

Stockton on Teme Extraordinary General Meeting

Wednesday 8th June, St Andrews Church, Stockton on Teme, 7.00 pm

Apologies: Councillor Dell, Councillor Pollock, John Williams, Angela Marsh, Brian Marsh, Graham Smith, Hannah Bates, Coral Gaunt, Jo Probert, Jamie Probert, Tony Palmer, Sharon Mills, Clare Walker, William Walker, Lisa Hague, Mark Childe, Casey Childe, Greg Russell, Vicky Evans, Russell Carter, Kate Fitzpatrick

Chair – Margaret Danby, Clerk – Sioux Breeze-Derrigan

The chair opened the meeting at 7.00 pm and welcomed all those present. She explained that the purpose of the meeting was to obtain a Parish response to the second planning application (16/00678/FUL) submitted to Malvern Hills District Council (MHDC) for a solar energy installation in Stockton on Teme. It was also explained that anyone can make representation to MHDC via the website or by letter. The Chair had checked that the meeting was being run within current laws and regulations. In terms of context, a brief overview was given, describing that:

- The original application was submitted in August 2015. There had been two Parish Meetings where the application had been discussed, and a majority decision taken to recommend refusal of the planning application to MHDC.
- In March 2016 MHDC refused the planning application - the Chair then read out the decision notice to all those present, outlining the principal reasons behind its refusal.
- In May 2016 a second application was submitted concerning the same site with a new planning statement and design and access statement, and addendums to the flood risk assessment and landscape and visual impact assessment. The main differences from the first application were the realignment of some panels and confirmation that the power exported to the national grid would initially be limited to 1MW.

The chair explained that, in submitting the Parish response, we were required to justify our decision with factual concerns that would support our recommendation of approval or refusal of the application. Following discussion, a secret ballot would take place with parishioners Joe Gaunt and Bill Webb acting as observers of the count process.

The chair then read out an email from John Williams, who was unable to attend the meeting and had stated that he was happy for his comments to be read out to all those attending. The discussion then commenced with parishioners expressing both opposition and support of the application. In terms of opposition the following considerations were expressed:

- In response to John Williams' letter it was noted that the church was not in financial difficulty and the suggestion that the solar installation would be able to support the electricity usage of the building was not relevant.
- Concerns around access to the site from Pensax Road, especially since recent kerb work has narrowed the road at the access point, and that lighting may be installed on the access road. John Sinnett asserted that there would be no lights.
- In relation to the maintenance of the access road, if this fell into disrepair or weather conditions resulted in it being unusable other access points might need to be utilised.
- That the second planning application was still using the old flood plan which did not represent the current application and therefore failed to satisfy appropriate risk analysis.

- If approved, the solar farm would change the character of the area from agricultural to industrial and set a precedent for further development in the Teme Valley. Thus, the MHDC decision will have wider implications than just in Stockton.
- MHDC have already set a precedent in that they refused planning for this site three months ago by voting 10-2 against the application.

In terms of support for the application the following considerations were expressed:

- If the land cannot be farmed, as expressed by the applicant, what will happen to it?
- That the solar farm could become an asset for the village.
- That by supporting the application parishioners are supporting local farmers.
- Rejection of the application would stifle diversification.

The chair then invited electors to cast their votes by posting them into a ballot box.

Votes were counted by the Chair and Parish Clerk. This process was observed and the result double checked by the two village observers with the result of:

Supporting application: 21

Opposing application: 39

Spoils: Nil

The chair then confirmed that she would complete the return to MHDC with the recommendation to refuse the application and a summary of the reasons behind the decision.

The chair thanked all those who had attended the meeting and it was closed at 8.15pm.