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28 February 2014

To: Chairman – Councillor Lynda Harford
Vice-Chairman – Councillor Brian Burling
All Members of the Planning Committee - Councillors David Bard, Charles Nightingale (sub. for Val Barrett), Caroline Hunt, Sebastian Kindersley, Raymond Matthews (for Robert Turner), David McCraith, Deborah Roberts, Richard Barrett (for Ben Shelton), Hazel Smith, Aidan Van de Weyer (for Tumi Hawkins) and Nick Wright

Quorum: 4

Dear Councillor

You are invited to attend the next meeting of **PLANNING COMMITTEE**, which will be held in the **COUNCIL CHAMBER, FIRST FLOOR** at South Cambridgeshire Hall on **WEDNESDAY, 5 MARCH 2014 at 10.00 a.m.**

Members are respectfully reminded that when substituting on committees, subcommittees, and outside or joint bodies, Democratic Services must be advised of the substitution *in advance of* the meeting. It is not possible to accept a substitute once the meeting has started. Council Standing Order 4.3 refers.

Yours faithfully
JEAN HUNTER
Chief Executive

The Council is committed to improving, for all members of the community, access to its agendas and minutes. We try to take all circumstances into account but, if you have any specific needs, please let us know, and we will do what we can to help you.

AGENDA SUPPLEMENT

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EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

The law allows Councils to consider a limited range of issues in private session without members of the Press and public being present. Typically, such issues relate to personal details, financial and business affairs, legal privilege and so on. In every case, the public interest in excluding the Press and Public from the meeting room must outweigh the public interest in having the information disclosed to them. The following statement will be proposed, seconded and voted upon.

"I propose that the Press and public be excluded from the meeting during the consideration of the following item number(s) in accordance with Section 100(A) (4) of the Local Government Act 1972 on the grounds that, if present, there would be disclosure to them of exempt information as defined in paragraph(s) of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act."

If exempt (confidential) information has been provided as part of the agenda, the Press and public will not be able to view it. There will be an explanation on the website however as to why the information is exempt.

Notes

- (1) Some development control matters in this Agenda where the periods of consultation and representation may not have quite expired are reported to Committee to save time in the decision making process. Decisions on these applications will only be made at the end of the consultation periods after taking into account all material representations made within the full consultation period. The final decisions may be delegated to the Corporate Manager (Planning and Sustainable Communities).
- (2) The Council considers every planning application on its merits and in the context of national, regional and local planning policy. As part of the Council's customer service standards, Councillors and officers aim to put customers first, deliver outstanding service and provide easy access to services and information. At all times, we will treat customers with respect and will be polite, patient and honest. The Council is also committed to treat everyone fairly and justly, and to promote equality. This applies to all residents and customers, planning applicants and those people against whom the Council is taking, or proposing to take, planning enforcement action. More details can be found on the Council's website under 'Council and Democracy'.

Agenda Item 5

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Planning Committee

5 March 2014

AUTHOR/S: Planning and New Communities Director

Application Number:	S/2616/13/FL
Parish(es):	Meldreth
Proposal:	Development of solar photovoltaic panels and ancillary structures including; field transformers, auxiliary transformer, inverter housing, communication room, district network operator building, switch room building, access tracks, security fencing and security cameras
Site address:	Bury Lane Fruit Farm, Melbourn Bypass, Meldreth, Roston, SG8 6DF
Applicant(s):	EW Pepper Ltd
Recommendation:	Approval
Key material considerations:	Principle of development; Impact upon the landscape character; Ecology; Flood Risk; Highway Issues; Impact upon Residential Amenity; Archaeology; Landscaping; Loss of Agricultural Land; Crime and Disorder Act 1998 and Other Considerations
Committee Site Visit:	Yes
Departure Application:	No
Presenting Officer:	Andrew Fillmore
Application brought to Committee because:	The officer recommendation is contrary to the views of the Parish Council
Date by which decision due:	19 March 2014

Updates to the Report

Agenda report paragraph 9 – Consultation response from Meldreth Parish Council

The Parish Council's full comments were not reported and are now attached as appendix 1.

Agenda paragraphs 35- 39 – Landscape Impact

The parish council state there is no mention of a suggestion that the scheme could be improved, and local opposition reduced, if the southern field was removed from the scheme as suggested in pre-application advice.

While the omission of the filed would reduce the overall landscape impact, the Council's Landscape Officer has considered the overall impact to be acceptable subject to conditions set out in the main report.

Agenda report paragraph 55 – Loss of Agricultural Land

The Parish Council is concerned that due to the size of this application it should be looked at as part of the whole solar development within the South Cambs area from the standpoint of how much arable farm land should be lost or what it considers is the fair burden that should be placed on the landscape. The parish council believes this point has not been fully addressed in paragraph 55 of the main report so it is not clear how the planning committee will debate this issue.

In response, officers recognise this is a legitimate concern, but is one that is incrementally difficult to deal with. The officer's report refers to existing plan policy which seeks to prevent the "irreversible" loss of high quality (i.e Grades 1, 2 or 3a) agricultural land. This policy is effectively repeated in the emerging Local Plan. As the loss here would not be irreversible (confirmed by proposed condition 11), there is no conflict with the development plan on this point.

Paragraph 112 of the NPPF suggests that where "significant" development of agricultural land is demonstrated to be necessary, planning authorities should seek to use areas of poorer quality land in preference to that of higher quality. Recently published national best practice guidance on large-scale ground solar arrays similarly advises that a clear justification on the benefits a development would have for the land to be taken out of full agriculture use would have to be demonstrated..

The 25 year period of loss and the change of use from crop production to grazing are therefore significant factors if repeated across large areas of the district. Nonetheless, in the absence of any adopted policy approach and the sustainability credentials arising from the renewable energy produced, officers do not consider a refusal of planning permission on this point alone could be substantiated.

Members should also note that this is a "major" application which, if determined at the meeting, will help meet the important targets set by central government in the determination of planning applications.

Agenda report paragraph 55 – Other material considerations

Members are asked to note that the parish council is disappointed there is no mention of its concern that Meldreth residents, as a result of what it believes was misinformation on the location of the site, did not have timely information on the public consultation that took place in Meldreth.

Contact Officer: Andrew Fillmore – Senior Planning Officer
Telephone: (01954) 713180

Bury Lane Fruit Farm, S/2616/13/FL - E W Pepper Ltd.

Development of solar photovoltaic panels and ancillary structures including; field transformers, auxiliary transformer, inverter housing, communication room, District Network Operator (DNO) building and switch room building, access tracks, security fencing and security cameras.

Meldreth Parish Council recommend **Refusal** with comments.

Reasons for refusal are based on the following:

1. The size of the proposal is 47 hectares (116 acres), we understand the largest currently being considered by SCDC (see below) and is a comparable size to the developed area of Meldreth village.
2. There would be a visual impact from high ground nearby and from some local areas.
3. Possible reflection hazard for trains passing immediately by the site and aircraft overhead from airfields in Meldreth, Fowlmere, Duxford and Marshalls as well as long haul routes.
4. Loss of good (Grade 2) arable farmland for at least 25 years
5. There is already a proposed solar farm at Orwell and another in Melbourn at the A10/A505 junction. Our research of the SCDC web site has shown that there are already 13 applications pending (6 for full planning and 7 requesting EIA clearance) and 4 approved. There may be others at the pre-application stage. Meldreth Parish Council believes that because of this and due to the size of this application it should be looked at as part of the whole solar development within the South Cambs area from the standpoint of how much arable farm land we should loose or what is the fair burden we should bear on our landscape.

Another concern which was raised by the public was:

Vermin control – little thought had been given concerning this, as already there is a large rabbit problem in this area and control by shooting is not possible.

However, Meldreth are aware that there is a need for low carbon energy and that the area in question would be suitable for this purpose as being on level ground landscaping can in time be used to ameliorate the impact from most viewpoints. The size of the scheme would make it more economical and the substation, which is already in situ, would be of benefit to the scheme.

Meldreth Parish Council believes that local opposition to the scheme would be less and the scheme improved if the overall size of the development was reduced by removing the southern field bounded by the bridleway and the railway line. This would allow landscaping to be at some distance from Ashwell Stret so the long views to Barrington Hill would not be lost which would take away some of the overall impact of the development. The pre-application advice, given by letter on 12 September 2013 from Andrew Fillmore and included in the application, in fact suggests this too as it would remove an "unacceptable intrusion into the countryside".

If SCDC is minded to grant planning permission we would support the use of sheep to graze the grassland and Meldreth Local History group have requested the opportunity to walk the site before grass is seeded to see if interesting artefacts from past history have been uncovered.

Public Consultation

Meldreth Parish is also concerned that there has been confusion as to which parish the application lies within and that this has resulted in the public consultation, outlined in the application, being less effective than it should have been. In fact the application site and the applicant's business, Bury Lane Farm shop, lie wholly within the parish of Meldreth. The parish boundary with Melbourn runs along Ashwell Stret/Harcamlow Way to the south of the proposed solar farm. The visibility splay of this track with the A10 is the only land mentioned in the application that is in Melbourn.

The pre-application advice, given by letter on 12 September 2013 from Andrew Fillmore and included in the application, suggests the site is in Melbourn as there is no mention of Meldreth and only views of the site from Melbourn are considered. However Savills, for the applicant, were suggested by SCDC to approach both parish councils to brief on their plans pre-application. We are disappointed as we have written to SCDC Planning in the past when we discovered that planning applications for Bury Lane Farm Shop had by-passed Meldreth Parish Council completely and only been dealt with by Melbourn Parish Council.

The confusion arises from Bury Lane Farm having a Melbourn postal address, probably dating back to before the A10 by-pass was built and the farm shop was accessed from the Melbourn end of Bury Lane.

We arranged for Savills to attend our planning committee meeting on 21 November 2013 and discovered, in the process, that there would be a public exhibition in Melbourn on 22nd November. We asked for a similar meeting in Meldreth and were told that they had only budgeted for one meeting for both villages. When we explained that the site was located in Meldreth (they thought it was in both parishes!) they agreed to hold the meeting in Meldreth. As a result of the short notice the meeting was poorly attended by only 25 people; including all 9 parish councillors. After pressure from Melbourn Parish Council they did agree to a second exhibition in Melbourn on January 17th which was better publicised through Meldreth Matters and a leaflet drop by Savills to parts of the village. However Meldreth people would have attended the Meldreth meeting in greater numbers had they known about it.