



REDGRAVE PARISH COUNCIL

Clerk: Alison Spouncer
E: clerk@redgrave-pc.gov.uk
P: 01379 890613

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MINUTES OF THE EXTRAORDINARY MEETING OF THE PARISH COUNCIL

held at 7.00pm on 21st March 2024 at the All Saints Church, Redgrave.

Present: Chair Cllr Andy Warnes, Cllrs Ann Preston, Frank Gillett, John Giddings and Brian Andrews, Alison Spouncer (Clerk). There were 30+ members of the public. Fiona Wilson and George Seinet (Gressingham Foods Ltd), Andrew Fillmore and Jon Westwood (Centrica Plc)

- 1. Chairman's Welcome and Introduction.** A welcome was extended to all to the meeting by Chair, Cllr Andy Warnes.
- 2. Apologies** Cllr Elaine Brown. **Declarations of Interest** – None. **Delegated Declaration of Interest Dispensation decisions or dispensation requests where required** – None.

3. Public Forum

The Chairman to invite members of the public to indicate if they wish to speak at this meeting, either on an item on the agenda or a general matter.

There were no comments to be made on general matters.

4. Gressingham Foods Ltd and Centrica Plc presentation of a Proposed 17-acre Solar Farm.

Cllr Warnes introduced the meeting subject matter, outlining considerations such as the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) which encourages renewable energy but with requirements to meet. Babergh and Mid Suffolk Council's policies are found within the Joint Local Plan (JLP) Part 1 approved in November 2023 including its support for "community-led" initiatives. It was noted the proposed solar farm for Gressingham Foods Ltd will serve the factory's energy requirements only. The JLP diagram (link available on the website) presented showing the proposals being within the Little Ouse and Waveney area. Whilst a "view" is not a given and the loss of one is irrelevant in planning terms, there are specific elements that can be referenced including integration into a sensitive area. Finally, Cllr Warnes referenced the Neighbourhood Plan identification of protected landscapes – one being the view to Hinderclay Church which is adjacent to the proposed solar farm.

Cllr Warnes handed the presentation to Andrew Fillmore of Centrica Plc to provide the proposed plans. Mr Fillmore highlighted the two areas of proposal on the 17-acre field owned by Gressingham Foods Ltd; 1. Roofs of buildings of the factory will have solar panels placed to the maximum level possible; 2. 3.5MW of power will be generated by the proposed 17-acre solar farm. After 25 years, the site will be returned to its original state. The proposed height of the panels will be 3 metres with wildflower planting around the perimeter along with hedging and trees. Adjacent to the 17-acre are two Public Right of Ways. It is proposed that these will be joined by an additional Public Right of Way running along the perimeter of the site. The height of the hedgerow is proposed as 4 metres for residents' consideration. There will be 2

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transformers on site. Noise monitoring has been carried out and Centrica Plc confirmed there will be no additional noise level due to the transformers. It was also assured there would be no lighting or security cameras across the site.

Traffic and transport considerations include utilising the north and south routes (B1113 from South Lopham and the A143 onto the B1113). There will be four points of access for construction. Centrica Plc stated there will be a maximum of 22 HGVs in total for 4-6 months during construction alongside the contractors' vehicles. There would be no huge increase in HGV transport, once operational it is expected 1 vehicle/per month.

The residents present were invited to ask questions on the presentation (attached for reference). One major question was that of the noise level. Several residents were very concerned about the increased noise alongside the current noise of the factory. The level of background noise result was not available but will be in the public domain within the planning application. There was concern that the seasonal increase in noise that is currently experienced from the factory would become even more of an issue – this was denied by Centrica Plc, stating there would be no increase in noise. It was asked about the noise levels at the weekends and night. The solar panels would only work whilst the sun is shining, originally suggesting there would be no additional noise on a Sunday it was confirmed there would be no additional noise on non-sunny days.

Residents asked what the real purpose of the development was – with a question over the extent to which it would help the environment with the 17-acre site only covering 25-30% of the factory's energy requirements.

Physical details of the site were discussed. Each panel would be 3 metres high, with a 1.9m deer fence around the perimeter alongside hedging and some positioned trees. Within the site there will also be transformers and inverters, logistically these cannot be soundproofed. Wildflower meadow seeds would be sown around the site. It was assured the front of the site would be screened by hedging but there was an inability to confirm what height and type the hedging would be from the outset, alongside who would maintain it. There was also concern about glare suggested – Centrica Plc stated there will be a “glare assessment” available.

The position of the site was questioned. Other suggestions such as to the back of the factory where there are currently empty sheds and brownfield areas. Gressingham Foods Ltd suggested this would not be feasible due to the JLP. The field is not constrained by anything. Another suggestion of car park panelling, such as Stowmarket Leisure Centre, was suggested but this was discounted by Centrica Plc.

The logistics of the panels and if there was the possibility of recycling those panels should there be any issues before the end of the project. There are currently no mechanisms for recycling solar panels and each panel will have a 25-year guarantee so there should be no failure rates.

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The financial element of the plan was questioned. Given the provision would be 25-30% of energy needed. Cllr Warnes suggested there would have been an investment assessment carried out and there would be costs/benefits to Gressingham Foods Ltd which could not be disclosed.

A question arose regarding the original planning application in 2015 for solar panels which was rejected due to landscape degeneration among other reasons. Gressingham Foods Ltd confirmed this was a different site.

The hours of work were questioned; a 60mph limit in a residential street with frequent accidents and near misses, it was asked what assurance there would be for no increase in nuisance and potential effect on house prices. It was assured by Centrica Plc that there would be controls via the planning consent for working, suggesting 8 am – 6 pm (weekdays), 8 am – 1 pm (Saturdays) with prices not expected to not be a material consideration.

An increase in traffic was a real concern for residents given the current amount of HGVs, buses, and cars there was a request to seek assurance this would not become even more of an issue.

Centrica Plc was asked for any example sites that could be provided for those interested to be able to look at the completed projects. Centrica Plc confirmed they would provide some site details for information.

Material change to the current field status was discussed. Currently, a green field, suggesting post 25 years of being a solar farm it would effectively be a brownfield site also effectively extending the village by connecting the village properties to the factory which would potentially substantiate the call for more development. Centrica Plc/Gressingham Foods Ltd stated that the field's status would not be changed and there was no hidden agenda for development.

The question over the vicinity of Hinderclay and Redgrave and Lopham Fen was a concern, but Centrica Plc wished to allay any fears there may be on the effect it would have on both sites.

Centrica Plc asked for further comments and questions to be sent directly to the Parish Council via the Clerk (clerk@redgrave-pc.gov.uk) or a Councillor. Centrica Plc would then reflect on these points before submitting the application. It was asked that all communications be put to Centrica Plc in the coming week for consideration.

The Chairman closed the meeting at 8.15 pm

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