

Note of the meeting of Staveley Solar Farm Community Liaison Group held on Thursday 19th September 2024 in Wing Village Hall

In attendance:

Cllr Andrew Johnson	Rutland County Council
Andy Lawrence	Wing Parish Council
Stephen Howe	South Luffenham Parish Council
Ruth Blinch	Manton Parish Council
Doug Reid	Staveley Solar Action Group
Jayne Williams	Pilton Parish Meeting
Bob Purves	North Luffenham Parish Council
Kevin Atkinson	Morcott Parish Council
Eric Montmean	TotalEnergies
Thierry Chevrot	TotalEnergies
Rhonda Miller	TotalEnergies
Philip Reilly	Anglian Water

Apologies received from Cllr Giles Clifton and Mitchell Ward.

Welcome and Introductions

Rhonda explained that the website and been revamped (www.staveleysolarfarm.co.uk) and that all comments made using the site contact us page will now come directly to Eric and Rhonda.

She also apologised for the delay in getting the note of the last meeting distributed.

Eric updated the group to explain that Bluestone were involved to get us to the planning submission but were no longer needed and would not be part of the project going forward.

Debrief following pull out tests and update on site access route

Thierry explained that the pull out test results were very positive – the soil is soft enough to drill into which means construction will be faster to complete.

Eric thanked Jayne and Doug for attending the site visit and spoke about a question posed by them regarding glint and glare and whether the undulations of the site had been taken into consideration. It was explained that these have all been mitigated for and that the most likely area to be affected would be Morcott.

Thierry explained that there would be 25 panels per tracker, each of 40-50kg and that is why pilings are necessary.

It was also noted that if there are any problems with noise these will have to be mitigated. Thierry is happy to put in writing that TotalEnergies commit to take care of any issues regarding noise. Thierry explained that the pilings work will be very noisy in certain areas, but we will work quickly with many machines and we will discuss with local residents to decide the best times to carry out works.

Cllr Johnson pointed out that what is acceptable to one person may be unbearable to another and requested information on the maximum decibel reading likely to occur.

It was explained that there will be 12,774 pilings, and around 220 will be installed daily. Jayne commented that the noise could cause problems for people who are home all day or working from home and this was agreed by all.

The piling work is likely to take 4 months. It was recognised that wind direction could affect noise and the prevailing wind in the area is westerly.

Ruth asked if artificial lighting will be used during installation and it was explained that these would only be used very locally, attached to the machines. Thierry explained that they do not like to work in the dark for health and safety reasons.

Should planning permission be granted, piling work is likely to start in March at the earliest.

Action: TotalEnergies to provide information on likely maximum decibel readings and to undertake to discuss with local communities regarding appropriate timings for work to be carried out.

TotalEnergies to share detailed timescale and schedule.

There are very real concerns about the transport route proposed. A discussion was held around the various pinch points and concerns. The community of Morcott wanted it noted that they are really worried about this.

Thierry agreed to look at a possible alternative of creating a lay by and temporary road through a neighbouring field. He will report back to the CLG when he has done this.

He explained that throughout the construction phase there would be a total of 200 lorries with a maximum of 4-5 lorries per day at peak times.

It was pointed out that adequate signage would be needed, including banksmen. Thierry agreed that they would look into what can be done. Eric stated that he would contact the landowner.

Action: it was agreed that the logistics contractor should attend a future meeting of the CLG.

Construction Update

TotalEnergies were asked if this is the first solar farm they have built in the UK. Thierry answered that yes this is the first such development in the UK but we have constructed many solar farms across the world.

He also pointed out that reputation is key to us as a company and Eric stated that although he understands that people will be sceptical, our commitment to the local communities is there.

Thierry will be on site regularly and there will be a complaints hotline and full grievance procedure in place. The CLG will continue.

Update on Planning Application

Eric explained that the outstanding comment from Landscape has been submitted, but they are still waiting on the conservation report. This is being done in house by Rutland County Council and is expected in early October. The Case Officer is working on the report.

A question was asked about how many inverters there will be and TE could confirm that there would be 8. These will be in air conditioned boxes.

Site visits from the CLG will be carried out throughout the construction. In response to a question Thierry confirmed that there will be 91,854 solar panels.

There was a discussion about a likely date for Committee, but this is at the discretion of the Case Officer. Cllr Johnson explained that there is a backlog within planning and they won't wish to submit until they are sure the application is complete. The next planning meeting is the 22nd October, but a 2-3 week lead in time is required after completion of the report.

There was a discussion about grid capacity versus maximum output and would it be possible to give any remaining capacity to locals. It was explained that TE has no control of the grid and to share power with local communities would require a micro grid, which was not feasible.

There was a discussion on the planning committee and who would be allowed to speak. Cllr Johnson stated that as Ward Councillor he would have a slot to speak and would sit in on the committee. Other than this it would be dependent on the committee's protocol how many speakers would be allowed.

Discussion on Community Benefit Fund

Rhonda explained that the intention now was to commence the disbursement of the CBF once construction starts. It was agreed that this made sense. Eric confirmed that it would be CPI Indexed. Members of the CLG asked if the overall amount would be reconsidered. They also reiterated that Morcott and Pilton will be the most affected.

Action: Rhonda to prepare a short report on what a Community Interest Company would look like.

AOB and Date of next meeting.

The next meeting will be held at 7pm on Thursday 7th November at Wing Village Hall. Thierry gave his apologies in advance.