



RESTAURANT & BAR

# Tetsworth Parish Council

Clerk and RFO: Lin Freeth

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## Minutes of the Extraordinary Meeting of Tetsworth Parish Council Held in Tetsworth Memorial Hall at 7pm on Monday 18<sup>th</sup> July 2022

### Present:

Chair Cllr. Paul Carr (PC)

Vice Chair. Seb Mossop (SM)

Cllr. Susan Rufus (SR)

Cllr. Christopher Thompson (CT)

**Clerk/RFO:** Lin Freeth (LF)

**Members of the public:** One present

**91. Apologies for Absence:** Cllr. Sanjiv (Kim) Bhagat (SKB); Cllr. Sean Whitehead (SW)

**92. To Receive Declarations of Interest** Members are asked to declare any personal interest and the nature of that interest, in any of the items under consideration at this meeting - **NONE**

**93. To Consider the following Planning Applications:**

- a) **Application Reference: P21/S3915/FUL Amendment No. 1 - dated 8th July 2022: Dodwells Solar Farm Land north of the A40 near Milton Common** - Installation and operation of a Solar Farm together with all associated works, equipment and necessary infrastructure (as amended).

**Comments UNANIMOUSLY AGREED and to be submitted by the Clerk :** *Tetsworth Parish Council (TPC) has previously objected to the development of Dodwells Solar Farm principally on the basis of the site's scale and having an overwhelmingly detrimental cumulative impact on the local landscape when considered alongside the approved developments of Harlesford and Cornwell Solar Farms also adjacent to Tetsworth. Collectively, development of these sites would cover the vast majority of 245Ha of open countryside with ranks of solar arrays close to the village. It is useful to express such an area in more understandable terms of football pitches. A standard professional football pitch measures 105m x 68m (approx. 0.75Ha), so 245Ha is the equivalent of almost 330 football pitches. TPC's objection on the grounds of unacceptable scale remains.*

*The SODC target for development of solar energy is 170MW by 2030. 47MW had already been delivered by October 2021, so the 3 planned developments closely surrounding Tetsworth would, in themselves, more than satisfy this aim. It cannot be right to concentrate such a bulk of solar farm developments in such a small area of open countryside. TPC's objection of an unreasonable concentration of solar farm developments surrounding the Tetsworth village settlement remains.*

*In its assessment of cumulative impact, the applicant included the footprint of a neighbouring potential strategic development site known as Harrington. The implication might reasonably be interpreted as urbanisation of nearby open countryside would render the landscape harms of a solar farm less significant. The Harrington strategic site development proposal failed to be included in the draft South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2035 and did not appear in the adopted version. Therefore, no development on the Harrington site is likely to be considered until at least 2035. TPC's objection that Dodwells Solar Farm would impose unacceptable landscape harms in open countryside therefore remains.*

*TPC was also concerned that the loss of productive agricultural land would be contrary to Government encouragement for greater productivity and delivery of home-grown agricultural outputs. TPC's objection that Dodwells Solar Farm development would result in an unacceptable loss of productive agricultural land remains.*

*The applicant's recently revised proposal includes a new indicative site layout including removal of solar arrays from the western and southernmost portions of the site without supporting explanation. However, the overall site remains in the order of 112Ha and the maximum projected power output still seems to be set at 49.9MW. The material change to the proposal may have been made in response to earlier shortcomings and information in recently submitted specialist reports, but fails to demonstrate how the revised layout would reduce harms to an acceptable level. TPC objects on the grounds that the applicant has failed to explain how the findings of specialist reports into harm mitigation contribute beneficially to his revised proposal.*

*The specialist reports cover archaeology, biodiversity, drainage and landscape. TPC will comment on each.*

*The 2 archaeological reports clearly demonstrate that the site has a rich heritage of previous Iron Age, Roman and later periods of occupation. The bulk of significant finds were concentrated in the western portion of the site no longer proposed for installation of solar arrays. However, not all find-rich areas have been relieved from development and there are 2 large parcels of land at the centre of the site which were not subject to geophysical survey. It therefore appears likely that further significant archaeological evidence would risk destruction during installation of multiple array support posts to a depth of 1.5m across the site. TPC believes this should not be allowed to happen.*

*Analysis and interpretation of the applicant's biodiversity metric is beyond the non-specialist. However, the lay members of TPC are sceptical that the wholesale development of a 112Ha countryside site could result in a 37% improvement in habitat units or even a near 5% improvement in hedgerow units. Leaving, or reinstating, all areas under solar arrays as pasture for sheep grazing is tantamount to promoting a widespread monoculture and must surely result in a narrowing of biodiversity. Moreover, the planting scheme planned for open areas could make no contribution to agricultural output. TPC is not convinced of the report's assertion of increased biodiversity.*

*The drainage report is presented as the outcome of previous conversations with the applicant. It states that the access tracks would be constructed with permeable materials and not increase the surface run-off hazard. However, the applicant's revised indicative site layout plan describes the access routes round and across the site as roads. It must be clarified whether these routes would have permeable or impermeable surfaces usually associated with roads. The report bases its assessed run-off attenuation requirement on 5% of impermeable surfaces on an 87Ha site. Although the area covered by solar arrays might have reduced to an area of 87Ha, it is not declared elsewhere. If the 5% was to be applied to the whole of the 112Ha site, the attenuation requirement would be considerably higher than quoted. TPC does not have the technical expertise to analyse the report findings but would expect SODC specialists to examine its robustness.*

*The new landscape information comprises a plan representation of the site's planting scheme, an external zone visibility map and a series of baseline, 1 year and 10 year photo montages from selected viewpoints. The visibility map, far from demonstrating the acceptability of near and distant landscape impact, actually reinforces the extent of the landscape harms. The visibility plot extends beyond and includes virtually the whole of the Cornwell Solar Farm site to the south, penetrates the northern segment of the Harlesford Solar Farm site, reaches the western edge of Tetsworth and extends to the north and east of the village settlement. This confirms the unacceptability of clustering solar farm developments round Tetsworth. The serious loss of landscape amenity would be undeniable. The viewpoints chosen for the photo montages demonstrate some success in visual*

screening, but also some significant failures. The scene from Viewpoint 9, south of the M40 shows minimal if any visual mitigation even after 10 years. It seems likely that an intermediate view from the elevated position of motorway itself would leave the expanse of solar arrays even more obvious to the passing motorist in an otherwise undisturbed rural vista. The scene from the motorway bridge at Viewpoint 13 is the closest to the Tetsworth village settlement. It, too, presents a stark representation of the visibility of the solar arrays from the direction of the village. TPC objects on the grounds of unacceptable loss of landscape visual amenity and associated major harm to the village's landscape character.

The applicant has made an enabling planning application, P22/S2220/FUL, for installation of a 33kV underground cable connection between the solar farm site and Cowley substation. TPC will be responding separately to this proposal.

**b) Application Reference: P22/S2220/FUL: Dodwells Solar Farm Land north of the A40 near Cuddesdon** - Underground cable route to connect Dodwells solar farm to Cowley substation.

**Comments UNANIMOUSLY AGREED and to be submitted by the Clerk:** *This application for permission to lay an underground 33kV power cable between the proposed Dodwells Solar Farm and a National Grid substation in Cowley would not pass through land within the Parish of Tetsworth. However, this cable connection would be an essential enabler of the associated planning application for the Dodwells Solar Farm, P21/S3915/FUL, which would affect Tetsworth, so Tetsworth Parish Council (TPC) is responding to the P22/S2220/FUL application in this context.*

*The thrust of the applicant's proposal is that the underground installation of a power cable along a defined 12.6km route is of little consequence and is supported by national and local planning and infrastructure policies. TPC believes that its arguments fail to address the planning issues associated with the cable-laying project itself.*

*Moreover, TPC is also concerned that power loss over 12.6km of cable would be significant and would adversely effect the amount of power to the grid, reducing the power of something that is set up to be efficient.*

*The need for a 12.6km cable connection (calculated as 0.5m wide trenches covering 0.63Ha of land) between the proposed solar farm and a National Grid connection must cast doubt on the appropriateness of the Intended site of Dodwells Solar Farm – an issue that TPC has objected to separately. Additionally, the requirement for 16.35Ha of land to support 0.63Ha of trenches must question the extent of environmental harm that the project would incur, and how it might be mitigated. The planned cable route is shown as passing along existing public highways and through a number of villages, and crosses the Oxford Green Belt en-route to Cowley. There is no explanation whether the trenching would be undertaken on the roads themselves, or within highway verges. The traffic management consequences and environmental harms of these alternatives must be exposed to scrutiny. Moreover, the application fails to recognise the known archaeological heritage which would be disturbed or destroyed along the planned trenching route. Clearly, the findings of a full archaeological survey of the planned route should be demanded.*

*The applicant expects the cable laying project to take almost a year to complete, but there is no evaluation of the extent of the inconvenience and loss of amenity which would be experienced by affected village residents and users of the local road network.*

*The applicant's Planning and Sustainability Statement does little more than promote the justification for the Dodwells Solar Farm proposal submitted as P21/S3915/FUL, as amended. It is devoid of any analysis of the heritage and environmental consequences of implementation or of any measures to mitigate or avoid identifiable harms.*

*Para 2.6 of the Statement asserts that the 'cable route avoids all impacts on countryside as possible'. It provides no evidence to support this awkwardly-worded claim. Under Section 4, Need and Sustainability, it makes its case for photo-voltaic power generation, but ignores any justification for the connecting cable, the subject of this planning application. In Section 5, Planning Policy Framework, the applicant claims applicability of National Policy Statement EN-1. At its para 1.4, it defines its scope to be applicable to solar energy projects with generation*

capacity in excess of 50MW. The planning application for Dodwells Solar Farm repeatedly states that its output will be up to 49.9MW, thereby avoiding scrutiny by Infrastructure Planning Commission. The connection cable proposal cannot 'have its cake and eat it'. Sections 6 of the Planning and Sustainability Statement deals exclusively with the Benefits and Impacts relevant to Dodwells Solar Farm itself, but makes no mention of the connection cable proposal.

The Statement's Conclusions at Section 7 unsurprisingly argues that a connector cable to the National Grid is an essential enabler of the Dodwells Solar Farm proposal and, because solar farms are supported by the Government's 'Net Zero 2050' agenda, should be permitted without serious questioning. TPC cannot support this application as it stands and urge the LPA to refuse permission unless it can be properly supported by detailed evidence of the impact of its implementation.

c) **Application Reference: P22/S2439/HH: 8 Marsh End, Tetsworth** – Proposed 2 storey rear extension.

**Comments UNANIMOUSLY AGREED and to be submitted by the Clerk:** Tetsworth Parish Council are in support of this application and consider that it complies with TET1 & TET2 of the Neighbourhood Plan Policy.

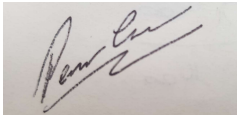
94. **Date of next meeting:** The next meeting will be held on **Monday 12<sup>th</sup> September 2022 at 7.30pm**

95. **To Close the Meeting:** Meeting closed at 7.11pm

96. **Open Forum:** Comments were made relating to the impact of four large scale solar farm developments on the landscape of Tetsworth, and surrounding villages, should they be granted approval. A meeting with Cllr Caroline Newton and SODC Planning Policy staff would be useful together with cohesion between the four effected Parishes of Tetsworth, Great Haseley, Great Milton and Lewknor.



Lin Freeth, Clerk & RFO



Cllr Paul Carr, Chairman