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CLIMATE, BIODIVERSITY & PLANNING COMMITTEE MEETING OF THE WITNEY TOWN COUNCIL

Held on Tuesday, 9 January 2024

At 6.04 pm in the Virtual Meeting Room via Zoom

Present:

Councillor G Meadows (Vice-Chair, in the Chair)

Councillors:	R Smith J Aitman O Collins	J Robertshaw S Simpson
Officers:	Adam Clapton Derek Mackenzie Claire Green	Deputy Town Clerk Senior Administrative Officer & Committee Clerk Administration Support - Planning & Stronger Communities
Others:	No members of the public.	

P8 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors D Temple & A Bailey.

P9 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

At this point there were no declarations of interest from Members or officers.

Councillors Smith, Aitman and Collins later declared a personal, non-prejudicial interest in Planning Application 23/03169/LBC as they knew the applicant.

P10 **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

There was no public participation.

P11 **PLANNING APPLICATIONS**

The Committee received and considered a schedule of planning applications from West Oxfordshire District Council.

Due to the personal, non-prejudicial interest declarations from three members the Committee was not Quorate for the hearing of application 23/03169/LBC therefore a “no comment” response was submitted.

Resolved:

That, the comments, as per the attached schedule be forwarded to West Oxfordshire District Council.

P12 **MARKS & SPENCER - MINOR ALTERATION TO PREMISES LICENCE**

The Committee noted the Application for Minor Variation from Marks and Spencer, Unit 5 Marriotts Walk under the Licencing Act 2003.

Given the short statutory timescale for Witney Town Council to respond, by prior agreement of West Oxfordshire District Council, documents were circulated electronically to members of this Committee and this item was added to the meeting agenda with the express permission of the Chair.

Members were in agreement that the proposed changes arose due to the movement of till terminals and as there was no change to the licenced area, they had no objections to the application.

Resolved:

That, a no objection response be forwarded to the licencing team at West Oxfordshire District Council.

P13 **BOTLEY WEST SOLAR FARM - PHASE TWO COMMUNITY CONSULTATION**

Members recommenced their discussions which had started at the meeting of the Climate, Biodiversity & Planning Advisory Committee of 19 December 2023, having agreed at that meeting to defer the submission of a response to the Phase Two Community Consultation.

A Member expressed strong views against the scheme, while the remainder of those present were all in favour of supporting and encouraged the Member to make their own personal submission to the consultation.

Members agreed that the key benefit of the scheme, harnessing a renewable source of energy, would not only be seen by residents of Witney, but also residents outside of the proposed areas of installation as it will feed into the national grid. They also felt that the move towards renewable energy would help mitigate the extreme weather events that were seen from the effect of global warming.

The Committee did however feel that more information was needed in respect of some of the technical information provided, such as the effect of corrosion of mixing metal components, what action was being taken with the grass cut from the sites and also that there was a need to quantify the community contributions being made by the developers.

A Member acknowledged that the Council's support of the scheme would be disappointing to some, but this was a critical time and renewable energy was needed now and this resonated with the Council's declared climate emergency.

Resolved:

1. That, the Committee agreed there was a need to install solar infrastructure at the Botley West site and,
2. That, an updated response be submitted to the consultation (appended to minutes)

The meeting closed at: 7.20 pm

Chair

Witney Town Council

Planning Minutes - 9th January 2024

011 24/01/ 24

011- 1 WTC/001/24 Plot Ref :- 23/02786/HHD Type :- HOUSEHOLDE
 Applicant Name :- . Date Received :- 02/01/24
 Location :- 9E WEST END Date Returned :- 10/01/24
 WEST END
 Proposal : Erection of replacement fencing to top of existing wall (Retrospective).
 Observations : Witney Town Council has no objections regarding this application.

011- 2 WTC/002/24 Plot Ref :- 23/02787/LBC Type :- LISTED BUI
 Applicant Name :- . Date Received :- 02/01/24
 Location :- 9E WEST END Date Returned :- 10/01/24
 WEST END
 Proposal : External alterations to include erection of replacement fencing to top of existing
 wall
 (Retrospective)
 Observations : Witney Town Council has no objections regarding this application.

011- 3 WTC/003/24 Plot Ref :- 23/03169/LBC Type :- LISTED BUI
 Applicant Name :- . Date Received :- 02/01/24
 Location :- 35 - 37 WOODGREEN Date Returned :- 10/01/24
 WOODGREEN
 Proposal : Replacement rear guttering along the roof
 Observations : Witney Town Council make no comments on this application.

011- 4 WTC/004/24 Plot Ref :- 23/03252/HHD Type :- HOUSEHOLDE
 Applicant Name :- . Date Received :- 02/01/24
 Location :- 34 SCHOFIELD AVENUE Date Returned :- 10/01/24
 SCHOFIELD AVENUE
 Proposal : Erection of a rear single storey extension.
 Observations : While Witney Town Council does not object to this application in terms of
 material concerns, it notes the loss of permeable drainage and would ask that
 mitigating measures are considered to help decrease the possibility of surface
 water flooding in this area, in accordance with policy EH7 of the West
 Oxfordshire Local Plan 2031.

011- 5 WTC/187/23 Plot Ref :- 23/02901/FUL Type :- FULL
 Applicant Name :- . Date Received :- 13/12/23
 Location :- 50 NEWLAND Date Returned :- 10/01/24
 NEWLAND
 Proposal : Erection of rear orangery.

Observations : While Witney Town Council does not object to this application in terms of material concerns and recognises the benefit of the addition to residents, it notes the loss of permeable drainage and lack of SuDS. Whilst the development is small, Members expressed concern that rainfall and surface water is to discharge to existing drainage. The age of the building and its internal infrastructure may not be suitable for this additional capacity, with the possibility of this causing increased flood risk elsewhere. The application site is uphill from an area that suffers from flooding. Members ask that a SuDS strategy and mitigating measures like a soakaway are considered to help decrease the possibility of surface water flooding in nearby areas, in accordance with policy EH7 of the West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2031.

Further, Members ask that the applicant consider the possibility of rainwater harvesting - given the proximity of WC facilities, could rainwater run-off be re-used sustainably?

011- 6	WTC/188/23	Plot Ref :- 23/02902/LBC	Type :-	LISTED BUI
	Applicant Name :-	.	Date Received :-	13/12/23
	Location :-	50 NEWLAND NEWLAND	Date Returned :-	10/01/24

Proposal : Erection of rear orangery.

Observations : While Witney Town Council does not object to this application in terms of material concerns and recognises the benefit of the addition to residents, it notes the loss of permeable drainage and lack of SuDS. Whilst the development is small, Members expressed concern that rainfall and surface water is to discharge to existing drainage. The age of the building and its internal infrastructure may not be suitable for this additional capacity, with the possibility of this causing increased flood risk elsewhere. The application site is uphill from an area that suffers from flooding. Members ask that a SuDS strategy and mitigating measures like a soakaway are considered to help decrease the possibility of surface water flooding in nearby areas, in accordance with policy EH7 of the West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2031.

Further, Members ask that the applicant consider the possibility of rainwater harvesting - given the proximity of WC facilities, could rainwater run-off be re-used sustainably?

011- 7	WTC/189/23	Plot Ref :- 23/03236/PN42	Type :-	PRIOR NOTI
	Applicant Name :-	.	Date Received :-	13/12/23
	Location :-	34 BURWELL DRIVE BURWELL DRIVE	Date Returned :-	10/01/24

Proposal : A 4.5m single storey extension, brick to match existing, flat roof with single skylight.

Observations : While Witney Town Council does not object to this application in principle, Councillors express concerns about the parking as shown in the plans. Whilst an allocation of off-road parking has been proposed, the location of the spaces may not be ideal; the existing road signage fixed to the pavement in front of the property and proximity of a road junction which serves a busy bus route mean that full consideration should be given to pedestrian safety and safety for other highway users. If approval is being considered, Witney Town Council request that an application for dropped kerbs be made to Oxfordshire County Council so that vehicles can access the proposed parking places safely and without causing damage. Adequate consultation should be sought from the relevant Highways Authority including a site visit, and Witney Town Council ask that consideration be given to West Oxfordshire Local Plan Policy T4 - Parking

Provision.

Further, Witney Town Council notes the loss of permeable drainage from the extended footprint. Whilst the development might be deemed small, Members expressed concern that surface water is to discharge to existing drainage, with the possibility of this causing increased flood risk elsewhere. Members ask that a SuDS strategy and mitigating measures like a soakaway are considered to help decrease the possibility of surface water flooding in nearby areas, in accordance with policy EH7 of the West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2031.

011- 8	WTC/190/23	Plot Ref :- 23/03180/FUL	Type :-	FULL
	Applicant Name :-	.	Date Received :-	13/12/23
	Location :-	ABBOTT DIABETES CARE RANGE ROAD WINDRUSH INDUSTRIAL PARK	Date Returned :-	10/01/24

Proposal : Extensions to buildings known as Evenlode and Wychwood with associated infrastructure (revision to approved scheme Ref. 23/00469/FUL).

Observations : Witney Town Council support the business growth of Abbott Diabetes Care, however, Members are unable to support the proposed development in its current form.

Comments from technical consultees Thames Water and Oxfordshire County Council both state that further work/revised plans are required in order for the development to be approved - If the applicant is able to address these concerns a revised application would be welcomed, and Witney Town Council support and encourage the continued business growth of this valued Witney employer.

The Meeting closed at : 7:20pm

Signed : _____ Chairman Date: _____

On behalf of :- Witney Town Council

Appendix

Minute No. P13, Climate Biodiversity & Planning held on 9 January 2023

Response items submitted to Botley West Solar Farm Consultation Jan/Feb 2024 by Witney Town Council.

2) As a principle do you agree there is a need to install solar infrastructure?

I agree there is a need to install solar infrastructure.

3) Based on our updated Stage Two proposals and the information presented in our Preliminary Environmental Information Report (PEIR), what are your views on Botley West Solar Farm?

I support the proposals

4) Which aspects of the project are most important to you?

Project specific feedback

Since Phase One we have updated our proposals, the design, and the layout of site. This is based on the feedback we received and ongoing technical assessments. In the following table, please tick the topic areas you consider to be the most important issues that you would like us to consider.

1. **Climate change and energy need**
2. **Socioeconomics**
3. **Local Ecology**

5) Please provide comments on our updated proposals for Botley West Solar Farm.

You may choose to expand upon your answers to the above question (your overall view of Botley West Solar Farm) and Question 4 (the topic areas you think are most important for our team to consider). In your response you may choose to refer to address specific chapters or environmental topics of interest from the PEIR.

Witney Town Council welcome this initiative. Since this scheme will primarily be supplying energy to the national grid, it might not be obvious as to how this scheme benefits the residents of Witney, however, weather phenomena like those seen recently, have caused major concern locally; residents in Witney have been rightfully concerned about rising river levels and the local response has included installation of emergency floodgates and sandbags, many of these resources have been made available since the serious flood incident in December 2020. These weather events are only going to increase, and whilst houses continue to be built and the town continues to grow, more people are going to move to Witney and more homes will be at risk of flooding. One of the few things that can be done directly and at this level is to mitigate the recurrence and regularity of extreme weather is to take steps to fight climate change, and one of those steps is a shift to renewable energy.

The focus needs to turn to renewable energy, locally, nationally and internationally. Otherwise flooding events will become annual events. We need to start taking our obligations and responsibilities seriously.

Whilst this scheme might not appear ideal to some, we cannot continue to push decisions into the future or look to move the problem elsewhere - time is running out. There may be locations within Oxfordshire for smaller schemes, and those conversations should continue, and challenges be explored with imagination and creativity for additional schemes. Climate change is not going to get any better, but we can stop it getting worse, one of the ways that we do that is in embracing solar technology. Witney Town Council support this scheme, Witney is not immune to the effects of climate change and the stakes are too high to be ignored. Greening our energy mix is beneficial to everyone.

Priority 1:

Climate change and energy need

For example, the carbon footprint of the project and the need for large-scale solar projects.

This proposal is of national importance, Witney Town Council recognise the significance of energy generation without greenhouse gas emissions - energy that does not have associated carbon dioxide. Climate change and global warming is one of its biggest concerns. While other renewables are coming forward, we are not yet in a position where other options are completely viable. This proposal is something that today we can choose to make a difference. Witney Town Council are in favour of supporting community tariffs or community ownership and would urge the developer to fully explore these options - this could provide a real financial benefit to many residents, especially those particularly affected by the development. There is precedent for this type of scheme, as shown with offshore wind projects, especially around the Thames estuary.

This proposal is a fully formed and funded project to make a massive dent in green energy, for potentially more households than there are in Oxfordshire.

Priority 2:

Socioeconomics

For example, employment, supply chain, and education opportunities.

The proposal should offer community tariffs and community ownership schemes. The last time the developer was approached about community ownership they said that a third-party company would be needed to facilitate such a scheme. This latest proposal does not appear to have produced that as an offer. Witney Town Council would like to see a greater commitment towards community benefit by way of community tariffs and community ownership, and more imaginative mitigations than those outlined in the proposals.

Priority 3:

Local ecology

For example, please suggest opportunities to improve ecology and biodiversity across the site, and / or provide us with details of existing flora and fauna you would like us to consider.

Witney Town Council acknowledge the estimated 70% gain in biodiversity through mitigation. However, members express concerns about the longer-term future of the development sites. Assurances and guarantees are sought that when the scheme has reached the end of its lifecycle, the sites and development areas are protected from automatically being deemed brownfield sites.

The developer has a duty to return the land to greenfield sites, or that the sites continue to provide renewable energy.

6) Do you have any comments on the information presented in our PEIR?

As part of our Phase Two Statutory Consultation, we have produced our Preliminary Environmental Impact Report (PEIR), alongside a Non-Technical Summary (NTS) of the information in the PEIR in less technical language. This document comprises the preliminary results of our Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) process, containing the findings of the environmental studies and surveys that we have undertaken to date. This work is across a range of environmental topic areas, and also sets out any suitable mitigation measures identified for our proposals. We used this environmental work, in addition to Phase One feedback, to inform and shape our updated proposals for Botley West Solar Farm.

In your response you may choose to refer to address specific chapters or environmental topics of interest from the PEIR.

The documents suggest that in areas where the panels are too low for grazing, undergrowth can be cut and collected for composting – there is no detail as to how or where this will be facilitated. A commitment is required to demonstrate how this will work and who is responsible for these ongoing works in the long term.

The documents suggest that the equipment will be installed using aluminium piles and galvanised steel frames – when two dissimilar metals are abutted they are likely to corrode – what measures are planned to stop corrosion?

7) Do you have any specific comments on our cable routes for the project?

Since Phase One we have explored potential cable route corridors between the three sites. This includes the two options east of Eynsham at the point where it crosses the Thames near the Swinford Toll Bridge, as well as the cable route options east of Woodstock. We have now presented you with the various cable route options between the sites.

No comment

8) Please provide any preferences for where you would like areas for community food growing to be placed.

Botley West Solar Farm is proposing areas for the community to grow food on site. We are seeking feedback on where members of the community would prefer these areas to be. This could include areas being located near to a particular residential area, or further into the site area.

These projects and their associated benefits should be maximised for those people living in the closest proximity to the sites. Witney Town Council encourage consideration of community gardening and food-growing projects, not just allotments.

9) Please provide any feedback on our approach to delivering opportunities beyond solar.

Botley West is committed to establishing an environmental and longstanding legacy across the area. We are committed to working with the community to inform what a package of community benefits could look like.

We are seeking to take a considered approach built on three key forms of community benefit: community funding, on-site benefits and helping to reduce energy bills. Please see pages 14 & 15 of our Phase Two Community Consultation Leaflet for more details.

Your response could include suggestions for the type of projects or initiatives you think could benefit from this package, including from a community benefit fund that will be similar in size to Blenheim's bursary fund of £50,000 per annum.

Witney Town Council acknowledge the community offers such as the £50k annual grants, the cycle paths and walking paths to ensure that the countryside remains accessible through development areas. However, all community offers need to be quantified, and agreements sought to ensure any promised funding and promised benefits are secured.

Local energy tariffs schemes are very much welcomed and need to be fully explored. If the scheme is to provide energy for 330,000 homes, that is more than the number of homes in Oxfordshire, and therefore all homes in Oxfordshire, including those in Witney, should be offered discounted energy rates.

As a fallback position, and very much a second choice, community ownership options could be made available.

Response ends.