



Minutes of the Additional Meeting of the Parish Council held on
Monday 6th March 2023 at 7.30pm in the Village Hall

Parish Councillors present: Cllrs Ros Day (RD), Sonia Plato (SP), Geoff Thomas (GT), Lynda Roller (LR), Jill Mitcheson and John Goddard (JG).

In attendance: Richard Watson, Director of ESC, Kerry Weller, ESC & Crowhurst Environment Group, John Feltwell, Ecologist, 4 members of the public and Gilly Lowe, Parish Clerk

1. Public Questions

The new owner of Horseshoe Farm spoke to express his concerns about the solar farm which he knew nothing about when he purchased his new home. The house had been vacant for 5 years. It sits centrally with a southerly view over the proposed solar farm. He appreciated that a great deal of hard work had been done getting the project to this point, and he would like to be involved with shaping it from here. He is an environmentalist and wants to be supportive but would like his concerns and those of other Swainham Lane residents to be considered. RD thanked him for his comments and invited Richard Watson to make his presentation.

2. Apologies for absence

There were no apologies.

3. Proposed solar farm at the land behind Swainham Lane, Crowhurst

Richard Watson introduced himself and his colleague from Energise South Coast (ESC) which formed the joint working group with residents, the Warmer Crowhurst Clean Energy Project in 2021. They successfully applied for a £40k grant to carry out an energy assessment of the whole village. In Crowhurst 80% of homes use oil, 73% have very low rated energy performance certificates. Methods to improve insulation or switch to ground source heat pumps are expensive.

The community cohesion makes Crowhurst a good place to try this project and Richard Watson highlighted the benefits. Additionally, the area behind Swainham Lane is an ideal site for several reasons.

The challenges are gaining the support of those who live nearest to it as well as the infrastructure of the grid which is due to be upgraded to accept more generated power in 2029. Currently it will only take 200Kw and the proposed solar farm is between 5-7MW. They plan another short consultation to decide on the boundaries, beginning with the public meeting on Saturday 11th March, before going to planning - probably by the end of April.

SP said it was important to put the proposal in context of helping people with the cost of living. The Neighbourhood Plan research carried out in 2019 included a lot of surveys which showed there are many Crowhurst residents who are property rich but cash poor. Locals are priced out of the village. The Declaration of a climate emergency which was adopted by the PC was one way of addressing this and reducing the carbon footprint. A lot of work, and resident support has gone into this, and it is not a one-off project but should be considered in the wider context of a group working with residents.

Richard Watson then answered some specific questions about the installation – the posts can be fitted by a small vehicle with minimum ground disturbance, no concrete is required, and they can be removed afterwards. There would be a 2m high perimeter deer fence, with one access gate and CCTV, a requirement for insurance purposes. RD asked some questions about noise and lights and JG asked if there were summer & winter settings, and if the panels needed to be washed regularly. After some further discussion, RD confirmed that ESC is at this stage want a general letter of support to accompany the planning application. She then proposed that the PC would be generally supportive of the solar farm if they follow NP policies, and consider points raised by the consultation with the village. The PC will then look at the details of the planning application and make any comments in the usual manner when it comes before them. All members agreed and the clerk was asked to write an appropriate letter.

4. RR/2023/217/P – The Normanhurst Estate, Catsfield TN33

The chairman asked members if they wanted to comment on this application which is not in the parish of Crowhurst. There was unanimous agreement that as an adjoining parish, the impact of such a large development would certainly affect Crowhurst residents. After various points were raised highlighting bio-diversity concerns, increased traffic, destruction of natural habitats, employment opportunities and the protection of the HWAONB and light pollution, the following comments were proposed by RD. All councillors agreed with the proposal, and the clerk was asked to submit the response online.

Crowhurst Parish Council objects to this planning application for the following reasons:

- i) If a similar development was proposed in Crowhurst it would go against our Neighbourhood Plan policies, particularly our environmental policies.*
- ii) Crowhurst as an adjoining parish would be affected by the increased traffic.*
- iii) Crowhurst lies in the watershed of Catsfield and therefore any water pollution would affect the residents.*
- iv) The proposed development goes against many of Rother's own bio-diversity policies which we strongly support in Crowhurst.*
- v) We didn't see any details about lighting in the whole development (in the lodges and along paths), but we are concerned that light pollution levels would likely be greatly increased and go against the dark skies policy.*
- vi) We fear that it would set a precedent for a development of this size in the HWAONB, and more could follow.*

5. Pathway at the Rec

The clerk provided an update on the hire of a temporary pathway. JG also confirmed that a recent meeting with the owner of the pond behind had been positive and remedial measures had been agreed on. The whole pathway needs to be higher and needs to be permeable / porous. The clerk was asked to contact some contractors to quote for the necessary works, and to put the budget for a temporary pathway towards permanent repairs, particularly as the path and Rec had dried out significantly.

Meeting closed at 9.25pm

Signed by

Date:.....

