

HEMPNALL PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Parish Meeting held on Monday 9th January 2012 at 7.30pm in The Village Hall

ACTION

Present

Chairman of meeting David Hook, Chairman of parish council Geoffrey Moulton, Debbie Ashford, Kevin Cunningham, Richard Delf, Mike Turner, Peter Workman and the Clerk Ian Nelson.

Members of the public present

District Councillor Windridge plus at least 240 others (241 being the number that voted in the ballot)

Apologies

Apologies were received from Richard Bacon MP, County Councillor Alison Thomas (hoped to attend later – if not will attend parish council meeting on 10/01/12), David Pointer, and Mr Michael Franks.

Welcome & Purpose

Mr Hook welcomed everybody to the meeting and explained that the purpose of the meeting was :

- 1) For the parish council to hear the views of local residents re. the proposed turbines
- 2) To assist councillors decide on how they will vote on the turbines' planning application

Procedure

Voting

Mr Hook explained that in order to gauge public opinion on this issue individuals needed to fill in the slips provided (name, parish, for / against). The Parish council would collate results to establish the majority view. If individuals are undecided the slips should still be completed to identify individuals name and parish so that a record of who attended was maintained but the voting section should not be filled in. The Parish Council would treat all voting slip responses in a confidential manner – they would not be passed on to SHOWT or TCI.

Parish Poll

Mr Hook explained that both South Norfolk DC and NALC had stressed the importance of public opinion as a factor that can influence the outcome of planning decisions such as these and he understood that TCI said (at their pre-Christmas consultation) that they wouldn't proceed if they did not have public support. In this context he mentioned the possibility of holding a local referendum and would welcome parishioners' views on this. Mr Hook went on to explain that the Localism Bill Community Referenda idea was dropped from the Act, however the Parish Poll procedure remains in place and NALC advised this as the best way of establishing a community's view on an important issue. It is a properly conducted poll (administered by SNDC & paid for by the parish) and its results cannot be ignored by Parish or District Councils, especially if the result is very clear. NALC advise that the results of such a poll (esp. if there's a high turnout) cannot be dismissed by developers / action groups / councils as being distorted through bias or interpretation in the same way as statistics provided by those on opposing sides of the issue can.

To speak at the meeting

Mr Hook explained the administrative procedures re speaking at the meeting via the microphone and the importance of clearly stating one's name and parish. In summary, The Parish Council wanted to be good neighbours and on this issue in particular the impact of

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the turbines on neighbouring villages would be highly significant. The proposed turbines are 131m high i.e. equivalent to 4 London Eyes between Hempnall, Saxlingham, Woodton and Shotesham. So residents of other villages were asked to complete the voting slips and speak if they wished, their opinions would be taken in to account but of course when reviewing opinion their votes and opinions would be distinguished from those of Hempnall residents.

What is proposed?

Mr Hook said that as already stated this meeting is primarily a chance for individuals to tell the Parish Council what they thought. It was not a presentation of the scheme, nor was --it a meeting where both sides present their cases, such a meeting could perhaps be held at a later date. The plans are not yet produced but TCI has held a public consultation in Hempnall and those who attended this event would have as good an idea as anyone about what is proposed.

It was made very clear to the Parish Council at its 15th November 2011 meeting by those members of the public present that it should hold a meeting like this ASAP after the TCI consultation.

Mr Hook explained that SNC had approved the TCI Scoping Opinion request without imposing any conditions. This means that TCI will produce an EIA which will deal with potentially significant issues such as:

- Landscape & visual impact
- Ecological impact
- Ornithological impact
- Noise
- Hydrological impact
- Access and vehicle movements
- Constructions & site safety
- Proximity to flight paths – Norwich airport and military air bases
- Electromagnetic interference (including potential effect on radar, television and telecommunications)
- Archaeological heritage
- Public rights of way
- Grid connection points

The comments of Hempnall Parish Council about additional viewing points etc. were not taken on board by SNC.

Mr Hook went on to state that the scheme is for 4 x 131m high wind turbines (hub height 85m) on land surrounding Busseys Loke. The exact position of each turbine nor details, such as access routes, are as yet unknown. The site boundaries cover the whole of the north east quadrant of Hempnall from Nobbs Lane in the east to the Saxlingham Road and Old Market Way in the west.

Predetermination

Mr Hook explained the concept and rules relating to predetermination of councillors and how they have changed as a result of the Localism Bill enactment.

Correspondence received

The clerk had received the following (this was not read to the meeting but is included in the minutes for completeness):

Mr Michael Franks of Hempnall was unable to attend but had emailed to state that he would have voted to oppose the wind turbines. In summary his opposition is based on the belief that:

- Climate change is happening and will be a serious problem

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- We need alternative forms of energy
- Energy produced by wind turbines is a flawed technology and will not work as a full or partial replacement
- The money which the government is paying in subsidies should be spent on research into an alternative which actually works
- The disruption and damage to the beautiful countryside around Hempnall to make a political point would be absurd. If a political point needs to be made situate the turbines off shore or in industrial areas

He was also very unhappy that the UK government is subsidising overseas based speculators. TCI is owned by companies in Australia, Jersey and the British Virgin Islands and he attached a structure which may be of interest.

He stated that the companies in Jersey and the BVI have chosen to keep their directors and non-corporate shareholders secret. His experience of the BVI and Jersey is that companies are only formed there to conceal the identity of the owners and their profits.

Public Participation

Mr Hook opened the floor for comment. It is not possible to record matters verbatim, however the main points raised by individuals were as follows:

A Gentleman from Saxlingham Green stated that he would like to be part of the parish poll. Mr Hook explained that the rules restricted the Hempnall parish poll to the residents of Hempnall but encouraged other parishes affected by any subsequent planning application to carry out their own parish poll.

Mr Trevor Shurmer of Hempnall made the following points:

- Government were encouraging wind turbines, solely for political purposes.
- Businesses were only developing wind turbines for commercial gain rather than for green considerations.
- Turbines would industrialise the landscape.
- On shore turbines are particularly inefficient.
- The cost to wildlife and landscape amenity was too high.
- There had recently been instances of 3 turbines losing blades and/or catching fire, thus they were a risk to public safety.
- The parish councillors should represent the majority of parishioner's views as they were elected to do.

Mr John Byde of Hempnall expressed his opposition of the proposed turbines and had some interesting ideas on alternative renewable energy which he agreed to supply to the Parish Council.

Mr Peter Robertson of Hempnall stated that:

- He was in favour of the proposal and that he did not understand the argument re spoiling the landscape. He considered the turbines to be attractive.
- With regard to safety, the turbines in Gt. Yarmouth and Lowestoft had been in operation for a number of years with anybody being killed.
- He asked people to consider what the real alternative was, would people prefer a nuclear power station or wind turbines in the village. He preferred local, small scale units.

Mr Clive Britcher of Hempnall stated that given the choice of 4 turbines or nuclear, he would choose the latter as it would produce a meaningful amount of energy whereas turbines would not.

Mr David Bailey of Saxlingham stated that:

- He was worried that villagers in Saxlingham did not realise the impact the

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proposed turbines would have on them.

- He believed that if TCI are allowed to build 4 turbines they would eventually build more on the same site.
- He encouraged the parish councillors the need to stress to other villages that they will be significantly affected.

Mr Chris Laxton of Saxlingham Green stated that:

- Turbines dwarf all features in the landscape, both natural and man made.
- Wildlife and in particular many birds and bats will be scared and/or damaged by the turbines.
- Grove Wood is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (“SSSI”) and was very close to the proposed turbine site.
- Road access and site infrastructure would be needed and this was very ungreen to build.
- There was strong evidence from UK and abroad that peoples health or at best their enjoyment of the quietness of the countryside is affected by turbine noise / ultra sound.
- The benefits of onshore turbines are very questionable unlike solar which is a proven renewable energy source.
- If it were not for the government subsidies turbines would not be built.
- TCI had indicated to him that there will be more than 4 turbines on the site following the initial build.
- The turbines would detrimentally affect the value of local properties
- The community fund is a laughable amount.
- Turbines create more CO₂ than they save according to a report published in Holland today.

Mr Tony Harvey of Hempnall asked if it was true that if TCI erected turbines, in 25 yrs. there would be no finances to take them down.

Mr Hook explained that decommissioning was covered in the scoping document. Mr Harvey said that we need to know that they will be taken down effectively at the end of their lives.

Mrs Hook said that local residents had fought the last application democratically at all stages - parish council, district council (with over 600 letters of objection) and finally at a public inquiry when a government inspector refused Enertrag's appeal. She added that she was dismayed the village had to fight another campaign after making it clear that large turbines were not wanted and she hoped the TCI application would be refused.

District Councillor Mr Michael Windridge of Fritton thanked the parish council for taking the initiative to hold a public meeting to consider the proposed application. He informed the meeting that largest wind turbine blade manufacturer in world had just laid off 3,000 people due to lack of demand so perhaps general opinion as to the desirability of turbines is changing. As a result perhaps the proposal may not turn into an application, however he indicated that we must be realists and expect an application to be made.

He commended the idea of parish poll, which is a secret ballot organised by the District Council, thus there was no question as to the integrity of the poll. It would provide incontrovertible evidence one way or the other as to the opinion of this parish.

This village and beyond had already had to endure so much fighting the previous Enertrag application, he echoed Mrs Hooks comments regarding this and asked what this new proposal said about the worth of local democracy? Enertrag's application had been opposed by village, the district councillor, the planning officer, the planning committee and the planning inspector, facing an appeal from the developer, had turned it down. He stated that TCI had no regard for parishioner's concerns and merely wished to generate

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profit for its shareholders.

He said that TCI were ultimately owned offshore which would indicate that any profits will not be returned to this country in taxes so the proposal is even more objectionable.

He urge both sides, whether for or against to do more than simply sit in the village hall for a meeting and encouraged people to write a letter of objection to SNC if an application is put forward by TCI.

Mr Andrew Jermy from Hempnall stated that:

- Hopefully the vast subsidies offered to the landowner / developers will be removed by government as if they did not exist he was sure turbines would not be built.
- If turbines are to be built they should be located closer to existing industrial sites and not spoil the countryside.
-

Mrs Hilary Battye of Hempnall stated that:

- Decommissioning was the responsibility of the landowner and was enforceable by the District Council.

Mr Patrick Stone of Hempnall Green stated that:

- He felt that the overwhelming feeling of the meeting was against the proposed turbines and asked how to take the fight to TCI rather than passively sitting back and fitting in with the planning machine.
- He required answers to the following questions:
 1. Those that came to the TCI exhibition were being asked to consider 4 turbines in a 4.5 square mile site but were given no indication of where the turbines would be situated - where will they go?
 2. Do we really believe there will only be 4 turbines? In his opinion there would be many more in such a large site, if the initial 4 were to be built, it would be necessary to get in writing that only 4 would be built.

Mr Alan Harper of Woodton stated that:

- Government consultation was due to close on 12th January regarding renewable obligation certificates. He felt that the answer was to scrap renewable obligation certificates and get on with generating nuclear power.

Mary of Hempnall stated that:

- Parishioners needed to say and think that the turbine would not be built, rather than even consider having them, people need to be more bullish.
- TCI would not provide her with an answer when questioned about any potential 2nd stage of build so she was convinced that they were planning to erect more than just 4 turbines. She felt that people would start leaving the village, is that really what people want?

Mr Hook explained that the parish council has a vote on the application but this is not binding on SNC – they can take a different view. He stated that planning decisions are made on the basis of local and national planning policies.

Mr John Ellis of Hempnall asked why there was another proposal similar to Enertrag's, when Enertrag's application had been turned down. Mr Hook explained that the planning system allowed for new applications to be made even when a similar application has previously been turned down.

Mr Gary Hewitt of Hempnall stated that:

- He very much enjoyed the countryside as an amenity and was concerned that

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public footpaths would be restricted if the proposal went ahead.

Mrs Carolyne Moulton of Topcroft reminded the meeting that there was an anti turbine group called Save Hempnall from Onshore Wind Turbines (“SHOWT”) and encouraged people to sign up and actively help. She said that it was a war of attrition that had to be won.

Mr Hook was mindful that so far only one person had spoken for the proposed turbines and encouraged any other people for the proposal to speak. There was no response.

Mr David White of Woodton stated that:

- He had seen in the newspaper a proposal that a national grid line would cross the Waveney valley. He was concerned that if Hempnall had the turbines, this would attract the giant pylons towards Hempnall. Even if people thought that the turbines were aesthetically pleasing they may not say the same about pylons.

Mrs Jenny Fairhead from Hempnall was concerned about increased traffic on roads that were already narrow and windy. Would the roads be widened etc.?

Mrs Christine Rogers of Lundy Green, Hempnall pointed out that the voting slips provided to people only gave options to vote for or against the proposed turbines and that there may be people who were unsure. Mr Hook said if not sure leave the “yes/no” section of the voting slip blank.

Mrs Rogers went on to say that she was also concerned that the attendees at the meeting were not representative of the parish as only those who had strong feeling would attend. Mr Hook explained that every household in the village had received an invitation to attend this meeting and therefore everyone was given the opportunity to make their feelings known. He reiterated that the purpose of the meeting was to gauge local opinion and that he considered it to be a valid part of the consultation process and that it was a legitimate way of measuring opinion. He added that he hoped a parish poll would also be held on this matter.

Mrs Yvonne Davey of Hempnall stated that:

- A secret ballot, such as the parish poll would be best to establish true opinion.
- She felt that many people had been rubbishing renewable energy, however Hempnall village hall had installed solar panels which contributed a significant amount of clean energy.
- Fossil fuels were running out whether we like it or not, so alternatives are required.

District Councillor Mr Michael Windridge of Fritton stated that:

- He commended the village hall committee for realising that wind energy was not the answer but solar was. He hoped that the landowner of the turbine site could be persuaded to go solar rather than wind.
- He felt that TCI and the authorities did not appreciate the high value that locals attach to the look of the landscape.
- He would be attending a meeting at SNC and it would be useful if he had an indication of the degree of support or not of the proposed turbines. He suggested, though the chair, that a show of hands would be useful although he acknowledged that not all parishioners were present.

Show of Hands

A comment was made that votes at open meetings could be pressurised. Mr Hook said that he was prepared to ask for a show of hands and would do so if the meeting wished this. A clear majority of those present expressed their desire for a show of hands on this matter.

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Approximately 90% of those present voted against the proposed turbines.

Mr William Lloyd from Hempnall stated that he wished it to be known that he was not against renewable energy per se and would support an efficient method of renewable energy.

Conclusion

Mr Hook thanked those involved in organising the meeting and especially everybody for attending as such a huge issue deserved a large turnout.

There being no further business, the meeting was closed at 8.45pm.

Ballot results – counted after the meeting had closed

Results of the vote by ballot are as follows:

	For	Against	Don't know
Hempnall	4	163	1
Brooke		8	
Fritton		4	
Morningthorpe		1	
Saxlingham		21	
Shotesham		13	
Topcroft		6	1
Unknown	1	5	
Woodton	2	6	
	<u>7</u>	<u>227</u>	<u>2</u>

Percentage			
Hempnall	2.5%	97%	0.5%
Percentage overall	3%	96%	1%

There were also 5 spoilt or incomplete voting slips.

Signed _____ Date 6th March 2012