

SOMERSHAM PARISH COUNCIL

MINUTES of the Parish Council Meeting held online on February 17, 2021 at
7.30pm

PRESENT

Cllrs James Caston, Stephen Wright, Thomas Hallett, James Rook, Sam Barrell and Shaun Whiting were present, together with the Clerk Rod Caird. District Cllr John Field, County Cllr Kay Oakes and eight members of the public were also present.

1/170221 Apologies and approvals of absence

Cllr Will Caston Cook had sent apologies and his absence was approved.

2/170221 Declarations of Interest and Requests for Dispensation

Cllr James Caston declared an interest in planning applications DC/21/00060 and 05895, referred to in Items 7 and 8 on the Agenda. He will leave the room during that discussion, passing the chair to Cllr Wright.

3/170221 To approve the Minutes of the meetings on January 6 and February 3, 2021

The minutes were approved.

4/170221 To receive comments from members of the public on matters on the Agenda

There were no comments.

5/170221 To consider the following planning applications:

DC/21/00548 | Notification of Works to Trees in a Preservation Order - T1 (Holm Oak) - Reduce crown to reduce load on partially decayed stem by approx 3m in height north 2-3m east 1-2m south 3-4m and west 5-6m. See accompanying arboricultural report | The Old Rectory Main Road

DC/21/00514 | Householder Application - Erection of first floor extension and single storey rear extension (following demolition of conservatory). Installation of first floor window | Old Barn Stores Main Road

There was no objection to either application.

Cllr James Caston left the meeting at this point; Cllr Wright took the chair.

6/170221 To consider the outcome of the public consultation by leaflet and online on the solar farm planning applications.

The Clerk reported that the written and internet survey of local opinion produced the following results:

There were 59 responses, of which:

10 were in favour

39 were against

10 were unclear/unsure/of no opinion

Broadly, those in favour listed climate change as their main concern; those against listed the impact on the landscape and the loss of agricultural land as their main concerns.

The impact on wildlife and footpaths were also of concern to those opposed.

Written comments drew heavily on the issues of loss of agricultural land, and damage to the character and look of the area. The large size of the site was also mentioned, as was the fact that commercial and residential new builds are not obliged to install solar panels.

Smaller sites were consistently favoured, on brownfield land.

Responses were divided evenly between online forms and written sheets. All but one online respondents said they lived in Somersham; it can be assumed all the written forms came from Somersham residents. All but two said they had read the proposal.

59 responses represent approximately 10% of the individuals currently on the Somersham electoral register.

Parish Councillors wished to thank all those who had taken the time to complete the questionnaire.

7/170221 To receive comments from members of the public on Item 8 on the Agenda

Extensive public discussion had taken place at the open meeting on February 10, 2021. Comments were uniformly opposed to the applications.

8/170221 To consider the following planning applications

DC/21/00060 | Full Planning Application - Installation of renewable led energy generating station comprising ground-mounted photovoltaic solar arrays and battery-based electricity storage containers together with substation, inverter/transformer stations, site accesses, internal access tracks, security measures, access gates, other ancillary infrastructure, landscaping and biodiversity enhancements including Nature Areas | Land To The East Of The Channel, Burstall Hill

DC/20/05895 | Full Planning Application - Installation of renewable energy generating station, comprising ground-mounted photovoltaic solar arrays and battery-based electricity storage containers together with substation, inverter/transformer stations, site accesses, internal access tracks, security measures, access gates, other ancillary infrastructure, landscaping and biodiversity enhancements including Nature Areas. | Land To The South Of Church Farm, Somersham, IP8 4PN And Land To The East Of The Channel, Burstall

All Parish Councillors present spoke against the applications. Main arguments concerned the lack of benefit to the community; the loss of agricultural land; the change in the character of the landscape; the potential flooding risk from run-off; the overwhelming opposition locally to the proposal. The green benefits of solar power generation were felt to be outweighed in this case by the disadvantages of the site.

Cllr Oakes and Cllr Field both spoke against the applications.

It was felt to be very important that the Parish Council and individuals should express their views clearly about this matter, in order that the Mid Suffolk planning officers and Councillors on the Planning Committees are in no doubt about feelings in the community.

It was unanimously agreed to oppose the applications; the Clerk would draft comments for submission and publication which would be approved by Parish Councillors before the closing date of February 28, 2021.

9/170221 Correspondence and urgent matters to be brought to the attention of the Parish Council

Cllr Rook reported that the two laptops and associated equipment purchased by the Parish Council for pupils at Claydon High School have been delivered. Cllr Hallett reported that the Environment Agency is planning a site visit to investigate the persistent flooding problems in the village.