



Minutes of the Additional Meeting of the Parish Council held on  
**Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2024 at 7.30pm** in the Village Hall

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

In attendance: Maureen Collins, Deputy Parish Clerk, and 32 members of the public.

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### 1. Public Questions

The Chairman (GT) began by asking if there were any questions from the public that were not related to the Solar Farm planning proposal. There were none.

### 2. Apologies for absence

Apologies were received and accepted from Cllr Sue Laimbeer, Cllr Koorosh Ashrafi, District Cllr Chas Pearce and County Cllr Kathryn Field

### 3. Declaration of Interests

Cllr Thomas – Village Hall Committee

Cllr Roller – Member of the Crowhurst Environment Group

Cllr Plato - Youth Club & Crowhurst Environment Group

### 4. Town & Country Planning

*RR/2023/1201/P – Swainham Lane - Fields to the South & East, Crowhurst TN38 8ED Proposal: Installation of solar panels, security fencing, CCTV cameras, underground cabling, inverters, environmental enhancement measures and other ancillary development.*

The Chairman (GT) began by advising members of the public that it is usual for 15 minutes to be set aside for questions from members of the public and that these would be considered prior to the Parish Council considering the application. However, he was mindful of the numbers present and would allow more time than this but requested that individual comments were kept to one or two minutes.

He reminded those present that the proposal had arisen from a Rural Community Energy Fund (RCEF) feasibility study undertaken by Energise Sussex Coast working with the Warmer Crowhurst Group. There has been some significant opposition, particularly from those living closest to the site. Their main objections are the impact on the local landscape, potential harm to biodiversity and the use of greenfield land for energy production. They suggest that the solar farm would disrupt the rural character of the area, negatively affecting views and local wildlife habitats, potentially resulting in the devaluation of nearby properties and causing long-term environmental impact. There has been some comment that there is a need for a more thorough assessment of the project's environmental impact and that alternative locations, such as brownfield sites or rooftops, should be considered as these would not compromise valuable green spaces.

Supporters of the project highlight its potential benefits, which include generating renewable energy for thousands of homes whilst contributing to community funds aimed at local sustainability initiatives. The solar farm project has incorporated measures to enhance local biodiversity, including the planting of wildflower meadows and additional hedging.

The debate highlights the need to balance renewable energy production with environmental and community considerations. At a previous Parish Council meeting on 6<sup>th</sup> March 2023, a motion was passed to write a letter in support of the application with the caveat that consultation with residents would continue and that the concerns of residents would be considered.

The Chairman then opened the meeting to questions from the public.

Alan Stainsby asked how big the solar farm would be and how many homes could it power? Richard Watson replied that it is quite a small solar farm, being approximately 12 hectares but would generate enough power to supply 2500 homes.

Another resident commented that in his view solar farms are an extremely inefficient way of making electricity, particularly on fields and that the best way forward would be to generate it as you use it using solar panels on rooftops.

Further questions were asked about the noise that would be generated by the inverters used in the proposed solar farm and the method used to clean the panels, which was felt to have the potential to cause additional noise. Richard Watson advised that water is used to clean the panels of dust and debris and can be done by using a tractor, and that this would be done once a year. Noise made by string inverters can be on a scale from that made by a fridge to a tractor. Updated inverters used would generate noise similar to that of a fridge. An inverter would power a number of panels.

Richard Day addressed the issue of noise. He has solar panels on his house and when standing in his bedroom under the inverter in the loft finds that it makes little noise. He also questioned whether efficiency is the issue either. Rather he feels that it is very important that we all support the need for renewable energy and accept that in future we will need lots of electricity for heat pumps and electric cars.

A resident from Royal Oak Lane commented that there are particularly striking opportunities within this project to support renewable energy. It will be a good asset for the village and one that will generate income for the community. It will not leave a footprint once removed and has the potential to explore private wire connection to the railway or to local industry.

A question was asked about how Crowhurst residents will benefit from the proposed solar farm and where profits would go. Cllr Plato (SP) said that the proposal is to set up a Community Fund; to reduce our high carbon footprint evidenced by the surveys carried out by the Warmer Crowhurst Group. The fund would be administered by a community group and set up to benefit the residents of Crowhurst. Currently we are a very oil dependent village, and there is a lot of hidden fuel poverty. Funds could be used to alleviate this or to support the need to decrease energy use in the village. This will be for the Community Fund group to decide. Whilst the group may include some Parish Councillors it is important to note that the Parish Council will not benefit from this fund. It would be for the benefit of Crowhurst residents. Richard Watson suggested that around £100,000 may be generated.

A resident asked if the proposed solar farm would reduce the carbon footprint of the village and benefit future generations. They also asked if the Parish Council has declared a Climate Emergency. Cllr Plato (SP) replied that yes, the PC declared a Climate & Ecological Emergency in 2019 aiming to become carbon neutral by 2030, in line with Rother. The PC had set up the Climate Emergency Working Group to address this aim, made up of councillors, residents, experts and Energise Sussex Coast members. The Warmer Crowhurst Group sat under this and had carried out cross village surveys and events previously which had been grant funded. Richard Watson replied that the proposed solar farm would reduce the carbon footprint by 1400 tonnes per year, or 25%.

A resident of Swainham Lane asked if the Parish Council were aware of the Campaign for Rural England survey which recommends that 25,000 hectares of south facing rooftops should be used first when considering solar power generation? Cllr Plato said that the Council were aware of this, and that poor quality grade 4 land, such as the land at the proposed site, is also seen as acceptable and is supported by the government.

Ros Day commented that electricity usage is estimated to triple in future years, due to heat pumps, electric cars etc.

Concerns were raised due to the loss of view that would be suffered by the Swainham Lane resident at Windy Ridge. Cllr Plato (SP) replied that the Warmer Crowhurst group had walked the site with residents of Swainham Lane to address ways to minimise this, and that panels had been removed/reduced in number, re-sited and hedging enhanced in the current proposal to reduce visibility of the solar farm from the property. This was disputed as the resident concerned felt that 'panels had been put in to take out'.

The Chairman (GT) then asked for comments from the Councillors. Cllr Mitcheson felt that she was not 100% convinced and was neither for nor against the proposal. Cllr Plato (SP) saw this as a fantastic opportunity for our village and was in favour. Cllr Linda Roller (LR) was in favour and will support the application, commenting that the advantages for the future will be greater than any current loss. However, she wanted it noted that she fully understood the concerns of those living nearby. Cllr John Goddard (JG) felt that the proposal was contentious and said that he wished to abstain from making a comment.

The Chairman (GT) said that there was no way to balance the views of everyone or come to a decision that everyone agrees with. However, the Parish Council need to decide to support the application or not and he would support the application. A vote was taken, and with two abstentions and three in favour it was decided that Crowhurst Parish Council will continue to support the application.

Councillors agreed to submit the following comments online:

***Crowhurst Parish Council continues to support the application as it should bring benefits to the community, is in line with Neighbourhood Plan Policies and the PC's support for climate and ecological emergency. In supporting the application, the PC acknowledges that not all in Crowhurst will be supportive. However, the PC hopes that through further dialogue adverse effects identified by those opposed can be mitigated."***

## **5. Date of Next Meeting:**

The next meeting of the Parish Council will take place on **Monday 17<sup>th</sup> June at 7.30pm** in the Village Hall.

Meeting closed at 8.15pm

Signed by ..... Date.....