

At the Extra Ordinary Meeting of Grimley Parish Council held on

16th November 2021

in The Peace Hall, Sinton Green

This document is a typed version of the notes made by the Clerk at that meeting. No formal minutes were kept.

Present: Information to be added once names are verified. Parish Cllrs. Worcs Wildlife. BRL.Solar. Reps from resident Action Group.

In Attendance: Mrs L Stevens – Clerk, District Cllr Dean Clarke.

Apologies: Information to be added. County Cllr.

Robert Shaw – presentation by BRL

- Gov has committed the country to net zero and net carbon reduction strategy. This decade is the one we must take action in. Net zero includes completely greening the national power supply within the next 14 years. This is a generational defining challenge.
- Not going to be able to achieve net zero with a bit of cutting back and solar farms on roofs. Location of solar farms are constrained by access to electricity grid. This team has identified suitable fields along the existing pylons
- Previous screening was for larger area and this has been pruned down to more suitable fields and location.
- Acknowledge that solar farms are space hungry, but doesn't contaminate land and can continue to graze sheep.
- BRL intend to do the project well and wants to do it with the help of the community.
- Proposing to plant extra hedgerows. Acknowledge that this won't be invisible but BRL will try to make it as low impact as possible,
- Clear that the community cares for biodiversity.
- BRL going to respond to PC questions (asked week before) asap.

Jim Moffit, Grimley Farm Solar Action Group

- Come to conclusion that the location is completely inappropriate
 - Will lead to industrialisation of area adjacent to SSSI at Monkwood and the wood itself.
 - Development is contrary to SWDP policy and will cause harm to visual amenity.
 - Have ref to SWDP 21 Design, 22 Biodiversity and 25 Tourism and development.
 - Have ref to Q121, DS3 of the MHDC plan
 - Have ref to 118 and 124c of NPPF.
 - Many solar farms have easy access to A roads. This is not the case here. All kit needs to be brought in via heavy lorries.
 - Speed limit is 60mph not 30mph as assumed in the BRL application. This mistake affects estimation of visibility splays and the length of hedgerow to be removed.
 - Narrow roads and steeply banked road sides do not allow escape by pedestrians if they encounter large vehicles. No passing places. Those areas not 'banked' instead have soft verges which are not suitable for lorries to drive over.
 - 6 months build time is an estimate and probably a large underestimate.
- Current journey for one household to school takes 3 miles and 8 minutes. With the construction diversion, the journey will take 5 miles and 15 mins. Spread this over 6 months and across all households.
- Net biodiversity improvements are negligible if at all.
 - Overlooks the historic importance of the land.

- Cultural impact assessment does not go back earlier than the 19thC.

Steven WWT

- The WWT has neither supported nor objected to the solar farm.
- WWT has not be paid by the developer. And no offer has been made by the developer to the Trust.
- Trust is not in support of the application but has to work within planning policy and the law.
- As custodians of Monkwood, it is essential that the wood is protected and the Trust has a legal requirement to make sure that this happens. Trust wants the area to be enhanced not just protected.
- In its response the Trust has reiterated the other issues that they cannot comment on but their silences should not be taken to indicate that the issues are not important.
- Trust response DOES ask for conditions and these conditions are fundamental.
- Trust believes in theory that this application can provide enhancement for ecology and biodiversity if done correctly.
- Planning condition route is widely used and that gives the parish the security it needs that the DC will enforce.
- IE the Non objection response by the Trust is contingent on the DC enforcing planning conditions and the Trust has a legal requirement to makes sure that this enforcement happens with regard to its land adjacent.
- Wider implications are accepted as being significant.

Question. Sources for questions are a mix of local residents and parish cllrs. Nb. The person posing the question is not nec. the person who submitted it to the parish council.	Question aimed at	Person posing question	Notes
1. None of those involved in submitting this application live locally – what criteria did they use to choose Monkwood for this project?	BRL	Cllr Anne Taft	Wide list of criteria was used, cultural, land quality, landscape/visual effects. The Environmental Impact Assessment worked through the impacts and reduced the areas under consideration.
2. Have you had any experience of developing sites next to SSSIs, and of improving biodiversity as is claimed? If so, where?	BRL	Cllr Sue Wilson	No experience of developing sites directly adjacent to SSSIs. However, have had 10 years in solar industry and all have had proposed biodiversity improvements. Keen to work with local community to transfer words into action.
3. Where will the trucks be coming from every day? Where were the panels actually manufactured?	BRL	Cllr Sue Wilson	Most come from east Asia. Modules will be imported from Asia, land in a post in south England and be transported across country. Rest of equipment will be manufactured in south of England and will also be transported north. Q) what is the efficiency of the panels that will be used. A) Panels have not been ordered or manufactured yet and industry is improving all the time. Existing projects have efficiency in high 20s.

<p>4. Inevitably during construction, the large HGVs will come up behind one of the many horses on one of our narrow lanes. What do you think will happen next?</p>	BRL	Cllr Pam Ayers	<p>Have used specialist consultants to look at transport routes and id issues. Solar farms are often down narrow lanes. Construction operators will work with community and road users. Management plan will be part of separate planning application which will take account of local needs and could work outside school pick up and drop off hours for example. It will be 4 HGVs a day – not a relentless stream of traffic. Detailed strategy would be part of planning conditions.</p>
<p>5. A sizeable vehicle compound for parking, wheel washing, equipment storage etc. will be required during construction. Its location is not indicated on any of the maps. Where is it exactly and how large an area will it cover?</p>	BRL	Cllr Georgie Moore	<p>Parish Council has already asked a similar question in writing (Q3) 09/11/21) and not received an answer. Construction compounds will be within solar farm area. It is not shown on the maps because it is a separate from the current planning application, but will be within solar farm site. IE Site 2 top end. Primary access point will be put in at field 3 and all deliveries will take place there. Equipment moving to field 4 will have to cross the public right of way and the management plan will sort this out and apply for the nec permissions including temporary crossing of a public right of way. A single corridor will be in place with a controlling banksman.</p>
<p>6. <i>Further to Q5.</i> That compound is referred to only in the singular in the plans, implying that vehicles will need to cross the footpath. What will the applicant have to do to allow that footpath to be crossed, or will a second compound be necessary in the south and if so, where is that on the map?</p>	BRL	Cllr Georgie Moore	<p>Parish Council has already asked a similar question in writing (Q1) 09/11/21) and not received an answer. See above.</p>
<p>7. Although the project is stated not to be in a flood area, residents and Cllrs are in possession of photos which shows flooding. How will you mitigate against this on site?</p>	BRL	Cllr Anne Taft	<p>If there are parts of the site that flood then please share this information with the applicants. They will then account for this in a flood risk assessment. There are a lot of solar farms in existence and all have minimal impact on flooding. Angled solar panels will allow runoff that does not concentrate water on the sort of topography that we have here.</p>
<p>8. Why do parts of the application repeatedly refer to fencing panels if you are claiming in other parts of your application that post-and-wire will be used for security?</p>	BRL	Cllr Pam Ayers	<p>Possible that there is a mistake and will double check. Will all be post and wire and NO panels.</p>
<p>9. In the LVIA it states the substation perimeter is 48 metres x 25 metres with galvanised palisades 2.4 metres high and finally surrounded by a stock fence 1.2 metres high; at no point is there any consideration to conceal or mask this. What is the proposal to ensure this sub-station is sympathetic to its surroundings? And why is</p>	BRL	Cllr Dave Stanley	<p>Question submitted by Cllr Izamis, who cannot be present. Substation will be adjacent to the existing overhead pylon and will concentrate new infrastructure around existing large metal structures. Hedges and substation will grow and conceal the substation</p>

<p>there no visual illustration in the LVIA from ubu design?</p>			<p>– won't be invisible but the effect on views will be minimal. Q) what maintenance will be in place to make sure hedges actually grow? A) Proposals will translate into action. Will work out who manages this after planning permission granted. 40 years is a good amount of tie to build an ecosystem.</p>
<p>10. How do we know that the existing water course is suitable for the changes which are to be made?</p>	<p>BRL & WWT</p>	<p>Cllr Anne Taft</p>	<p>Flood risk assessment looks at hydrological assessment of brooks and water courses and look at how placement of solar panels will affect the water courses. Come to conclusion that there is not a concentrating effect on the existing water courses. Q) insurance companies assess this area as a flood risk area. A) BRL – our solar farm will not exacerbate existing flood issues.</p>
<p>11. Is such a large sub-station necessary for that one site, or in anticipation of others in the area?</p>	<p>BRL</p>	<p>Cllr Sue Wilson</p>	<p>BRL received a legally binding offer from WPD. Substation and size of it is relative to size of pylons and is criteria set by WPD</p>
<p>12. Does the substation emit a sound of 60 -80 decibels as I have read, or perhaps more, and is that 24/7?</p>	<p>BRL</p>	<p>Cllr Sue Wilson.</p>	<p>Parish Council asked a similar question in writing regarding inverter noise (Q6) 09/11/2021. As yet has received no answer. BRL going to check. Decibels drop off quickly as you move away from the site. Distance from public footpath is sufficient so may hear it but each site is very site specific. Q) could all infrastructure be hidden by a bund? A) Construction principles set by network operator (WPD) but will take this idea back to them for an answer. Could look at boosting planting to create a wooded edge.</p>
<p>13. You make a point that your installation will provide power for local homes and businesses. Are you aware what the National Grid does? NB. Will the Parish community benefit at all or does it all go to the National Grid?</p>	<p>BRL</p>	<p>Cllr Anne Taft</p>	<p>Energy goes to local energy distribution and not to national grid. Anyone connected to local distribution will receive the energy and usually it finds its way to the closest demand course. Cannot send energy to specific users without setting direct links. The site will increase the proportion of energy that comes from renewable sources. Solar on roof tops will not solve the energy crisis as it wouldn't be enough to cover energy needs. E.g., Norwich study – if all solar was on roofs in the city, still only 10% of Norwich energy needs would be met.</p>

<p>14. You make multiple references to using poorer quality land. There is only 3b and 3a, in other words moderate and good agricultural land. Is that a fair description of "poorer quality land"?</p>	BRL	Cllr Dave Stanley	Land will continue to be grazed as is today and will use sheep to manage the proposed local meadow. Most land in country is grade 3.
<p>15. On p7 of your Planning Statement you write, "Agricultural Land Classification Survey (May 2021) classifies the site as containing a majority lower grade land, with a relatively small amount of higher grade." What percentage of the total is that relatively small amount of higher grade? (39% in the Planning Statement) Did you include the land on which the substation and its access road will stand? Did you include any 3b footpath land in that total?</p>	BRL	Cllr Allan Brether-ton	Didn't understand this answer. 60%/40%
<p>16. Will you have a legal management agreement to ensure there is a mechanism of enforcement for your many conditional claims and who might this be?</p>	BRL	Cllr Sue Wilson	There will be different parties that will help manage this process. Contractors will be responsible and will have to comply with conditions set by authorities. This requirement will also be part of the in-house contract. Legal mechanism will ensure that BRL will comply (i.e., planning conditions). Want to work with local community to comply. A partnership of 3 companies is part of a nationwide project for 10 solar farms including this one. Long standing tradition of quality solar farms. Push energy is the construction firm.
<p>17. As is the case with other solar farms, we understand that that you will likely use pile drivers to install posts. Pile drivers on average would require 200 hammer blows per post. How many posts be required?</p> <p>How loud would you say that is relative to the level of background noise in the PDA, in decibels roughly?</p> <p>Would you be able to hear that, let's say a kilometre away?</p> <p>As you know a higher proportion of our local population are retired. They have pets and keep other animals not used to any level of noise. Many more people now work from home. As these people and animals are accustomed to extreme quiet during the day, what level of financial compensation are you prepared to offer to each of our residents?</p>	BRL	Cllr Allan Brether-ton	Background noise cannot be heard a KM away. Will get exact numbers and get back to PC. Will be some noise for a period of time during construction and will make sure that residents are aware of when this will be. Usually, the worst noise is 2 -3 weeks in total.

18. Have I missed seeing a fully detailed carbon account including manufacture, installation, servicing and decommissioning? If so, where can we read it?	BRL	Cllr Sue Wilson	No carbon account for this project. BRL know from previous projects that this project is carbon neutral. Time taken to repay carbon debt from manufacturing is in months only. If project used more carbon that it saves then they would not be in this. Alternative is coal or gas power stations.
19. Can you explain your reasoning about loss of carbon capture and storage by the grassland, caused by shading it with the panels? Have you had a report from a specialist in environmental chemistry to support your claims?	BRL	Cllr Dave Stanley	No specialist reports. No grass on this site will be permanently shaded and there will be light to varying degrees across the whole site. Have countless examples of grass growing under solar panels. It will change the growing regime and will result in grass that prefers shade.
20. Are plans in place for decommissioning the site and can you confirm who would be responsible for paying for and carrying out the process, presumably by a certified and licensed contractor as it is hazardous waste, and that a bond would be in place should the developer goes bust?	BRL	Cllr Pam Ayers	Legal obligation with landowners to decommission sites. Will be a bond in place to protect community and protect sites. Planning conditions will require decommissioning management plan to be in place.
21. You made many recommendations in your response as a condition of not objecting to the proposal. Are you going to ensure these do / do not happen and if so, how?	WWT	Cllr Sue Wilson	Conditions will be imposed by DC as part of planning conditions. As a result of this the Trust will keep an eye on Phase 1 construction, traffic and transport and Phase 2 long term management of the site. Fairly easy to keep an eye on all matters, as it is visual and easy to measure. Monkwood is a SSSI and there is a legal requirement imposed on the council by the Wildlife Acts.
22. Are you confident that the sub-station noise and months of construction and associated noise will not have a detrimental effect on the sensitive sites just a few yards away?	WWT	Cllr Sue Wilson	Yes. The difficulty is in finding research on decibel levels and the effects on separate species. Sig research on impact on nesting birds but not on invertebrates. Monkwood principal importance is for invertebrates and there is no evidence of the impact of solar vibrations on invertebrates. Noise intervention will go in as part of the planning condition suite.
23. How will any upgrade of the technologies / equipment be planned and managed & who by?	BRL	Cllr Georgie Moore	No upgrade envisaged and technology will last the life of the project. Replacement will take place throughout the lifetime of the site. The maintenance operator is in house and will be on site an average of twice a year – one man in a van.
24. Are you aware that you should have used the new biodiversity tool version 3 released in the summer, well before you submitted your application and not version 2, a beta version?	BRL	Cllr Allan Brether-ton	Continued use of beta. The difference between the two is minimal and wouldn't change the outcome.

<p>25. Are you aware that there is no arable land on the PDA? Are you aware it is all semi-improved pasture and has never been intensively farmed? Are you aware that because there is no arable land and the grassland is only semi-improved, the baseline used in your biodiversity calculations cannot apply and your claims of a biodiversity gain are not evidence based?</p>	<p>BRL</p>	<p>Cllr Dave Stanley</p>	<p>Biodiversity net gain is based on the fact that the site will be grassland. Ecology assessment is that the current grazing regime gives a low /poor biodiversity mix. The regime under proposal is for an upgraded lowland mix. Q) improving grassland is a slow and complex project. Shading of grassland will result in a drop of 5oC. 30% of biodiversity is in soils and a decrease in temperature will have a large impact on the soil itself. A) Higher level message is that the site is used from grazing and not much else. This will become a site that is used from grazing and solar. The overarching direction is the most important one.</p>
<p>26. What do you think is the change in biomass beneath a solar panel at this latitude?</p>	<p>BRL</p>	<p>Cllr Dave Stanley</p>	<p>Don't know. DS) Reduction in photosynthesis will result in a decreased in biomass the soils beneath the panels and will result in increased carbon released. NB it is not possible to have an increased in biomass and increase in ecosystem activity if have a solar farm. A) Analysis from NE would suggest otherwise. They will be replacing a semi improved grassland with a lowland meadow mix and this will be a sig improvement.</p>
<p>27. Do you think cows can graze safely on the panelled area during operation? Horses? Donkeys? Would you put lambs out to graze on the panelled area during operation?</p>	<p>BRL</p>	<p>Cllr Pam Ayers</p>	<p>Only sheep and lambs.</p>
<p>28. How much hedgerow will need to be replaced at the southern and northern access points? How old do you think some of those hedgerows are?</p>	<p>BRL</p>	<p>Cllr Anne Taft</p>	<p>20m will be removed theoretically. 1.8km will be replanted.</p>
<p>29. This part of the county has some of the richest Saxon heritage in the country. Why did your cultural and heritage impact chap do such a selective job if by pulling out the Monkwood or Woodhall refusal documents he could have seen references to work done in close proximity to your PDA? Why did he not at least go to our local library?</p>	<p>BRL</p>	<p>Cllr Georgie Moore</p>	<p>The site will not affect any designated heritage assets and they have assessed the effect on nearby houses including Lovely Cottage. They looked at the potential assets using a geophysical survey and magnetic survey to look at what is under the ground. They worked with archaeologists throughout the consultation period. Landscape features will not be removed and will remain beyond the life of the site.</p>
<p>30. Is it the case that the pylon will need to be replaced at the substation by a taller model that can take the extra load?</p>	<p>BRL</p>	<p>Cllr Allan Brether-ton</p>	<p>No plans to change the pylon.</p>

<p>31. In your Site Search document, you indicate as Site B, all of Birchall and all of Noken Farm. That implies you have sought and gained permission from the landowner of Noken Farm to develop more of Noken Farm than the field on which a substation would be located. in the future. Is that the case?</p>	BRL	Cllr Georgie Moore	No. Agreement with Moken farm is for substation only and no solar will be on Noken farm.
<p>32. You emphasise how many homes you could power. In a typical January, the peak month for electricity consumption, how many homes could you provide power for? How about from 6pm to 7pm when we are having supper.</p>	BRL	Cllr Allan Brether-ton	No electricity will be generated during those times (Jan and 6/7pm for e.g.). That is why we need a mix of solar and wind and tidal energy generation across the county. No battery storage on this site.
<p>33. In your Site Search in section 3.1 ,“Overarching national need,” you state: “Along with offshore wind, therefore, solar is critical to achieving these radical reductions [in carbon]. Indeed, modelling in the 2020 Energy White Paper assumes up to 120 gigawatts (GW) of new solar capacity over the next 30 years, equating to 4GWs (4,000 megawatts) per year.” Does that accurately describe your position?</p>	BRL	Cllr Allan Brether-ton	Figures form energy white paper are not targets and are models for future energy grid. Gives a sense of the energy mix that we need to achieve.
<p>34. The key phrase in that is “up to 120 gigawatts”. That phrase is repeated on p6, section 1.1 of the Planning Statement. Going to the source, DBEIS, in its “Modelling 2050 Electricity System Analysis” which the 2020 Energy White Paper refers to, DBEIS states as one of its main findings, “There is no single optimal technology mix; many capacity mixes can meet different carbon emissions levels at low cost.” (p3). DBEIS generated a total of 3,360 unique low-carbon deployment mixes (p6). Solar was modelled at 15GW to 120GW, (p6). As of June 21, the UK already has 13.5GW of installed solar capacity (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Solar_power_in_the_United_Kingdom) so the UK is already within 1.5Gw of the low end of the solar range modelled for 2050 (i.e. 50Mw per year for the next 30 years of new capacity would get us there). The UK has a technical potential of 42Gw of residential rooftop capacity (Wikipedia). Including public sector and private sector rooftops, the UK could reach the mid-range of that model for total solar over the next 30 years - without a single new solar farm.</p>	BRL	Cllr Georgie Moore	Do need an energy mix as per the white paper. Again, these are modelling assumptions not targets. Solar is the cheapest form of renewable energy we can achieve. Solar on roof tops 4x more expensive that compared to solar farms. Roofs do not present the ideal conditions for solar and people do not want them on their roofs. Solar on roofs would be a mid-range options and is not sufficient to tackle climate change.

<p>35. The Government's 2020 Energy White Paper states on p42: "We are not targeting a particular generation mix for 2050, nor would it be advisable to do so." How many times do you think solar farms are mentioned in that paper? The phrase "offshore wind" appears 103 times, the word "solar" appears 20 times, (7 times referring specifically to consumer generation) and the phrase "solar farm" only once. The word "nuclear" appears 70 times. We would be interested to hear you justify your assertion that the country is reliant on solar farms to take the country to net zero.</p>	<p>BRL</p>	<p>Cllr Dave Stanley</p>	<p>Solar is easy to deploy and easy to remove. We do not depend on solar alone but it will be a very big part of solving the problem. Solar globally has reduced its costs through technology improvements. DS) Solar farms will result in shading. Intro to regenerative agriculture for Cllrs. A) This is a challenge but maintains that they will be taking a piece of limited value agricultural land and replacing it with better quality grazing, better quality seed mix and solar benefits on top. IE considerable biodiversity benefit even with shading.</p>
<p>36. The Natural Networks programme is a partnership between Worcestershire County Council and the Worcestershire Wildlife Trust which aims to create or restore wildlife-rich habitats. The programme offers free professional Biodiversity surveys carried out by WWT who will assess the project site and make recommendations on how to create or enhance your land to maximise habitats for wildlife. If the WWT were to assess this site, what recommendations would you make on how to enhance the site at Sinton Green. Why have you not applied these principles when responding to this planning application</p>	<p>WWT</p>	<p>Cllr Pam Ayers</p>	<p>Steven runs that project and can only offer that to land owners that want it and to sites that qualify (i.e. not benefiting from other grant schemes). Have applied exactly the same principles are in the Networks Programme and links all aspects of the landscapes to the desire to restore and improve. This is made clear in the Trust response to the application.</p>

Questions from public

Q) Ted Lewis – Flooding and noise (can hear over 3 miles and impact on animals will be sig).

A) Legitimate concern. If have local evidence please share. Drainage regime will not change and water will percolate through the soil.

Q) Substation details are vague. No details of aggregates to be used or concrete platform. Will there be welfare facilities on site? Ground condition in area of substation is very susceptible to flooding.

A) No buildings as such. They are units on a concrete pad. No welfare on site. Storm drains will not be affected. Legal obligation not to affect drainage and will be working with landowner.

Q) Ted Lewis. New substation site used to be used for wildflowers.

A) Wildflowers will be planted across the site and will be sig more than there was before.

Q) HR – Similar application on other side of Monkwood was refused What is different here? Reason for refusal was loss of ancient countryside and loss of visual amenity.

A) Hoping to work with local community to prevent such loss. Design scheme has taken care to ensure that the site fits within the landscape

Other points

- BRL has a commercial interest agreement in place and will only get money if the solar panels are installed.
- BRL would love community support and would help community to achieve solar on the roof of the peace hall.
- Solar farm will be sold to an investor after the panels are in place.

Clarification provided by BRL post meeting:

Please accept our apologies for the confusion on this point. To be clear, BRL is a collaboration between several experienced solar developers, including Push Energy (<https://pushenergy.co.uk/> - Daniel is employed by Push).

BRL will be responsible for agreeing the various detailed plans discussed with you yesterday (we will come back to you later this week with a list of what we expect these to be, but includes landscape, ecology and construction plans). I would reiterate our offer for you to work with us to prepare these, so they achieve the high standards we discussed on Tuesday. Once approved, we believe it would be appropriate to establish some form of community liaison group and the plans could detail how this will work.

Once approved, Push will be legally responsible for ensuring all commitments are delivered on behalf of BRL via a series of planning conditions and, as the operation and maintenance provider, will remain responsible throughout the operation and decommissioning periods. Importantly, should ownership change at any time, those responsibilities legally transfer to the new owners but with Push remaining as the operator and primary point of contact for you or the community.

The points made on Tuesday, which I believe caused the confusion, related to where the money comes from to enable BRL to develop its projects:

- As with most development projects, BRL secures debt and institutional financing, but BRL retains the management of the projects.
- No matter what the financing arrangements, the experienced team at Push will be responsible for constructing and operating the project under the banner of BRL solar. Testament to this fact is that the 350MW of solar sites built by Push since 2012 in the UK. All of these have been financed in various ways, including investors, but are all operated by Push's in house operations and maintenance team and they remain the primary point of contact. This will be the case here.

I do hope this clears up the confusion and gives you the confidence that the financing arrangements will not affect our commitment to engage with you and the local community, to make sure enforceable planning conditions are put in place that deliver on the promises made, and appropriate mechanisms are agreed for the Parish council to be able to review the work carried out.

-end-