

MINUTES
of the
PLANNING COMMITTEE
held on 5 July 2022 at 7:00pm

Present:

Councillor J A Sosin (Chair)

Councillors L Ashley, P Hughes, R J Hyland, R Lee, G H J Pooley,
R J Poulter, S Rajesh, T E Roper, E Sampson, C Shaw and I Wright

1. Chair's Announcements

For the benefit of the public, the Chair explained the arrangements for the meeting.

2. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor S Dobson.

3. Declarations of Interest

All Members were reminded that they must disclose any interests they knew they had in items of business on the meeting's agenda and that they must do so at this point on the agenda or as soon as they became aware of the interest. If the interest was a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest they were also obliged to notify the Monitoring Officer within 28 days of the meeting. Any declarations are recorded in the relevant minute below.

4. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting on 20 June 2022 were confirmed as a correct record.

5. Public Question Time

A number of statements were made on the application at Item 6. Details are given under minute number 6 below.

6. Land West of Hill Farm, Pan Lane, East Hanningfield, Chelmsford – 21/00555/FUL

Councillor Poulter declared a non-pecuniary interest in this item. He spoke as a ward councillor on the application but withdrew from the meeting during its consideration and took no part in the decision on it.

The Committee considered an application for the development of a site to the west of Hill Farm, Pan Lane, East Hanningfield into a solar farm with associated plant, access tracks, mitigation and landscaping. A list of amendments to the report, including amendments to condition 17, had been circulated before the meeting.

A member of the public had submitted a statement to the meeting opposing the application and representatives of East and West Hanningfield Parish Councils attended the meeting to speak against it. A ward councillor also spoke against it, whilst a representative of the applicant spoke in support of it.

Those who opposed the application recognised the need for renewable energy but felt that the application in respect of this site was inappropriate for a number of reasons. They argued that there would be a loss of agricultural land at a time when there was a growing demand for food production; the proposal would be a visual intrusion on the landscape and would harm the rural setting and character of East and West Hanningfield; there was a lack of key technical information about the proposal; the cumulative impact of this and other solar farm applications was detrimental to the area and should be taken into account; there was potential for the development to attract anti-social behaviour; there was a lack of local demand for electricity generated in this way; offshore wind power was a better means by which to provide renewable energy; there were more suitable sites elsewhere in Chelmsford; and the application was contrary to national and local planning policies.

The ward councillor who spoke on the application emphasised in particular that the cumulative impact of similar applications in the area should be a significant consideration; that the site was on a slope and could therefore be seen from a distance; that a well-used historic footpath crossed the site and the solar farm would not be adequately screened for at least 25 years; that the security fencing would be detrimental to the visual amenity and character of the area; and that although the land was classified as grade 3b and therefore not protected for agricultural use, it was productive and produced a significant amount of grain annually. Its loss would therefore be detrimental to food security and have an adverse effect on the climate as a result of the need to transport food greater distances.

The representative of the applicant present at the meeting emphasised the environmental benefits of renewable energy schemes such as this. He said that the location was outside of the Green Belt, was close to a suitable grid connection, was not an ecologically sensitive site, and comprised poor quality agricultural land. It was ideally located for the development, would not threaten food security and accorded with local and national policies.

In response to questions raised by the objectors and by members during the discussion of the application officers said that:

- The St Peter's Way footpath was 66km long in total and only a short length of it was affected by the application. None of the security fencing would be adjacent to the footpath
- It was the normal practice that permission for a solar farm's connection to the grid was sought after the application for the solar farm itself had been determined
- There had been previous applications for solar farms at Sandon Brook and Canons Barn. The application for the former site had been refused on the grounds that it was a large scale development in the Green Belt and the proposed landscaping had been inadequate to protect the rural character and visual amenity of the area. An appeal was pending against that decision but it would not be reasonable to defer this application until that appeal had been decided. The latter site was also in the Green

- Belt but permission had been granted on the grounds that it was a smaller scale development that would specifically provide energy for the nearby waterworks
- There was nothing in national and local policies to protect grade 3b agricultural land against development for purposes other than agriculture. The classification as grade 3b was based on an assessment by a qualified consultant
 - There would be ecological benefits associated with the proposed development

The Committee was divided in its views on the application. Members recognised the need for renewable energy and some were of the view that, on balance, that should be the prime consideration if measures were taken to mitigate the impact of the development on the area. Planning policy leaned towards granting such applications, the site was not in the Green Belt and the proposed mitigation measures were adequate. Others were concerned about the cumulative impact of such developments, the effect of this application on visual and residential amenity and the loss of productive agricultural land.

It was suggested that this type of application could not be determined without a site visit to assess at first hand its effect on an area. However, a motion for a site visit in this case was lost on being put to a vote.

The Committee was of the view that, on the balance of the arguments and by a narrow majority, the application should be granted.

RESOLVED that planning application 21/00555/FUL in respect of land to the west of Hill Farm, Pan Lane, East Hanningfield be approved subject to the conditions detailed in the report to the meeting, as amended by the list of additions and alterations circulated before the meeting.

(7.02pm to 8.35pm)

[7. 17 The Street, Little Waltham, Chelmsford – 22/00273/FUL and 22/00634/LBC](#)

This application had been withdrawn from the agenda as it no longer needed to be determined by the Committee.

[8. Planning Appeals](#)

RESOLVED that the information on appeal decisions between 20 April and 17 June 2022 be noted.

The meeting closed at 8.36pm

Chair