

Burton Pedwardine and Burton Gorse Village Meeting

Tuesday 9 May 2023

In the Church

Present: Michael and Jan Coy, Wayne and Luisa McIntosh, John and Gill Augilla, Sara and Tim Marchant, Mary Tilley, Graham Webb, Martin and Elizabeth Thompson, Ali Sutherland, Barry Gray, Mandy and Andy Topp, Stuart and Lisa Lancaster, Pete Willerton, Fraser Key, Joe and Clare Hughes and Frances Jerram.

Apologies: Pete and Jenny Davy, David Jerram, and Richard Sutherland.

Declarations of interest: MC declared an interest in the proposed solar farm. LM subsequently took on the role as Chair for the first item.

1. Presentation from Low Carbon on Beacon Fen Energy Park

Representatives from Low Carbon were in attendance: James Hartley Bond (JHB), Helen Scar and Jessica Goff. JHA introduced the team advising that they would like to explain where they are with the project, and provide an opportunity to ask questions.

The proposed Beacon Fen Energy Park is known as a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP), because of its size and type. An Environmental Impact Assessment Scoping Report has been submitted to the Planning Inspectorate for their comments. Comments are also invited from statutory consultees. This includes the Village Meeting.

Low Carbon has been around for over 10 years, and were at the start/coal face of renewable energy in the UK, particularly to do with solar. Over time they have branched out to other technologies and other countries. Their model is slightly different from other companies in that they own and operate their sites. They look after about 20% of the UK's solar farms.

The proposed Beacon Fen Energy Park will be 600mega watts subject to final detail and design, split across two sites. It is part of the overall portfolio that Low Carbon is trying as a company to deliver 20 gigawatt by 2030. It is intended to connect with Bicker. Establishing the best route is key. Shortening the route and minimising inconvenience is also key. May see more activity over the coming months as surveys are being carried out. There is another similar project in Gainsborough, Gate Burton project, about 16 months ahead of this project and is expected to go to examination later this year.

The land available for this project is approximately 2500 acres across the two sites. But that is the starting point. Heckington Fen is slightly smaller than this project. There are fewer points of connecting in the UK and it is starting to make traction in the national press where you can even get a connection much before the 2030s. However, this is an area where there could be a connection before 2029.

Low Carbon do not know the extent of the project as this stage. They are keen to gather local intelligence over the coming weeks. There will also be consultation events held locally. Offering meetings with individuals as well as parishes, if they would like that.

One of the exercises they have to go through is try to establish the best route for connection, taking in a number of factors, environmental impacts, how many landowners might it cross to minimise disruption, shortening routes wherever possible. At this stage it is quite a large corridor, while options are being considered.

Reference the figures from the scoping opinion, all of these figures are the maximum extent in terms of overall project area: the height of equipment and the maximum amount of infrastructure required. Overtime there is the prospect that some of these figures will reduce.

In terms of measures for enhancements, there are a number of things they will try to do, aside from simply generating renewable energy, such as enhancing hedgerow, new planting and keeping public rights of way open. As stewards of the land, they are keen to maximise biodiversity net gain. Changing from predominately arable to more biodiversity friendly processes for birds, bats etc. to forage on the sites.

Low Carbon is aware of the reservoir. The process for each is very different. About to begin detailed discussions with Anglian Water. Have been prevented from talking to them until now, because the Beacon Fen Energy Park project was not in the public domain.

Some surveys have been carried out, particularly around ecology. Normally must provide two seasons to develop a base line, replicate that over two years. Starting to build that baseline now. They are seeing a number of farmland birds, newts, reptiles. There are a number of other surveys that have to be carried out too: highways, archaeological, landscape, visual impact, flood risk assessment and so on. Important to understand local thoughts too.

More detail will be available for the statutory consultation that is being held later this month. Each household should have received a postcard with the details on. The emphasis at this stage is on listening.

They are keen to hear what people would want to see coming out of the project. For example, what are the constraints, where is more sensitive, or where might be more acceptable etc. and come up with a scheme at the end, all things considered, as harmoniously as possible. All information will be fed back to the project team and will help in the creation of the Statement of Community Consultation, a document that details how they consulted with residents and stakeholders.

Following the presentation from Low Carbon there was an opportunity for residents to make comments, and ask questions/receive responses. A summary of which is as follows:

Resident comment

There are NSIPs across the UK, but our tiny, beautiful, medieval village has two new proposed ones that butt right up to our village leaving no buffer, in fact they overlap. Nervousness around the

construction phase aside, a reservoir would bring tourism, and wildlife and cannot be built on. Cannot see any benefit from a solar farm at all. It will devalue our properties and devalue our enjoyment of this beautiful village and the land around it. Don't underestimate the strength of feeling. We do not want this solar farm, and we will pick apart anything you put forward.

Resident question

There seems to be a fundamental error here in the detail on the map. Burton Pedwardine seems to be an afterthought. Properties within the village limits will be looking to the rear, front and side at solar panels. As you drive into the village from Scredington, there will be solar panels on both sides. We have to think about the residents that will get nothing from this. What was the rationale for identifying Burton as a location?

Low Carbon response

No conscious thought to the text on the maps, and the size of the lettering, to elevate or de-elevate the village names. We have a starting point and that is key to say. Not presenting a final scheme here today. Still to define the more sensitive areas and the less contentious areas. Hope along the way to address some concerns. May be things that can be done to offset the concern. The point is there is a number of unknowns, and we are keen to learn more from people, this is not the final plan.

Resident question

One aspect that is out of your hands completely is the reservoir. Good agricultural land will be lost to the reservoir. If it was just one it could be bearable, but two is unacceptable. Very strong argument from local farmers saying why the reservoir shouldn't happen. Two massive projects working in tandem. We have years of planning and construction ahead, as we are in the middle of both. How would our community benefit?

Low Carbon response

Specifically on the reservoir, it is difficult to see how this will play out. More possibility that the two cannot quite coexist in the same space as there is such a degree of overlap. They will be talking to Anglian Water. Don't yet know which way they will go. It is not fully conceivable to see all the land as reservoir and all the land as solar because there is an overlap.

Resident question

How is our little community going to benefit?

Low Carbon response

There are a number of things that naturally flow from a solar farm development this but one of the things that also comes from a project like this the community benefit.

Resident request: There are a lot of polite people in this room, please keep your answers short.

Resident question

Who is your backer? Who instigated it?

Low Carbon response

They have a partnership with Mass Mutual, Low Carbon has a strategic fund with them, but equally it is pretty normal practice that these projects will also have an element of back finance too so a debt instrument as well. The grid connection caused them to look here. Plus, planning criteria.

Resident comment

There are already thousands of acres going under glass in this area. The newest solar farm off of Whitecross Lane was not objected to, we understand the need for this type of technology. But if you took an aerial view of North Kesteven, there are thousands of acres going down to glass and that is having a huge impact on communities as a whole. It is too much.

Low Carbon response

Low Carbon reiterated that the project outline is the starting point. Consultation will help work out where a more acceptable line might be. Please push as back as far as you like.

Resident comment

Suggestion, to take the schemes outside of the village limits, away from residential properties.

Resident comment

Appendix 51 talks about the impact on some of the rarer flora and fauna that you have identified, it simply states that *there will be an effect* – please be specific, about what those effects will be, don't use spin.

Low Carbon response

There is a prescribed way of doing certain things, but comments are taken on board.

Resident question

What are the community benefits?

Low Carbon response

Number of things that will naturally flow from the project. It doesn't create lots of long-lasting jobs beyond construction, but there will be some. Some of the materials can be purchased locally. Community gain and faster broadband as examples.

Resident question

We cannot buy into the scale and location of the project. The reservoir could bring prosperity over generations to come. That has been a process long in the making. You seem to be entering into a race to what end? Why do we need to generate so much energy, a little village in Lincolnshire? Only taking from people in this area, no benefits. Potentially deprive us of a project that will put us on the map. You will wipe out the value of properties in this area, and destroy lives.

Resident comment

The solar farm at Grange Farm is proportionate and was sensitively designed. This one is not. This community accepted it. What Low Carbon is trying to do is surround the village, and devalue it. Don't see how 110% is achievable. As a solution, talk to Anglian Water, put floating solar on the reservoir.

Resident comment

This consultation is providing them with the information they need to amend their plans to fit our concerns. Living in and surrounded by glass will not be good for anyone's mental health. This will be the next 10 years fighting and watching the land being ripped apart.

Resident comment

There are things they can do: the 110% is achievable on solar farms. It is far easier than on a housing estate. One of the key things is largely from removing monoculture, and pesticides that will support other species. If the project is to go ahead, there would be a community fund. About £1m out of a £500m project.

Resident comment

Money means nothing to us we love our bit of countryside. We don't want panels around us. There must be other sites that they are considering that would not affect people in the same way. Please consider other sites. It is not just the site, it is the construction phase too, and the damage to roads while the project is going on.

Resident comment

Going back to the condition of the roads, if you take the construction of the solar farm at Gorse Lane, Silk Willoughby as an example, the road is virtually impassable unless you are going 5 miles per hour. We have to live with that. That is a small site. Now if that is scaled up to the size of project talked about for Burton, the damage will be devastating.

Resident question

What are you going to do when our minor roads get destroyed by the construction traffic?

Low Carbon response

There will be a scheduled condition of highway before and after. Bespoke access routes could be considered. The team will take all the comments made away and discuss, as there is a lot to think about.

Resident question

Are you looking at compulsory purchase?

Low Carbon response

This land in the project area is the land that is available to us to consider. The optimum between trying to maximise generation, and balance the concerns and constraints. Not looking to come

through anyone's property with cables. Will try to avoid it, but can compulsory purchase if required, if no other option. Will always try and find an alternative route if possible. They will put forward a cable route, based on environmental issues, and land access.

Resident question

What is the timescale for this project and how did you come across this area?

Low Carbon response

Until the first round of consultation, and surveys have been undertaken, they cannot set out a definitive timescale.

This area was identified by looking at how far you can take the connection, and also grid availability. One of the chief gauges as you go further east is the grading of agriculture land. Also, as you go further east, more of the land is classified as flood plain. We are being pushed further west for that reason.

Resident comment

Need a clearer picture of where this is going. Not clear at all. It's really important to include specific elements on maps, especially the church and railway.

Low Carbon response

Points noted. More detailed plans will be available at the consultation events, and further information on the proposed design will be available later in the year.

Resident question

Why not connect Beacon north into 132? That goes directly into Bicker and there is nothing in the way. With one unit, down the fens, well away from everywhere else. Please look at that as a project. What you have just done to this community is create havoc. It will destroy the community.

Low Carbon response

The scale/voltage is the issue. Not an electrical engineer, can take that point away.

Resident question

This is going to be a colossal site. What about the glare factor and its impact on our health?

Low Carbon response

The technology has changed, and the glare would be absorbed by the panels.

Resident question

Have the COP 26 coastline objections been factored in to your application?

Low Carbon response

It will form part of the flood risk assessment process, and the environmental statement. Trying to be part of the solution, admittedly on a global scale.

Resident comment

I don't know if the people who have the ability to stop this in its tracks realise the extent of the effect it will have on this community and certainly visually because it will destroy things completely, and I would urge people to stop and think about exactly what they are doing.

Resident question

Whose land is it?

Low Carbon response

There are a number of different landowners over the two sites. It comes out of the process of planning constraints, and understanding the grid connection and cabling route. The shaded area is the indicative cabling area. The area in which they are currently searching. No solar panels will be put in that area. The surveying will help understand and drive the best route to take the cables through. Low Carbon is in a position where they have secured land interests for an option to lease agreements for the project.

Resident comment

Landowners will benefit much more than the community. If this goes ahead it will totally destroy the village.

In closing, Low Carbon made a request that anyone who wants to meet with them gets in touch. They are happy to meet with individual households in their own homes, to try to address specific concerns.

Representatives from Low Carbon left the meeting and MC resumed the role of Chairman.

2. Minutes of previous meeting and Matters Arising

GA updated on the successful grant application to Sleaford Renewable Energy Plant. £3700 has been awarded for the purchase of various supplies to support events and activities to be held in the Village. The income from the SREP grant fund will be held in the Village account.

GA also added that the Diocese is concerned about the structure of the church. Waiting on the outcome of a structural survey. It is hoped that we can secure grant funding to enable the creation of a kitchen and toilet in the Church. There will be a get together in (hopefully) July for us to work out a plan of how we can make that happen. BUT we have to prove as a community that we want it. All thoughts/comments and input would be very much appreciated.

3. Annual Return and Village Accounts

LM talked through the Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR). One has been prepared for the Village, and it has already been audited internally. The relevant pages that needed to be publicised were provided to all in attendance, and would also be displayed in the Village noticeboard for the next two weeks. The next stage is to submit it to an external auditor employed by Lincolnshire County Council, by July 1st 2023.

As part of the AGAR, the Village accounts were discussed. At the end of March 2023 there was £1,336.66 in the current account. The 2022/23 precept payment was £400, therefore the balance on the date of the meeting was £1,736.66.

4. Village Planters

MC offered thanks to the team behind the planters, and to Tim for litter picking. Thanks also to Martin for litter picking in Burton Gorse.

AS explained that the planter on Scredington Road is still looking good, however the others have taken a bit of a hit. The planter on Asgarby Road needs to be doubled up, new plants are required for all, and the compost needs replenishing.

LM advised that a contact at Heckington in Bloom has offered to provide some practical advice on best plants to use in each location, and also provide some plants at cost price. AT advised that he could provide compost (which was gratefully accepted).

£30.29 remained from the initial £300 allocated to the planters. After some discussion it was agreed to allocate £200 for the purchase of plants and compost to improve the planters for the coming year.

ACTION: LM/AS/MT to liaise regarding new plants and improving one of the planters.

5. Any other Business

- a. Appointment of new Clerk. LM advised that she would be stepping down. Any interested parties had been asked to get in touch. As a result, SM expressed an interest. All agreed that SM would be appointed as Clerk, with a gradual handover over the next couple of months. Thanks expressed to LM.
- b. Training for defibrillator. All agreed that this was not required for now, as the machine talks you through the process.
- c. Lincs Alert. This is a free messaging service run by the Police and Crime Commissioner, which goes some way to taking the place of Neighbourhood Watch. Register to receive messages by going to: www.lincolnshirealert.co.uk

Meeting closed at 9.57pm