



Stonestreet Green Solar – Community Liaison Panel

Meeting: Fraser Room, Aldington Village Hall, 6.30pm-8.30pm, Thursday 21 September 2023

MEETING NOTES

Attendance: Karen Byrne (Chair), Cllr Paul Bartlett (Ashford Borough Council/Kent County Council), Ray Boulding (Aldington Parish Council), Andrew Swarbrick, Nigel Spencer, Derek Burles, Sara Emmerson, Conor McNally (EPL 001 Limited), Charlie Vavasour (Quantum Public Relations), Stephen Wagstaff (Aldington and Bonnington Parish Council), David McQuilan

Apologies: Linda Arthur (Village Alliance), Clair Bell (Kent County Council), Tracy Roman (British Horse Society), Giles Frampton (EPL 001 Limited), Cllr Linda Harman (Ashford Borough Council/Aldington and Bonnington Parish Council), Cllr Simon Betty (ABC), Cllr Elaine Martin (FHDC)

1. Introduction by the Chair

Karen Byrne welcomed everyone to the meeting.

2. Confirm notes of previous meeting

CLP members approved the notes of the previous meeting (held 15/06/2023). No matters arising.

3. Project Update from the Applicant

Consultation Feedback

CMcN reported that there had been two key pieces of feedback from Statutory Consultees. The Environment Agency (EA) has provided new information on the impact of the scheme on the flood storage area. As a result, EPL 001 has removed panels from fields 26-29 but will retain the fields within the redline to allow more biodiversity and ecology on the site as well as ensure the new footpaths in that area can be delivered as part of the scheme.

CMcN also report that EPL 001 will be making changes in relation to the substation, taking account of water and visual impact requirements. A visualisation of the substation from the AE657 footpath north of Backhouse Wood will be included in the application.

DM asked if fields 26-29 would have open access. CMcN responded that the ecologist is reviewing what access could be granted without ecological impact. DM indicated that Aldington School would be interested in using the area for off-site learning opportunities.

CMcN stated that UK Power Networks have also confirmed that the cable route can connect at the UKPN substation at Sellindge (removing the requirement for the Alternative cable route included in the Statutory Consultation). EPL 001 is waiting for confirmation on whether it will be able to use the existing ducts under HS1 or will need to construct new ducts.

SW asked where any new ducts would go and whether the cables would have to go over the humpback bridge on Church Lane. CMcN replied that it is expected that they will be under HS1 directly opposite the eastern end of Sellindge Substation and that UKPN would be responsible for all of the cabling from Sellindge to the project's substation.

Changes made to the proposal

In addition to removing the panels from fields 26-29, CMcN also confirmed a number of other small changes to the scheme:

- There have been a number of small changes to the edge of the redline, largely to take into account hedgerows and other minor impacts.
- In field 3 the panels have been pulled back away from a potential barn conversion near to the Stonelees property.
- After running noise scenarios based on different temperatures, acoustic fencing will be introduced for some inverters to minimise any noise impact.

PB stated that Historic England had raised questions over the long-term visual impact of the project from Mersham. CMcN replied that the project's Heritage consultant was reviewing the feedback and will be providing visualisations of the project from Mersham and that EPL 001 will respond to all comments received from Historic England in due course.

PB also asked about feedback from ABC in relation to project design changes. CMcN confirmed that EPL 001 had responded to the majority of comments received from ABC in the 2022 Statutory Consultation resulting in significant improvements to the design. EPL 001 has responded to ABC's 2023 Statutory Consultation comments and is in on-going dialogue.

PB enquired about any comments from KCC and CMcN confirmed that EPL 001 expects to respond to comments raised shortly.

NS asked if a new footpath has been put in across field 19. CMcN confirmed that this hasn't been included.

AS asked if there had been any changes to footpaths since the consultation. CMcN replied that the footpath diversions in fields 26-29 will be removed, but the new footpaths proposed in those fields to improve the local network will remain.

Themes from the consultation feedback

CMcN went through the key themes that came from the consultation and EPL 001's responses on these;

Size of project – determined by the energy need and required to use available grid capacity to achieve 2050 Net Zero legal requirement.

Visual impact – the project is generally well screened, with main views coming from the PRowS

Alternative sites – this site was chosen following a lengthy exercise in screening out other options as previously explained during the public presentation held in November 2022.

Use of good agricultural land – 80% of the site is not classified as best and most versatile land

Light pollution – there will be no lights except in an emergency

PRowS – there are changes to the PRow network, but impact should be limited

Cumulative impact – the submission will consider the cumulative impact which will be examined by the Inspector

Panels from China – this is a global topic which the industry is aware of. EPL 001 will monitor its supply chain and report on this.

AS asked about the PRowS working group - CMcN confirmed that this will be established after the DCO decision is made and the group will focus on how the changes to the network are implemented to minimise disruption for the local community.

DM observed that 60 consultation responses on the project was quite small and possibly indicates that most people are neutral or positive about the project. CMcN replied that other schemes have been more controversial and noted that the Aldington event held from 3pm directly opposite the local school did not attract any parent attendees which could indicate DM's comment was correct. DB stated that this could have been for other reasons.

DCO Submission Timeline

CMcN stated that the timeline could not be confirmed as EPL 001 is waiting for final confirmation of the grid route from UKPN but hopeful that a response would be received in the next few weeks. The CLP will be informed and a newsletter will be issued to local residents before submission.

DB asked if the application will be a draft or final. CMcN confirmed that the application will be in final form, noting that EPL 001 has previously submitted the initial ES Chapters to the Planning Inspectorate in draft form for review, as is standard practice.

Post Acceptance Arrangements

CV confirmed that there would be a newsletter distributed before the application is submitted and a further one if the application is accepted. The newsletters will contain information on how

to register as an interested party. Statutory notices will also be placed in local and national newspapers.

SE asked what the stages were. CMcN replied that there would be a six-month examination, then three months for a recommendation and then three months for the Secretary of State (SoS) to make a decision. This process will all be set out in the newsletters.

PB stated that in his experience these types of decisions are rarely taken within the statutory timelines. CMcN replied that recent experience for similar projects is varied with some decisions issued sooner and some delayed.

Any other business

DM asked if there was any progress regarding the cycle route to Mersham. CMcN stated that EPL 001 remains keen to provide this and will make contact again with the adjacent landowners. PB offered to raise with his contact if that would be helpful.

PB raised a concern from LH regarding the access for HGVs using Goldwell Lane and the impact on Aldington School. CMcN replied that there would be only one HGV and 4/5 LGVs a day, and that the route was purposefully designed to avoid passing the school.

PB asked if there was a draft traffic chapter and whether KCC had reviewed this. CMcN replied that the draft traffic chapter is on the project website and that KCC has reviewed this.

SW asked how the power gets from fields 20, 21 and 22 to the substation. CMcN replied that it would be via underground cable along Goldwell Lane which would result in some temporary disruption.

The Chair asked on behalf of TR if there was any update on introducing a circular bridleway route around the site. CMcN replied that this is not under consideration but that the existing bridleway will be cleared and that EPL 001 will be responsible for its maintenance.

AS confirmed that it is actually a byway and there followed a discussion regarding whether it would be open to all traffic. PB suggested taking it up with CB and KCC.

CMcN stated that EPL 001 would provide the CLP with an update on progress by the end of November.

Date of next meeting

It was agreed that this would be confirmed once EPL 001 had greater clarity on timeline to submission.

-Ends-

Acronyms:

CLP – Community Liaison Panel
EPL – EPL 001 Limited
ABC – Ashford Borough Council
ABPC – Aldington and Bonnington Parish Council
FHDC – Folkestone and Hythe District Council
KCC – Kent County Council
PROW – Public Rights of Way
SGS – Stonestreet Green Solar