

**MINUTES of the Planning Committee of Melksham Without Parish Council held  
on Monday 8 June 2020 at 7.00pm**

**(DUE TO THE ON-GOING COVID 19 PUBLIC HEALTH CRISIS THIS WAS A  
VIRTUAL MEETING – MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC WERE ABLE TO ATTEND  
THE MEETING AFTER CONTACTING THE CLERK FOR JOINING  
INSTRUCTIONS)**

**Present:** Councillors Richard Wood (Council & Committee Chair), John Glover (Council Vice Chair), Alan Baines (Committee Vice-Chair); David Pafford (from 7.27pm) and Mary Pile

**Also in Attendance:** Wiltshire Councillors Phil Alford and Nick Holder

**Members of Public Present:** 8 Members of public including Harry Ramsey, Pegasus and Adam Withers Re Wicks Farm, Solar Farm and Richard Harlow agent for 3 Lopes Close.

**Officers:** Teresa Strange (Clerk) and Lorraine McRandle (Parish Officer)

**515/19      Apologies**

Apologies had been received from Councillor Coombes who unfortunately had no IT capabilities to join the meeting.

The Clerk explained Councillor Pafford had tried to access the meeting but was having IT issues.

Members accepted the apologies given by Councillor Coombes and hoped Councillor Pafford could join the meeting later.

Councillor Terry Chivers was not present.

**516/19      Declarations of Interest**

**a) To receive Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest

**b) To consider for approval any Dispensation Requests received  
by the Clerk and not previously considered.**

None.

**c) To note standing Dispensations relating to planning applications**

The Clerk reminded members Berryfield Village Hall was on the agenda and whether they wished to comment on their own application.

**517/19 Invited Guests**

Harry Ramsey, Pegasus Planning and Adam Withers JBM Solar Farm providers were in attendance to discuss proposals for a solar farm at Wick Farm, Beanacre between Westlands Lane to the South and Folly Lane to the North.

Adam explained JBM were currently deciding whether to submit a planning application for a 50 mega watt solar farm at Wick Farm, Beanacre, which would connect to the local grid and provide energy for the local community.

In order to understand the views of local residents and the wider community, public consultation was currently underway, with over 100 residents having been contacted on the proposals, as well as local stakeholders and councillors, a dedicated website for the application had been created and people were invited to contact them via email with comments needing to be submitted by 12 June.

Both Harry and Adam explained it was unfortunate, given the current public health crisis that face to face public consultation could not take place at present, but stated they would be happy to undertake face to face engagement, if this were possible further down the line.

**518/19 Public Participation**

***Wick Farm, Solar Farm***

A resident of Laurel Close, Beanacre voiced their objection to this application on the following grounds:

- The impact on their view from their rear garden, which is currently of open countryside/fields
- The lack of consultation, having only received a leaflet, which invited comments via email and provided website details, which meant that a proportion of residents without IT capabilities were unable to comment.
- The scale of the development.
- Lack of detail on what community benefit could be provided.

- Proximity to heritage woodland/open countryside.
- Impact on flora and fauna with bluebells present on part of the site.
- Concern at the possible reduction in property values locally.
- Impact on local wildlife. The site is home to several species of wildlife, including deer, foxes, pheasant and badgers, which may be displaced.
- Potential noise from inverters.
- The impact this application will have on flooding in Westlands Lane.
- Impact on the local highway, particularly during the construction phase.
- Impact on lifestyle currently enjoyed.
- Safety concerns. There is a lack of knowledge on the impact solar panels have on the health of those living nearby.

The Chair invited both Harry and Adam to respond to the concerns raised.

Adam explained the size of the site was approximately 200 acres and needed to be this size due to the large size of the sub station at Melksham which runs on higher voltage than standard. The pylons running from the station are 132,000 volts and in order to connect to this site, there is a need for a higher level of panels to make the site viable. Therefore, given the scale of the site it was felt public consultation needed to be undertaken in order to gauge local opinion on whether a solar farm of this size fitted in with the local landscape.

Adam expressed disappointment that it appeared some residents had not received either of the two consultation letters inviting comments.

With regards to the impact on flora & fauna and wildlife, Adam explained several surveys had or were being undertaken, for example, habitat, ecological and bird habitat surveys.

With regard to the visual impact and those mostly impacted, Adam explained the plans would be looked at to see how to lessen the impact and if this meant not using some of the site, then potentially the plans may not be submitted as the site would not be viable.

The Chair invited Wiltshire Councillor Phil Alford to speak to this item.

Councillor Alford explained he had received comments from residents regarding the visual impact, particularly the cumulative impact on the landscape, bearing in mind the various solar farms in and around the parish he asked if the site could be laid out differently, perhaps with denser rows in a smaller area, to lessen the impact on residents.

Adam explained in terms of making rows denser this created shading, therefore the yield did not increase.

Councillor Pafford joined the meeting at 7.26pm.

Councillor Pile raised a concern at the way people had been contacted in Beanacre and explained the site would impact some residents in Whitley who had not been contacted and felt given the current health crisis due to Covid 19 and the lack of face to face consultation, this was precluding a lot of people from taking part and asked if the plans could be deferred until proper public consultation could take place.

Councillor Pile also stated she had been made aware of the presence of newts in Daniels Wood which formed part of the site, as well as the existence of a Roman road and settlement in the field nearest Westlands Lane, which had been found quite recently following an archaeological dig.

Adam explained he was aware of the Roman road and settlement, following a geophysical survey of the site, which showed the settlement. Discussions were currently taking place with Wiltshire Council on how to proceed. As part of this process the County Archaeologist would also be informed.

Regarding the possibility of newts on the site, a Great Crested Newts survey would be undertaken and if some were found, would adhere to the guidance from Natural England.

Adam reiterated it was unfortunate public consultation could not take place, however, a submission date had not been set and it was hoped face to face public consultation could be done in the future. If people felt they needed more time to respond to the consultation this could be arranged. However, to date, a good response had been received so far to the consultation.

Councillor Glover referenced the site being left for sheep to graze and sought clarification that the panels would be high enough to allow sheep to graze underneath and asked whether discussions would take place on potential community benefit.

Adam confirmed the panels would be raised to allow sheep to graze underneath and explained research had found that solar farms had a positive impact on the ground.

Regarding community benefit, Adam explained they would be happy to discuss this at a later stage in the process.

Councillor Pile raised a concern that the panels would be raised higher than normal, creating more of a visual impact. However,

Adam explained the height of the panels would be in line with standard solar farm panel height ie 0.8m.

Councillor Baines also raised concern at the visual impact the site would have and explained Daniel's Wood could be seen as far as the Forest/Woodrow Road areas.

Councillor Baines expressed a concern at drainage in the area and noted one of the plans even showed part of the site under flood water near Westlands Lane. With regards to natural drainage for the site this was via a culvert under the railway line through to the rear of properties in Westlands Lane, resulting in flooding to properties in recent years which required the assistance of the local fire brigade to pump out.

Councillor Baines raised a concern if areas of the site were covered with panels this would result in the land being unable to soak up as much rainfall as at present, resulting in an increase in flooding run off due to the lack of drainage and asked that if this application were to go ahead that major drainage was incorporated on the site.

He suggested that the fields adjacent to Westlands Lane and to the North West should not be used, along with higher parts of the site near Daniel's Wood. There was scope to use land to the West side of the railway line up to the two transmission lines in the north, ie. no more than 150m from the railway.

Councillor Baines sought clarification on where battery storage for the site would be as well as expressing a concern at the impact HGVs would have on the local highway and stated these should not access the site directly from the A350 at Beanacre, but use the B3353, Corsham Road, Whitley and given the proximity of Shaw Primary School access should only be permitted outside of school start and finish times.

In response to Councillor Baines comments, Adam stated he had taken on board comments regarding the visual impact and Daniel's Wood, as well as the impact of construction traffic on the local highway and explained a comprehensive Construction Management Statement would be drawn-up.

Regarding drainage it had been proven that drainage on solar farm sites had benefitted from the installation of solar panels and was already aware of the flooding in the South East corner of the site. A Flood Risk Assessment would be undertaken of the site and a Sustained Urban Drainage System installed.

Regarding battery storage, there was currently ongoing discussions nationally on the provision of battery storage on solar panel sites,

therefore, it was anticipated there would not be a need for a large battery storage park.

Councillor Pafford endorsed the comments raised by Councillors Baines.

Councillor Pile asked if the developers were aware a Grade II Listed farmhouse (Westlands Farm) was close to this site and understood that solar farms had to be built away from residential properties.

Adam explained he was aware of this building and the cultural heritage locally. However, both he and Harry were not aware there was a statutory distance that solar farms had to be from residential development, each site was on a case by case basis given local receptors.

A local resident again raised concerns at the safety of solar panels to which Adam stated solar farms would not be allowed to be built if there were safety concerns.

Members thanked Harry and Adam for attending the meeting.

The Chair invited Richard Harlow architect for 3 Lopes Close to speak to the revised plans.

### ***3 Lopes Close***

Mr Harlow went through the various changes to the original plans following the various comments received and from discussions with the planning officer at Wiltshire Council and felt the revised plans were a compromise.

Mr Harlow explained he had also forwarded drawings to the Parish Council showing what could be achieved under permitted development, which he felt were not too dissimilar to the revised plans and went through the various differences for members' information in order they could make informed comments on the plans bearing in mind both local and national planning policy.

Mr Harlow also stated that the extension could not be viewed from the front of the property and therefore did not impact the streetscene and would not be out of character with other properties in the Close.

The Chair invited residents of Lopes Close to speak to this item.

Two residents from Lopes Close voiced their objections to the plans on the following grounds:

- The original plans for the Close were for 15 dwellings, but due to the size of the site this was reduced to 12 and achieved a good

balance between house sizes, garden space and communal spaces within its rural surroundings.

- The addition of the extension would create a high density feel to the Close.
- Create an overbearing feel to adjacent properties particularly No. 4, who would be essentially looking at a blank wall.
- Loss of light to the garden and habitable rooms of number 4.
- Loss of privacy for properties 3, 4 & 7. A bathroom window proposed on the first floor will overlook the rear of No 4.
- Loss of rural view.
- The impact the single storey extension to the south will have on the adjacent hedgerow.
- The change in character to the Right of Way adjacent to this site. The inclusion of a window to the single storey extension to the south will overlook the Right of Way.

**519/19**

### **Proposals for a Solar Farm at Wick Farm, Beanacre**

#### **a) To note Renewable Energy policies in draft Melksham Neighbourhood Plan and Wiltshire Core Strategy**

Members noted the information contained within the policies from the Wiltshire Core Strategy and the draft Melksham Neighbourhood Plan regarding renewable energy. In the draft Neighbourhood Plan it stated 'renewable and low carbon energy generation projects that are led by or benefit local communities will be supported subject to the following criteria:

- i. The siting and scale of the proposal is appropriate to its setting;
- ii. The proposal does not create an unacceptable impact on the amenities of local residents and
- iii. The proposal does not have an unacceptable degree of impact on a feature of natural or biodiversity importance

Schemes where the energy produced can be used on or near the generation site/where energy storage is incorporated will be strongly supported.'

The Spatial Planning officer had also sent information on solar farms.

#### **b) To note comments made by members of the public to the proposals**

Members noted the various items of correspondence received from members of the public, which had been circulated prior to the meeting.

It was noted a resident had made a comment on the impact of glare from the panels, which was not raised earlier and this needed to be borne in mind.

**c) To respond to proposals as part of public consultation**

It was agreed the Parish Council should respond to the public consultation as follows:

‘Whilst broadly welcoming these types of renewable energy developments, the parish council asked for amelioration against the impact of this application on Westlands Lane, particularly regarding visual amenity and the impact on flooding in the area and the need for appropriate drainage. They also sought amelioration against the visual impact this would have for the wider community and the impact on local wildlife.

The Parish Council would also welcome discussion on community benefit at a later date.’

It was asked if proposals could be advertised in the next edition of Melksham News which was due to be published the week beginning 22 June.

Adam stated he was happy to do this and to extend the 12 June deadline to accommodate those who may wish to respond to the consultation.

**520/19**

**To consider the following Planning Applications:**

**20/02674/FUL:** 3 Lopes Close. Proposed two storey rear extension. Applicant Mr Ferris (Revised Plans)

**Comments:** Members appreciated the applicant had addressed issues raised previously and therefore had **No Objection**.

**20/03478/FUL:** Lower Beanacre Farm, Beanacre Road, Beanacre. Demolition of existing porch and replacement porch. Addition of 3 new conservation roof lights. Applicants Mr & Mrs Ware

**Comments:** No objection

**20/03944/LBC:** Lower Beanacre Farm, Beanacre Road, Beanacre. Demolition of existing porch and replacement porch. Addition of 3 new conservation roof lights. Applicants Mr & Mrs Ware



**Comments:** No objection

[20/03663](#)/FUL: 144 West Hill, Whitley. Bedroom extension under existing canopy, incorporating new cloakroom. Applicant Mr Terence Bollen

**Comments:** No objection.

[20/03664](#)/FUL: 143 West Hill, Whitley. Bedroom extension under existing canopy. Applicant Mr Richard Cross

**Comment:** No objection.

[20/03699](#)/FUL: 44a Westlands Lane, Beanacre. Change land from agricultural to residential. Applicant Mrs Jane Wilkinson

**Comments:** No objection.

[20/03724](#)/FUL: Woolmore Cottage, 412 Woolmore Manor, Bath Road, Bowerhill. Ground floor residential conversion of garage and tool store to the Cottage at Woolmore Farm. Applicant Adrian Turner

**Comments:** No objection.

[20/04150](#)/LBC: Woolmore Cottage, 412 Woolmore Manor, Bath Road, Bowerhill. Ground floor residential conversion of garage and tool store to the Cottage at Woolmore Farm. Applicant Adrian Turner

**Comments:** No objection.

[20/03879](#)/REM: Berryfield Village Hall, Semington Road. Construction of new village hall and associated external works. Applicant Melksham Without Parish Council

As this application has been submitted by the Parish Council, the only comment Members wished to make was that they welcomed this much needed facility.

[20/04037](#)/FUL: 17 Blenheim Park, Bowerhill. Demolition of existing garage to side and replace with new dwelling. Applicant Chris Hulance

**Comments:** Members **OBJECT** to this application due to overdevelopment of the site, which is out of keeping with the streetscene. Members asked if officers were minded to approve this application that the brickwork is the same colour as the existing ex RAF properties in the vicinity.

The Clerk explained with regard to planning application 20/03543 for a new dwelling at 27 Beanacre she had recently been made aware that whilst the application had stated no flooding takes place on this site, in fact as recently as February part of this lane had to be pumped out and asked if Members they wished to add this to their comments previously submitted.

**Recommended:** To forward the above concerns regarding flooding to Wiltshire Council.

## **521/19 Neighbourhood Plan**

### **a) To receive update on Neighbourhood Plan & Regulation 14 Consultation**

The Clerk reminded Members that the 6 week consultation period on the draft plan started on 1 June. However, the Wiltshire Council Neighbourhood Plan lead officer had only very recently stated, given the current public health crisis and the lack of face to face meetings, consultations on Neighbourhood Plans be extended to 8 weeks.

The Clerk explained that the next edition of Melksham News was due out towards the end of the month which included an article on the Neighbourhood Plan inviting comments, with an explanation that the consultation had been extended for a further 2 weeks.

## **522/19 S106 Agreements and Developer meetings: (Standing Item)**

### **a) To note update on ongoing and new s106 Agreements**

Given the current public health crisis and the Government's wish to get the housing market moving, Taylor Wimpey had been granted an extension on their working hours until October to work from 07:00-19:00 6 days a week a change from the normal working hours of 08:00-18:00, 6 days a week in order to stagger staff for their safety.

The Clerk explained that following notification of a potential siting of Bath Asparagus in Bowerhill, Natural England had been informed. The developer of a site close by had also been made aware of the

siting in order to mitigate against any potential damage due to works in the area.

**b) To consider any new S106 queries**

There were no new S106 queries to report.

**c) To note any S106 decisions made under delegated powers**

The Clerk stated she had no S106 decisions under delegated powers to report.

**d) To note any contact with developers**

The Clerk informed the meeting that since the consultation had started on the draft Neighbourhood Plan she had been contacted by a developer, who had been invited to submit their comments as part of the Regulation 14 consultation.

The meeting finished at 9.10pm

Chair:.....  
Approved at Full Council Meeting  
held on 27 July 2020