brabourne Baptist Church. Wednesday 12th January 2022 at Brabourne Baptist Church. Wednesday 9th March 2022 at Brabourne Baptist Church. Wednesday 11th May 2022 at Brabourne Baptist Church.</p>	
<p>25. Resolution to exclude the public</p> <p>Resolved: That under Section 1(2) of the Public Bodies (Admissions to Meetings) Act 1960, because of the confidential nature of the business to be dealt with, the Public and Press leave the meeting during discussion of item 26, namely the Co-option of a new Councillor.</p> <p>The meeting closed at 10.10pm.</p>	