

NORTH TAWTON TOWN COUNCIL

Town Clerk:
Mrs R Rice

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Minutes of the Extraordinary Meeting of North Tawton Town Council held at the **Town Hall** on **Thursday 30th October 2014** at **7.30 pm**.

Present:	Cllr S Blood	Cllr Dr P Brickley
	Cllr Mrs C Burrow	Cllr K Hodge
	Cllr Mrs G Hoggins (Chair)	Cllr I MacLeod
	Cllr Mrs A Ponsford	Cllr Mrs D Rice
	Cllr S Whiteley	

Approximately 150 members of the public were present.

Mr C Young, Kinetica, Mrs J Perkins, Kinetica and Dr Philip Bratby, CPRE Devon were present.

The Chairman welcomed Mr C Young and Mr J Perkins from Kinetica and Dr P Bratby from the CPRE. The Chairman also welcomed everyone else in attendance.

A short presentation was made by Mr Young and Mr Perkins. Kinetica have built solar parks in South Wales, Barrow-in-Furness and have a number of projects in the planning stages. Early in 2013 Kinetica started discussions with West Devon Borough Council and Arla, who would benefit receiving cheaper electricity through the grid connection process. Community Consultations were held and local people voted in favour of the scheme both times. Meetings have been held with WDBC Planners and DCC Archaeologist. Mr Perkins showed the site on the map, stating that 23mw of electrical would go into the local electricity networks. 17 acres of woodland and screening was to be provided. Wild flowers, butterflies, birds would benefit from the planting of 1 mile of hedgerow, which will help with nesting birds. Support has been obtained from the RSPB, Natural England and Butterfly Conservation. The site can be used for educational, as it includes a trail on the north eastern side of the site, which will be an extension to the Public Right of Way, information boards on the history and ecology of the site. A community shelters which can be used by schools for outdoor lessons is also included

Mr Young stated that following the first public exhibition the application had changed, following feedback from the planning officers and County Archaeologist, and cuts in funding. 40% of oil is imported, blackouts are inevitable, we must utilise resources that are available.

Grade II arable land can be used for animals to graze under the solar panels.

Looking at the site plan, the archaeological sites have been identified; Roman features have been left out of the development site. Woodland walks, additional screening will be beneficial for all people in the area. Planting is planned to screen the site, the land will still be used for farming, and it is diversification of the site.

Mr Perkins appreciated that the visual impact of the development was of most concern to residents. The concern of impact upon the Dartmoor National Park, which is several kilometres away, would only be that the land would appear a different colour.

Mr Young and Mr Perkins thanked the Chairman for allowing them to address the meeting.

The Chairman asked members of the public if they had any questions.

Mrs S Knott stated that according to the Solar Trade Association there are 10 commitments concerning solar farms. No 1 being to focus on non-agricultural land or land which is of a lower agricultural quality.

Mr Young responded by saying that this does not fit into this category, and there is not stepping around that, the land is located next to the creamery, which is not a very attractive site for the area, and they are looking to build to screen it, and whilst it is good agricultural land in 30 years' time it will be reinstated to agricultural land.

Mrs S Knott asked if Kinetica had looked at brownfield sites.

Mr Young stated that they did consider lots of things, but with the substation being close this site was considered more suitable.

Mr Smith asked – Kinetica have stated the installed capacity to be 22 or 23 MW, which is the average output of the solar farm.

Mr Young stated 18 MW of power, 11 – 16% efficient, everything has its losses.

Mr Smith queries figures quoted in the Design and Assessment statement.

Penny Mills asked – what would you say to the people that are in fuel poverty, whether they live in North Tawton or Plymouth, because they are paying on bills for subsidies paid.

Mr Young stated that they get a certain amount of funding from the Government; however what needs to be considered is the fact of the amount of imports of fuel, we are reliant upon everything, so all it takes is a volatile market abroad and the fuel cost will go up anyway.

Mrs C Hughes asked – in Kinetica's 2013 brochure, centre fold, it states there would be an educational centre, toilets and car parking, but now in 2014 there is an outdoor centre, no toilets, no car parking, no drop off points and no running water.

Mrs C Hughes also asked – the Town Council have recorded Part II meetings taking place regarding community funding, these have come to nothing, she hopes that the Town Council will hear back from you, this is sorely lacking, and she feels very nervous for the town.

Mr Young stated that the project funding had changed, there would be 1 hour long walks within the site, and no toilet provisions have been made, the public footpaths is to be used for drop off point. A meeting is to be arranged regarding Section 106 funding.

Mrs Hughes stated, with respect, a decision on the recommendation to be submitted to WDBC is going to be made tonight.

Unknown stated that he arranged school visits in Devon, Cornwall and Somerset to historical buildings and sites. It is a requirement that toilets provision is made together with running water and safe drop off point. Schools will not be satisfied with what is being proposed here.

Mr Young stated that the education shelter was as if you were walking in the park.

Unknown asked if there are no subsidies from the Government would you still be able to build this Eco Park.

Mr Young stated no.

Ms A Pointer asked a question about the footpaths.

Mr Young stated that they would be adding 7 ha of woodland, 1 mile of hedges and wild flowers.

Mr A Yental asked – in the Western Morning News it states that the output from the Eco Park would be 22 mw.

Mr Young said that the Western Morning News had misquoted the figures. Mr Young stated that if the National Grid gets overloaded, they can manage by turning off systems; this was not going to be an issue. Other systems run in the background, even when it is cloudy the system will work, thereby reducing CO2.

Mr Mares asked about Kinetica's calculations. 23 MW of power can power 20,000 homes.

Mr Young stated again the Western Morning News had misquoted the figures. The correct figure is 6,000 homes. 1MW of power can power 164 average homes.

Mr R Knott stated that this land is the best arable land in the whole of West Devon, producing wheat 4,000 – 3,000 tons of wheat. With the population rising how can you justify this? How will you protect the trees against the sheep?

Mr Young stated that the sheep would graze under the panels. He stated that in 30 years' time the land will improve.

Mr Knott said what is wrong with it now.

The Chairman thanked Mr Young and Mr Perkins

Dr Philip Bratby, CPRE Devon, gave a short presentation.

This Eco Park, it is not, it is a power station. 140 acres it is the biggest in Devon. You cannot hide it, it will be visible from a wide area, and it will look horrendous from north, south, east and west.

Is there a need for this scheme?

The government target will be met by what has already been approved. When the sun shines we do not need so much power. There is no need for this.

21/2 MW average output per year.

There is no evidence that it will reduce carbon dioxide. Overall it will not reduce CO2.

It will have to be financial complete by 1st April 2015. Subsidy for 20 years, this subsidy will be 26 million pounds and over, this money comes from electricity payers. The land owners will be almost 3 million pounds. All of this money for a woodland trail for the community.

There will be 88,159 panels on the site; this amount of panels is unimaginable. The panels are Chinese made, measuring 38 "x 64", they weigh 20 kg each. That is 1760 tones, coming from China. There will be metal frames, mounted on steel piles, several thousand. 2 km of tracks, hard-core, concrete foundations, 3 km of fencing, CCTV cabling, construction vehicles. All unimaginable.

The planning application documents, some planning policies have not been referred to, some sections are missing. Sequential treatment, how the site was chosen, it seems the only consideration was it is closest to the grid.

Grazing under the panels, this grass is mostly shed, would require strimming and weed killer to keep under control.

Noise – invert building, there will be a lot of electrical humming and whining.

Finally, the new Environment Secretary, Elizabeth Truss stated "English farmland is some of the best in the world and I want to see it dedicated to growing quality food and crops".

Solar panels are best placed on commercial rooftops.

Questions were asked –

Unknown - A shed with no amenities, how is this going to benefit the community.

Mr T Cassells – the grass under the panels will be very poor quality.

Mr R Knott – Why not put panels on the roof of Arla and other businesses in the town.

Dr. Bratby replied that CPRE are very keen for this to happen.

Mr R Edwards – asked if the CPRE knew of any brownfield sites in the area, a suggestion has been made that Winkleigh Airfield would be a good site.

Dr Bratby said he was not in a position to answer.

Mr R Ash stated that Winkleigh Airfield was not a good option as the power line is fully loaded.

Unknown suggested that the developer could put in their own grid lines for connection if Winkleigh Airfield was used.

Unknown stated that she had concerns about the educational side of the proposal.

Mrs S Knott asked if the solar panels contain toxic chemicals.

It was stated that a solar panel is an electronic device, but it is well sealed.

1. **Apologies for Absence** – Apologies were received from Cllr A Gillespie (work commitments), Cllr Mrs L Watts (annual leave) and Cllr N Morgan (personal reasons).
2. **Declarations of Interest** – Cllr S Whiteley declared an interest and he had written a formal letter of objection to West Devon Borough Council objecting to this application. Cllr S Whiteley could take part in the discussions but could not vote on the matter.
3. **PLANNING MATTER**
To consider the planning application received from West Devon Borough Council and to make a recommendation.

01132/2014

30 year permission for development of a 58 ha 'Eco Park' comprising of a ground mounted solar photovoltaic system (22MW) and associated infrastructure incorporating recreational facilities and an ecologically enhanced landscape.
Land To Rear Of Taw Valley Creamery, North Tawton

The Chairman thanked everyone for their contribution to the debate, and asked Councillors to consider the application and express their views, after which a vote would take place.

The Clerk reported, that to date, 5 letters of objection had been submitted to West Devon and 2 letters of support.

Cllr S Whiteley said his views on this type of development were well documented. 150 acres is too large, the site would contain solar panels for 30 years, for many of us that would be the rest of our lives. Why not use roofs of warehouses in the town. Why not site them in Hyde Park. Again Cllr Whiteley said when we run out of food you cannot eat a solar panel.

Cllr Whiteley left the meeting.

Cllr S Blood asked at the end of the 30 years does decommission include removal of the hedgerows and planting, this is viable farmland; the site is too big with a glorified bus shelter.

Cllr Dr P Brickley stated as part of the Neighbourhood Plan on the 1st July 2014 the group considered this site as part of the Call for Sites and using the criteria set down by WDBC the group considered the site to be too big. The response from the questionnaires was that people were in favour of renewable energy, but not on a large scale. This site has special significance, i.e. Prayer Book Rebellion and a Roman site, there are 40 heritage assets on the site. A focus group meeting on the 6th July 2014 62 people were against this large site and 11 people were in favour. That is 6 – 1 against. The Kinectica survey handed out at their open day, the questions were very vague.

Cllr D P Brickley also stated the proposal should take account the cumulative effect with the Wind Farm at Denbrook, the Cheese Factory and the large turbine on the Winkleigh road. The WDBC Local Plan is very clear; there are 6 strategic objectives that a proposal should comply with. When Kinectica first met the Council they proposed to include a visitor centre, with a manger, which could have been used as a museum, this proposal now has swept all of this away, the community benefit is non-existent.

Cllr Mrs A Ponsford stated everything has already been said, concerned about the lack of any Section 106, the proposal is for 30 years, and the shed would be an ideal place for youths to gather.

Cllr I MacLeod stated early discussion with the Town Council included community benefit. Wind farms pay £5,000 per MW installed. Other schemes have included community benefit with payments for each year for the life of the scheme. Kinectica walked away from offering community benefit and education provision.

Cllr K Hodge stated he could not see any benefit to the people of North Tawton at all.

Cllr Mrs D Rice stated that the proposal was on good agricultural land.

Cllr Mrs C Burrow stated that when Kinectica held their first exhibition she was quite excited with what they were proposing, a visitor centre which could be used for education purposes and a museum, but now these elements have been dropped this. The proposal is too big for the area, there is no benefit to the community and the people do not want it.

The Chairman called for a proposal. Cllr Dr P Brickley proposed to object to the application for the following reasons:

- Impact on the landscape, including fringes of Dartmoor
- Use of Grade 2 agricultural land
- Accumulative effect on North Tawton
- Historic assets on the site and surrounding area
- No evidence of that applicants have searched for brownfield sites in the area
- No community benefit offered with application

National Planning Policy Framework

Paragraph 97 – the cumulative effect of visual impact should be taken into account, and in North Tawton there is the Denbrook Wind Farm and the adjacent Cheese Factory.

Paragraph 98 – even small scale projects contribute to the Government Targets and this is a tacit acceptance that small scale rather than large scale projects are relevant.

WDBC Core Strategy

SO 9 – the LPA needs to sustain an active and working countryside, acknowledging the importance of agriculture, tourism and rural housing, this site does a reverse of this.

SO 15 – there is a need to enhance the high quality landscapes of West Devon; this application damages the quality of the area.

SO 16 – protect and enhance and promote the historic heritage in our towns and villages, this proposal has an adverse effect on the sensitive area of the town,

SO17 – conserving and enhance designated areas, such as SSSI, SAC's both of which involve Dartmoor and the fringes of Dartmoor, this application does not do this.

SO 1 – must try to use previously developed land resources (brown field), where possible, and there is no evidence that the applicants have tried to do this (i.e. the Cheese Factory land or buildings/roofs at Gregorys).

The Government designation for this land is BMV– best and most versatile – in that it can be used for arable and grazing.

Community benefit, which cuts across industry standards in the sense there is no community benefit with this application.

Cllr I MacLeod seconded the proposal

A vote was taken, which was unanimous, it was therefore resolved to object to the application for the above mentioned reasons.

4. Any other business

Nothing was raised.

5. Date of next meeting

The next meeting of the Council shall be 4th November 2014.

The Chairman thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting at 8.50 pm.