

# THE PARISH OF CONSTANTINE

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Minutes of a Parish Meeting of the Parish of Constantine held on Wednesday February 9, 2011 at 7.30pm in The Church Hall, Constantine. The Chairman of Constantine Parish Council, Cllr P.C.Carter, presiding, Mr C.Chapman (Parish Clerk) in attendance.

**Present:** Ninety members of the public.

Welcoming all those present to the meeting The Chairman explained that the Parish Meeting had been convened at his request and meant that only those resident in the Parish could speak. The sole purpose of the meeting was to gauge the reaction of the Parish as a whole to the proposals for the construction of a solar farm at Brill.

The Clerk explained that a Parish Meeting consists of local government electors registered for the area for which it is held and cited the relevant statute (the Local Government Act 1972 s 13(1)). He further explained that, because of current legislation, at this meeting Parish Councillors would be prevented from expressing their views on the proposal and that, essentially, they were there to listen. Their views will become clear at the Parish Council meeting on Thursday February 17, 2011 when the Parish Council's observations on the planning proposal will be decided.

The Clerk then outlined the proposal for a solar farm at Brill stating that in brief the application is for the development of a solar farm on 15.3 hectares (37.25 acres) at Brill.

If it is granted permission,

- the solar farm will comprise 15,720 solar panels, each 1.5 metres high and 1 metre wide
- each of these panels will be placed on a pole and the maximum height above the ground will be 2.5 metres (8 foot 3 inches)
- a 2 metre (6 foot 5 inches) high wire mesh security fence will surround the site (a distance of 1.6km or 1 mile)
- 20 security cameras will be installed on 3m high poles
- an associated building housing meters, switches and a transformer 19 feet high, 48 feet long and 20 feet wide will be built. This building will be Tyrolean rendered and roofed in fibre cement tiles
- the construction is estimated to take six months and will entail 71 HGV deliveries along the road from Edcumbe past Silver Hill Farm to Brill
- the applicant states that the site is within 400 metres of Brill
- in support of the application, the applicant states that "the overwhelming response from the public consultation has been positive". This statement is based on the attendance of 34 members of the public at two exhibitions held within the village
- the farm will have a maximum capacity of 5MW, which, at average usage rates, is sufficient to power 1,064 local homes.

The Chairman then asked for those present to state their views, preceding what they had to say with their name and address simply to confirm that they were resident within the parish. Thirty people spoke against the proposal as it stands and one (who admitted to a personal interest as an employee of Wardle-Armstrong,

the company responsible for writing the application) adopted a neutral stance but endeavoured to answer several questions of detail.

A considerable number of points were noted, including the following

- existing government legislation is not tight enough. The original thinking had been for a maximum of scores of panels rather than for thousands
- the application ignores the fact that the site falls within an existing Area of Great Landscape Value. Policy ENV4 of the Kerrier District Local Plan 1996-2011 Revised Deposit Draft states that Development within the areas of Great Landscape Value will not be permitted unless: (i) it is sited and designed to conserve the characteristic degree of exposure of the open countryside, patterns of settlement and traditional locally distinctive building styles; and (ii) there is no significant harm to the appearance, visual amenity or character of its landscape of county-wide value except where this would be outweighed by the social and economic benefits to the community. It was noted that the site will also impact on the Constantine Conservation Area and the nearby Cornwall Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Clearly, the proposed development does not accord with this policy
- by virtue of the security fence and cameras, the development will resemble an open prison
- the application rides on the back of the generally-held view that it all helps with the impact of climate change. However, the company concerned has no interest in climate change: its interest lies solely in the profits it can make through the Feed in Tariff
- the size of the proposed solar farm (5MW) is set simply because that is the largest size that qualifies for the financial benefit arising from the Feed in Tariff
- development in and around the parish has always been undertaken with care and consideration for the locality: this application rides roughshod over the work done in the past
- the overwhelming positive response to the scheme referred to in the application is based on a very small number and refers to answers given to very general questions about green energy. The responses do not refer to this scheme
- nothing about the scheme will benefit local people. The suggestion that a sum of money might be made available to the community every year will not be fact unless an S106 legally binding agreement as a condition relating to a grant of permission for development, nor is it at all evident that, were it to become available, this money might underwrite projects identified by the community
- this is the thin end of the wedge; once one farm has been built, others will follow
- the word “farm” in the term “solar farm” is misleading in the extreme. A farm is an area of land and buildings dedicated to the growing of crops and livestock and is essentially rural in nature. This application is for a power station: an industrial development of unprecedented size in the area
- the surveillance cameras are capable of turning their intrusive lens on neighbouring properties
- the views from the sites within the 2km and 5km study areas should have been supplemented by views from inside the proposed site: if you can see it, it can see you! The impact of the proposed development will be beyond that suggested in the application. Its scale and dominance within the rural area will intrude upon views of the countryside for many miles
- solar panels are valuable in financial terms: in an area of very low crime they will be a temptation to criminals. Has the Devon and Cornwall Police Authority been invited to comment?
- rain water run-off will cause problems to the local infrastructure. The average rainfall in Cornwall is 39 inches per annum which, on this site, will amount to nearly 10.5 million gallons. When the water falls off the panels, it will create rivulets at the base of the panels. In times of heavy and prolonged rain, these will quickly join together to form streams. Inevitably this will increased pressure on banks of streams, on bridges downstream and on the roads and will result in further silting of the Helford and possible flooding of properties (it was noted that a Flood Risk Assessment accompanies the application)
- the claims that the development will bring benefits to the local community are spurious. A few jobs will be available during the construction period: after that the power station will very much run on its own
- noise from the motors aligning the 15,720 panels with the orbit of the sun will increase as the motors age

- the decision has already been made: the developers and the Local Planning Authority are riding roughshod over the views of local people who are powerless to prevent development
- a Cornwall Council Officer speaking on *Farming Today* had dismissed a statement by Chris Huhne MP, Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change that the Feed in Tariff scheme had been designed for households, small business and communities rather than for the benefit of multi-national companies His view was that solar farms are necessary and desirable
- a petition should be raised locally and, should planning permission be granted against the weight of local opinion, consideration should be given to mounting a legal challenge
- access along the road from Edgcumbe to Brill is impracticable if not impossible for the weight of traffic foreseen during the construction period (the meeting was informed that this problem has been identified and is being addressed)
- the site is of archaeological interest in that the fields are identifiably those of a medieval strip field system: the 22,000+ holes dug and driven to take poles support the structure and the security fence together with the trenches necessary to carry the wires will cause irredeemable disturbance
- the site is presently used for growing crops: there must be brown field sites where such a development would not have such an impact
- the land is classified in agricultural terms as 3b: it was suggested that, in the light of predictions of world shortages of food, these particular fields should continue to be used for their present purpose
- no mention is made of any compensation for adjoining properties, the value of which will undoubtedly fall if the application is successful
- it is perhaps ironic that, in order to avoid the effects of climate change, the panels themselves are being shipped from America.

A number of points not directly related to the application were raised, including the fact that Sun-Power had not (as had been promised) circulated local people with information concerning their two public presentations. It was also noted that individual members of Transition Constantine, who are in very much favour of a small community-owned renewable energy project, were against the development of this very large power station.

At the conclusion of speeches from the floor the Chairman asked for a show of hands for those in favour and those against the development. Eight hands were raised in favour: the overwhelming majority of those residents present were against.

The Chairman declared the meeting closed at 9.00pm.

Agreed for accuracy at the Ordinary Parish Council Meeting on February 17, 2011

Chairman.....