

BLITHFIELD PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Planning Meeting dated 27.11.2024

Present: Cllr P Atkins, (Chairman) Cllr Vernon, Cllr K Massey, Cllr S Hulme. Mrs F Shipley Clerk

24.11.01 Apologies: for Absence: Cllr P Massey,

24.11.02 Declarations of Interest: Cllr Vernon declared an interest as the father of the tenant farmer whose land the application P/2024/00696 is associated with.

24.11.03 Planning application P/2024/00696.

This meeting immediately proceeded a public meeting where 20 members of the community came together to discuss this application and for a briefing from the applicants Aura Power.

All but one of those present agreed to oppose the application. The parish council therefore agreed to oppose the application on the following grounds:

1. The parish is an agricultural community which includes 10 farms. The tenanted farm in question (currently growing wheat), will in effect lose its viability, the family will lose the majority of their livelihood. There is a serious concern about food security, going forward. Suggested sheep farming and beekeeping are token gestures and not an alternative. Shade and water run-off mean any agriculture is unproductive and the land will be in a terrible state and not easily returned to its former glory in 35 years' time.
2. The integrity of the area will be lost if farmland is used for solar farms, the concern is that the 'flood gates' are opening and that once one is approved on a beautiful, productive, nature rich, tranquil site, many more will be. Indeed the council are aware of a number of planning applications in our small area that are either existing or intended.
3. Rare species of bird fly over the site regularly to feed on fish in Blithfield Reservoir. There is also a serious threat and disruption to other wildlife. Birds and bats often mistake the panels for water and are killed when they fly into them.
4. There is concern about the environmental impact of the solar farm, not just from an aesthetic point of view but also contamination. Solar panels use rare and in some cases dangerous minerals in their production including cadmium, which will leach into soil and then run off into Moreton Brook causing contamination to waterways and wildlife. Panels are not recyclable and at this time, will go to landfill when spent.
5. There are reservations about existing flooding issues on roads and farmland and how the solar farm will effect Moreton Brook and will they be made worse by the solar farm.
6. More thought needs to be given to the carbon footprint of constructing the farm and disposing of spent panels, along with the loss of food production, against the efficiency of the solar farm to produce renewable energy over a period of time. It is a well known fact that, despite their many, deliberately glossed-over shortcomings, even wind turbines are more efficient in the provision of power than solar and the output figures quoted in this application assumes maximum conversion rates in perfect solar conditions. There is a large gap between ideal and reality results.

7. Much more investment should be put into installing solar farms on brownfield sites, roofs, over car parks etc. and the use of offshore wind farms.
8. There is a great deal of concern by many in the parish about the weight of traffic during construction and the suitability of the roads. Should the application be given approval, what guarantees do we have that the local roads will cope and also be maintained and repaired? The intended access off B5013 onto Lea Lane, is just about wide enough for 2 cars to pass but not farm traffic, add a large number of HGVs over many months and transport of over 200 workers on a daily basis and we are going to have serious damage to the roads and the verges, and potential gridlock. The junction on to the fast and twisty, in some places narrow B5013 is also a major worry, already being a very dangerous road.
9. The solar farm will be visible from Cannock Chase (SAC), from where you will see the full impact of the glare when the sun shines on the panels.
10. A house less than 20 metres from the solar farm perimeter will not only have a complete change of view but also be impacted by CCTV cameras.
11. We have been offered a 'sweetener' of an index linked 20k per year. What guarantees and legal obligations can we be assured, should the planning application be granted?

The meeting closed at 8.55pm

Signed

Clerk