

## LITTLE BLAKENHAM PARISH COUNCIL MEETING

Meeting of Little Blakenham Parish Council on Tuesday 16<sup>th</sup> February 2021 at 7.30 pm.  
Due to Covid-19 regulations this meeting was held via Zoom.

Present: Cllrs. Wally Binder, Stephen Wright, Linda Keen. John Latham.  
Clerk to the Council – Janet Gobey.

County and District Councillor John Field  
Fifteen members of the public were present.

The Chairman opened the meeting at 7.30 pm.

1. To receive and approve apologies for absence.

Apologies were received from Cllr. Palmer (work related). Councillors unanimously approved these apologies.

2. Declarations of any pecuniary and non pecuniary interests.

a. Councillor declaration of interest appropriate to any item on the Agenda.

None.

b. To receive written requests for dispensations for disclosable pecuniary interest (if any)

None.

c. To grant any requests for dispensations as appropriate.

None.

3. Public Forum – to receive any comments from members of the public on the two planning applications below.

The Chairman clarified that the two applications are identical in content, but because the site is in both Babergh and Mid Suffolk, a separate application is required for each District.

Members of the public present expressed the following concerns about the application:

Damage to the environment.

Impact on views and the landscape.

The size of the batteries and other equipment.

Loss of high-quality agricultural land.

Noise and light pollution.

Loss of amenity, with footpaths and bridleways badly affected.

Potential problems with runoff from the site, drainage and flooding.

Construction phase – large lorries and contractor vehicles using roads that are too narrow to cope with the volume and size of traffic.

Possibility of further similar applications being made in the area if this one is approved.

When all members of the public who wished to speak had done so, the Chairman asked if there was anyone who wished to speak in support of the application and nobody asked to do so. Councillors noted that all members of the public present who had spoken were opposed to the application.

4. Planning

To consider the following planning applications:

a. **DC/20/05895**. Full Planning Application - Installation of renewable energy generating station, comprising ground-mounted photovoltaic solar arrays and battery-based electricity storage containers together with substation, inverter/transformer stations, site accesses, internal access tracks, security measures, access gates, other ancillary infrastructure, landscaping and biodiversity enhancements including Nature Areas.

Location: Land to the south of Church Farm, Somersham, IP8 4PN and land to the east of The Channel, Burstall, IP8 4JL In Suffolk.

Councillors unanimously agreed that they had the following concerns about this planning applications:

Visual impact and loss of amenity - the land is part of an unspoilt rural landscape and includes a number of listed buildings. Views across a wide area surrounding the site would be seriously affected by the solar panels themselves, as well as the battery storage and ancillary equipment. The application states that the site and footpaths and rights of way inside it will be surrounded by deer fencing and screened by newly planted hedges. These will be allowed to grow much higher than the 4ft maximum which is recommended to allow views to still be enjoyed and will have a harmful effect on the footpaths and rights of way in and around the site. The proposed development would discourage the use of footpaths and minor roads in the area for walking, horse riding, cycling etc.

Loss of agricultural land - this proposal would mean the removal from food production of approx. 242 acres of high-quality agricultural land for 40 years and possibly longer. This is at a time when recent events such as Brexit and Covid-19 have highlighted the importance of maintaining the security of the UK's food supply.

National Policy (NPPF) identifies the best and most versatile land (BMV) as normally unsuitable for solar farms. Over 80% of the site is classified as BMV land, much of it further improved by a programme of environmental stewardship.

Flood risk - Councillors noted that surface water run off rates can double when the land under solar panels is not managed correctly. Councillors felt that the Flood Risk Assessment provided by EDF was not adequate and were seriously concerned about the proposed development adding to the existing flood problems in Somersham. There have been increasing problems with flooding in Somersham. When this happens, traffic diverts through Nettlestead and Little Blakenham. These roads cannot cope with the volume of traffic this produces and when the traffic re-joins the Somersham Road, there is often gridlock. This would only be increased by having larger numbers of lorries and contractor vehicles on the road as well.

Construction phase – All construction traffic would be going along the narrow road from the B1113 to Somersham which passes through Little Blakenham. Councillors agreed that the road is far too narrow to take the kind and number of large lorries that would be required to bring in construction materials, especially as there are several sharp corners. Agricultural vehicles also use the road and would not be able to pass an approaching lorry safely.

There have been increasing problems with flooding in Somersham. When this happens, traffic diverts through Nettlestead and Little Blakenham. These roads cannot cope with the volume of traffic this produces and when the traffic rejoins the Somersham Road, there is often gridlock. This would only be increased by having larger numbers of lorries and contractor vehicles on the road as well.

The Council Meeting to consider this application was attended by fifteen members of the public, all of whom were opposed to the application for the reasons listed above. Councillors voted unanimously to object to the application on the above grounds.

b. **DC/21/00060**. Full Planning Application - Installation of renewable led energy generating station comprising ground-mounted photovoltaic solar arrays and battery-based electricity storage containers together with substation, inverter/transformer stations, site accesses, internal access tracks, security measures, access gates, other ancillary infrastructure, landscaping and biodiversity enhancements including Nature Areas.

Location: Land to the east of The Channel, Burstall Hill.

Councillors unanimously agreed that they had the following concerns about this planning applications:

Visual impact and loss of amenity - the land is part of an unspoilt rural landscape and includes a number of listed buildings. Views across a wide area surrounding the site would be seriously affected by the solar panels themselves, as well as the battery storage and ancillary equipment. The application states that the site and footpaths and rights of way inside it will be surrounded by deer fencing and screened by newly planted hedges. These will be allowed to grow much higher than the 4ft maximum which is recommended to allow views to still be enjoyed and will have a harmful effect on the footpaths and rights of way in and around the site. The proposed development would discourage the use of footpaths and minor roads in the area for walking, horse riding, cycling etc.

Loss of agricultural land - this proposal would mean the removal from food production of approx. 242 acres of high-quality agricultural land for 40 years and possibly longer. This is at a time when recent events such as Brexit and Covid-19 have highlighted the importance of maintaining the security of the UK's food supply.

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The Council Meeting to consider this application was attended by fifteen members of the public, all of whom were opposed to the application for the reasons listed above.

DRAFT

Cllr. Wright proposed that the Council object to both applications. This was seconded by Cllr. Binder and Councillors voted unanimously to object to the application on the above grounds.

**ACTION:** Clerk to circulate draft of the Council's objections to Councillors.

The Chairman closed the Meeting at 8.20pm with thanks to all who attended.