

Minutes of the extraordinary meeting of the Watton-at-Stone Parish Council held in the Community Hall on Wednesday 10th August 2011

Present: Mr. Michael Smith (Chairman) Mrs. Christine Dinnin
Mrs. Helen McCash Mr. John Meischke
Mr. Nigel Poulton Mr. David Stock
Ms. Emma Waltham The Clerk (Mrs. Jane Allsop)

Public: Approximately 40 – 50 present

1 Apologies for absence and leave of absence

Apologies for absence from Mr. Denis Filer, Mr. Iain Harris and Mr. Ian Knight.

2 Public Participation

This item to be taken under item 5 a – Planning applications.

3 Declaration of Interests

None.

4 Chairman's/Clerk's Report

None.

5 Planning

a) Applications

Land East of Walkern Road and North and, West of High Elms Lane, Benington (3/11/1190/FP)

Erection of a single wind turbine of up to 86.5m in height, substation, access tracks and ancillary infrastructure

Mr. Smith welcomed members of the public to the meeting. He said that the purpose of the meeting is so that Parish Councillors can agree a response to East Herts Council planning department on the application for one single wind turbine, having taken into account public opinion.

The East Herts Council's planning department in 2008 rejected a previous application for three wind turbines (each 119 metres tall) and in 2009 the Planning Inspectorate rejected an appeal made by the applicant.

Mr. Smith said that the Parish Council has not invited any representatives from either the Benington Wind Turbine application or Stop Benington Wind Farm to talk about the application tonight. However, he invited residents in the parish of Watton-at-Stone (which includes Whempstead residents) to talk.

Prior to the meeting Parish Councillors carried out a straw poll of 246 people in Watton-at-Stone and more than 70% were opposed to the application.

Ms. Waltham said that the results of her straw poll showed that in Great Innings 14 out of 20 residents were in favour of the application, 3 were against and 3 were indifferent. She said that when the Parish Council voted on this issue she felt she should support the application, unless the majority of Parish Councillors voted against, however she would support her fellow Parish Councillors decision.

Mr. Smith then invited residents to debate the application. Some of the points and concerns raised were as follows.

- The previous wind farm application was rejected for good reasons and these reasons still apply although the number of turbines has been reduced from three 119 metre turbines to one 86.5 metre turbine.
- Opposition to the change of use of the land, with the fear of an industrial site adjacent to green belt land.
- If permission is granted for this wind turbine, it would open the flood gates to other farmers and land owners applying for wind turbines on their land. Mr. Smith said that there are some restrictions, one of which is that any applicant would need to own 200 acres of land around the wind turbine.
- The traffic movement through Watton-at-Stone would disturb residents and local businesses and cause possible damage in the area. Mr. Poulton said that the route through the village will no-longer take the wind turbine sections down High Elms Land but will be going down to White Hall instead.

- The welfare of the Walkern Road bridge over the River Beane taking such heavy loads. Mr. Smith said that this bridge has been strengthened in recent years, to meet current regulations, and is used regularly by large agricultural vehicles.
- There would be approximately 40 lorry loads of concrete required to build the wind turbine foundations. These lorry movements don't necessarily need to come through Watton-at-Stone. In the environmental statement attached to the application it states that 860 lorry movements will be required to and from the site. Of these, 424 will be for providing the access track to the site.
- The safety of villagers and those using the Walkern Road during this large traffic movement. Mr. Smith assured members of the public that Hertfordshire Highways would be addressing all issues concerning traffic moment.
- The close proximity of the wind turbine to an adjacent bridleway and the affects it will have on horses and their riders using this route.
- Gregorys Farm is the closest building to the wind turbine and will be most affected by this application. Keith Luetchford (Gregorys Farm) said he had put in a lot of hard work into opposing the previous application for three wind turbines and said that a single turbine will have the same detrimental visual affect on this listed farmhouse building as the three turbines would have done.
- The energy required by the Bott's family businesses do not require such a large wind turbine and a smaller one sited adjacent to their farm would be more in keeping.

Mr. Smith asked those present at the meeting to give a show of hands in favour of the application, there were none. He then asked those present for a show of hands against the application and there was 100% in favour of rejecting the application.

Mr. Poulton proposed that the Parish Council write to East Herts Council planning department strongly objecting to the wind turbine application for the following reasons.

'This large industrial man made structure of up to 86.5 metres in height will dominate the sky line and will be out of proportion to the natural surrounding landscape.

The visual impact of this structure will be harmful to the natural, historic part of the Beane Valley.

Watton at Stone is a rural village with approx 1721 on the electoral role and is mentioned in the Domesday Book. The village has many historic buildings including Gregory's Farm, a late medieval farmhouse remodelled in the 17th century; this building will be dwarfed by this structure and will have a negative effect on this listed building.

Councillors have carried out a "straw poll" of 246 residents, of which 70% were against this proposed development with 16% for and 14% undecided.

The Parish Council held an extraordinary Parish Council meeting on Wednesday 10th August were 100% of residents present asked Councillors to vote against this scheme.

Parish Councillors ask that this application be rejected as per the previous application.'

Mr. Stock seconded the motion and all Parish Councillors were in favour.

The clerk to write to East Herts Council accordingly.

Action: J. Allsop

Mr. Smith urged members of the public to e-mail or write to East Herts Council (and copy District Councillors Nigel Poulton and Ken Crofton) with their views on this application. All e-mails and letters need to include the planning application number 3/11/1190/FP.

- **The meeting closed at 2012.**
- **The date for the next Parish Council meeting is Tuesday 20th September 2011.**