

RETTENDON PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the Council held remotely on Thursday 22nd April 2021.

Councillors attended the meeting through digital link.

Present: Cllr Mark Fleming (Chairman)
Cllr Sandie Cottee
Cllr Hazel Dale Evans
Cllr Denise Fleming
Cllr Roy Hart
Cllr James Knight
Cllr David Phillips
Cllr Ray Ride
Cllr Barbara Wright

There were two members of the public in attendance.

206-20/21 To Receive Apologies and to approve Reasons for Absence

There were no apologies to receive.

207-20/21 Declarations of Interest on Items on the Agenda

Cllr Ride declared a non-pecuniary interest in Item 215-20/21 as trustee of the Bell Fields charity.

Cllr Wright declared an interest in anything to do with the Rettendon and Battlesbridge newsletter.

The Chairman said the Council would observe a minute's silence to acknowledge the death of His Royal Highness The Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh.

208-20/21 Public Forum – strictly 5 minutes only per speaker

There were no comments.

209-20/21 Minutes

To agree the minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 30th March 2021 as a true record for signature by the Chairman at a later date

Cllr Dale Evans said she had concerns that the minutes were not correct as they omitted information that she thought should have been included.

Cllr Cottee referred to correspondence between herself and the Clerk regarding a requested amendment to the minutes.

Signed _____
Councillor M. Fleming, Chairman

The Chairman said it would be appropriate to add this issue to a future amendment so that Cllr Cottee's view could be minuted.

The minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 30th March 2021 were **agreed** as a true record for signature by the Chairman at a later date.

210-20/21 To receive the Essex County Councillor and Ward Councillors' reports.

There were no comments.

211-20/21 To receive reports from the following:

a) Village Hall Committee representative

Cllr Cottee said the tree had been inspected. She said a meeting would be held on 26 April 2021 and hopefully more information would follow.

b) Parish Survey Working Group

Cllr Phillips said information had been sent to other members of the Working Group and he had no further update for the Council at this time.

c) Bus Shelter Working Group

Cllr Cottee said there was no further update.

d) S-Type Security Working Group

Cllr Phillips said patrols continued and that there was a possibility of free extra cover for the parish as S-Type provided cover for South Hanningfield on a trial basis. He said S-Type would be travelling through the parish more often and would be likely to be able to keep an eye on the main routes at least.

e) Sonters Down Play Area Working Group

Cllr Phillips said there was nothing to report.

212-20/21 Finance

To agree to authorise invoices for payment, receive copy Bank statements and details of expenditure to date.

Invoices were authorised for payment as listed below:

Mrs K. Kane	April salary	£730.96
Mrs K. Kane	Mileage – April	£31.50
EALC	Annual subscription	£508.99
RetBatNews	Newsletter article	£25.00

Signed _____
Councillor M. Fleming, Chairman

S-Type Security	Security Patrols	£420.00
Cllr Knight	Expenses – Survey boxes	£19.99
Cllr M Fleming	Expenses – Zoom	£211.16
Stanley Tee LLP	Legal Fees	£7200.00

Cllr Dale Evans requested a recorded vote. Councillors voted as follows:

Cllr M Fleming voted “For” for all payments listed.

Cllr Ride voted “For” for all payments listed.

Cllr Phillips voted “For” for all payments listed.

Cllr Knight voted “For” for all payments listed.

Cllr D Fleming voted “For” for all payments listed.

Cllr Cottee abstained from voting on the payment to Tees, and voted “For” for all other payments.

Cllr Wright abstained from voting on the payments to Tees and the Rettendon & Battlesbridge newsletter, and voted “For” for all other payments.

Cllr Dale Evans voted “Against” the payment to Tees, and voted “For” for all other payments.

Cllr Hart voted “Against” the payment to Tees, and voted “For” for all other payments.

213-20/21 To agree the response to planning applications notified to the Parish Council as statutory consultee

The draft comments from East Hanningfield Parish Council on the Sandon Brook solar farm application had been circulated prior to the meeting.

21/00555/FUL - Land West Of Hill Farm Pan Lane East Hanningfield Chelmsford Essex - Installation of a solar photovoltaic (PV) park generating up to 41.8 MW of electricity to the land West of Hill Farm Pan Lane, comprising of ground-mounted photovoltaic solar arrays, battery-based electricity storage containers, together with inverters/transformer stations, Distribution Network Operator (DNO) Substation, customer substation/switchgear and meter kiosk, internal buried cabling and grid connection cables, internal access tracks, security fencing and gates and CCTV cameras, upgraded existing site access, other ancillary infrastructure, landscaping and biodiversity enhancements.

It was **agreed** to object to this application as follows:

Signed _____
Councillor M. Fleming, Chairman

The Parish Council strongly objects to the Planning Application due to the impact on the landscape and its residents.

This application is one of three large solar farms which have applied for planning application in our Parish. The others are 21/00502/FUL Canon Barns Road and 21/00394/FUL Sandon Brook.

Whilst it is recognised that each application must be considered separately the Supplementary Planning Document presented to Chelmsford Council Planning Board on March 4, 021 currently awaiting public comments and subsequent approval clearly recognised that nearby solar farms could have a cumulative impact and should be taken into consideration.

Chelmsford City Local Plan

The Application is contrary to several objectives and principles in the Chelmsford City Local Plan. In particular it is:

Contrary to the Chelmsford Local Plan Strategic Priority 3.33 to *“Respect the character and appearance of landscapes”*

Contrary to Strategic Policy S1 Spatial Principles 4.14 *“The existing settlement patterns should be respected so development does not sprawl into nearby settlements undermining their distinct and separate identities.”*

The solar farms are essentially urban/industrial in appearance and character. The villages of East, South and West Hanningfield and Rettendon are small rural settlements separated by a largely agricultural landscape. Individually each of the three proposed solar farms in this area significantly reduce the gaps between the individual villages. The three combined have a compounding affect and remove 20% of the agricultural area between the four villages.

Contrary to Strategic Policy S4 Conserving and Enhancing the Natural Environment

The council have committed to take a precautionary approach. Damaging food production and the landscape which has evolved over centuries when there are proven alternatives is not a precautionary action.

Contrary to Strategic Policy S11, The Role of the Countryside.

The Sandon Brook solar farm is in the Green Belt and it has not been demonstrated that there are no alternative sites outside the Green Belt.

The NPPF requires that solar farms in the Green Belt need to demonstrate very special circumstances.

Contrary to policy DM19 “Renewable and Low Carbon Energy”

Specifically that planning permission will only be granted if it:-

iv. does not have a unacceptable visual impact which would be harmful to the character of the area.

No mitigation actions can be taken to totally hide the alien nature of the large mechanical constructions in a rural landscape.

Visual Impact

The Sandon Brook site and the proposed Hill Farm Solar Farm site are in fact on two farms only separated by 200 metres along Church Road. This will significantly reduce the rural separation between East and West Hanningfield.

The two solar farms are only separated by 300 metres along the Southend Road and the Canon Barns Road Solar farm is then immediately adjacent. This will result in an almost continuous one kilometre stretch of solar panels along this key north south corridor.

Agriculture

Although Grade 3b land it is intensively farmed and productive. The NPPG recommends that one consideration regarding solar farms should be whether land is being used effectively and applications should be focussed on non agricultural land.

This proposal will reduce food production and the associated carbon capture of the growing crops.

21/00502/FUL - Land East Of A130 South Of Canon Barns Road East Hanningfield Chelmsford Essex - Installation of a solar photovoltaic (PV) park generating up to 8 MW of electricity, comprising of ground-mounted photovoltaic solar arrays, substation, internal access tracks, transformers/inverters, fencing and gates, CCTV cameras, temporary construction compound, underground cable and connection to end user and other ancillary infrastructure, landscaping and biodiversity enhancements.

It was **agreed** to object to this application as follows:

The Parish Council strongly objects to the Planning Application due to the impact on the landscape and its residents.

This application is one of three large solar farms which have applied for planning application in our Parish. The others are 21/00555/FUL Hill Farm and 21/00394/FUL Sandon Brook.

Whilst it is recognised that each application must be considered separately the Supplementary Planning Document presented to Chelmsford Council Planning Board on March 4, 021 currently awaiting public comments and subsequent approval clearly recognised that nearby solar farms could have a cumulative impact and should be taken into consideration.

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Contrary to Strategic Policy S1 Spatial Principles 4.14 "The existing settlement patterns should be respected so development does not sprawl into nearby settlements undermining their distinct and separate identities."

The solar farms are essentially urban/industrial in appearance and character. The villages of East, South and West Hanningfield and Rettendon are small rural settlements separated by a largely agricultural landscape. Individually each of the three proposed solar farms in this area significantly reduce the gaps between the individual villages. The three combined have a compounding affect and remove 20% of the agricultural area between the four villages.

Contrary to Strategic Policy S4 Conserving and Enhancing the Natural Environment

The council have committed to take a precautionary approach. Damaging food production and the landscape which has evolved over centuries when there are proven alternatives is not a precautionary action.

Contrary to Strategic Policy S11, The Role of the Countryside.

The Canon Barns solar farm is in the Green Belt and it has not been demonstrated that there are no alternative sites outside the Green Belt.

The NPPF requires that solar farms in the Green Belt need to demonstrate very special circumstances.

Contrary to policy DM19 "Renewable and Low Carbon Energy"

Specifically that planning permission will only be granted if it:-

iv. does not have a unacceptable visual impact which would be harmful to the character of the area.

No mitigation actions can be taken to totally hide the alien nature of the large mechanical constructions in a rural landscape.

Visual Impact of the three sites

The Sandon Brook site and the proposed Hill Farm Solar Farm site are in fact on two farms only separated by 200 metres along Church Road. This will significantly reduce the rural separation between East and West Hanningfield.

The two solar farms are only separated by 300 metres along the Southend Road and the Canon Barns Road Solar farm is then immediately adjacent. This will result in an almost continuous one kilometre stretch of solar panels along this key north south corridor.

Agriculture

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This proposal will reduce food production and the associated carbon capture of the growing crops.

214-20/21 To consider and possibly agree a response to the Essex County Council Minerals Local Plan 2014 (Draft Proposed Amendments)

It was noted that no response was necessary.

215-20/21 To agree to instruct Rettendon Parish Council Clerk to take steps to rectify the unauthorised transfer from the Council of the freehold title to the Bell Fields.

The Chairman said it was proposed that the Clerk write to the Land Registry and the Charity Commission regarding the transfer of title to the Official Custodian without the authority of the freeholder.

Following a comment from Cllr Hart, a point of order was raised by Cllr Phillips against Cllr Hart.

The Chairman referred to Standing Order 2 regarding Disorderly Conduct at Meetings.

The Chairman moved that Cllr Hart be removed from the meeting.

It was **agreed** that Cllr Hart should be excluded from the meeting.

Cllr Hart left the meeting.

It was **agreed** to instruct Rettendon Parish Council Clerk to take steps to rectify the unauthorised transfer from the Council of the freehold title to the Bell Fields.

Cllr Dale Evans requested a recorded vote.

Cllrs D Fleming, M Fleming, Knight, Phillips and Ride voted in favour of the motion.

Cllr Dale Evans voted against the motion.

Cllrs Cottee and Wright abstained from voting.

216-20/21 Reports from Councillors on Council activities since the last meeting

Cllr Cottee said the street cleaning provided by Chelmsford City Council had been due to take place that day. She said she would check that it had been done.

Cllr Phillips said he was looking at potential plans for work on the Bell Fields pavilion.

Cllr Dale Evans said she had been dealing with correspondence, cleaning and litter-picking in the parish, including the Village Hall car park.

217-20/21 Date of the next Parish Council Meeting: To be confirmed.

It was **agreed** that the Annual Meeting of the Council would be held online on Tuesday 4th May 2021 at 7.30pm.