

Minutes of the Annual Meeting of Staploe Parish Council Held Online at 7.45pm on Thursday 20th May 2021 on Zoom

The legislation allowing local councils to run virtual meetings during the COVID-19 pandemic came to an end on May 7th. At the time of the meeting many local authorities were raising objections to returning to face-to-face meetings, such as the lack of suitable premises to conduct socially distanced meetings (Wyboston and Colmworth Village Halls remain closed as does the Eatons Centre), and the difficulty in controlling the number of members of the public who attend. In addition, Bedford Borough is a hotspot for the Indian Variant of COVID-19. As a result many, including Staploe Parish Council, have decided to meet online in May and ratify our decisions when we are able to meet safely in person.

Present: Cllr. J. Ibbett (Chair), Cllr. V. Zwetsloot (Vice Chair), Cllr. G. Meola, Cllr. E. Meola, Cllr. D. Smith, Cllr. J. Thomson, Cllr. R. Squire, Lucy Crawford (Clerk), Borough Cllr. T. Wootton, Roy Amner and James Jamieson (Intelligent Alternatives – agents for the solar farm), Beth Minter (landowner's agent) and six members of the public.

Apologies for absence: none

2021/043. Election of Chairman

Having consented to her nomination Cllr. J. Ibbett was proposed for the post by Cllr. R. Squire and seconded by Cllr. D. Smith. There being no other nominations she was duly elected as Chairman.

2021/044. Election of Vice Chairman

Having consented to her nomination Cllr. V. Zwetsloot was proposed for the post by Cllr. J. Ibbett and seconded by Cllr. E. Meola. There being no other nominations she was duly elected as Chairman.

2021/045. Declarations of Acceptance of Office

The Clerk will witness signatures of these forms after the meeting.

2021/046. Declarations of interest and Updates to Registers of Members Interests

Cllr. R. Squire declared an interest in the solar farm and the playing field. He will leave the meeting after the open forum. Cllr. G. Meola declared an interest in the solar farm as she will be able to see it from her house. It was agreed that she could take part in the discussion and vote as the plans do not include the land adjacent to her boundary.

Cllr. G. Meola, and Cllr. E. Meola have submitted updates to the registers, and Cllr. J. Ibbett will submit some changes after the meeting. All other councillors have confirmed there have been no changes.

2021/047. Approve Minutes of the Parish Council Meeting held on 25th March 2021

Having been previously circulated the minutes were approved as an accurate record of the meeting. Proposed by Cllr. E. Meola and seconded by Cllr. R. Squire.

2021/048. Public Open Forum

(See Appendix A and Appendix B for comments about the solar farm)

Cllr. J. Thomson advised that she had been asked by the owners of the Old Dance Hall whether they could move the noticeboard to the bus shelter. Councillors agreed with this suggestion.

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2021/049. Appointments and Responsibilities

- It was resolved to make the following appointments (proposed by Cllr. J. Thomson and seconded by Cllr. E. Meola):
- Staffing committee. Cllr. G. Meola, Cllr. J. Ibbett and Cllr. R. Squire (no change)
- Finance committee: Cllr. R. Squire, Cllr. V. Zwetsloot and Cllr. D. Smith (no change)
- A1 Working Group. Cllr. R. Squire, Cllr. D. Smith, Cllr. J. Ibbett and Tom Tagg (no change)
- Speedwatch. Cllr. R. Squire, Cllr. V. Zwetsloot, Mark and Soo Potts and Tom Tagg (updated)
- Cllr. G. Meola and Cllr. E. Meola were appointed to the Village Hall Management Committee and Cllr. J. Ibbett stood down. Cllr. J. Thomson will attempt to recruit a new member from Honeydon.
- Footpath / Rights of Way representatives. Caroline Kent and Gill Tagg were appointed (new appointments)

2021/050. Standing Orders and Terms of Reference

- The following standing orders and terms of reference were approved without amendment:
- Parish Council, finance and staffing committees (committees are covered in the Parish Council standing orders)
- Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group
- A1 Working Group

2021/051. Community Events

- It was resolved to wait until social distancing rules have been relaxed before organising any events – particularly with the Indian variant circulating in our area. Proposed by Cllr. V. Zwetsloot and seconded by Cllr. J. Thomson

2021/052. Borough Councillor Tom Wootton's report

Borough Cllr. T. Wootton thanked the Clerk. He commended Richard Squire for listening to parishioners concerns regarding the solar farm. In his experience many landowners are not interested in residents views. He would be happy to listen to residents concerns regarding the solar farm. He continues to do what he can to address parishioners concerns about the E-W rail route which will go through Wilden and Colesden and is the most expensive route. He urged residents to respond to the consultation. He also urged residents to use the mobile library.

Councillor concerns about face to face meetings

Bedford Borough Councillors are concerned by the Governments' decision to enforce face to face meetings for Councillors, especially with the new Indian variant that is spreading through Bedford. Bedford Borough Council are looking for workarounds for this at the moment with a number meetings being turned into 'workshops'. This will then allow committees to meet in a shorter meeting that can have a minimum amount of members to allow the meeting to be quorate. The June 2nd Full Council at the Corn Exchange is still due to go ahead.

East West Rail - Public Meetings

Bedford Borough Council held two virtual meetings to hear views from residents and businesses on what they wish to see in the Council's response to the current East West Rail Company consultation.

There was a presentation and they will present the results and answers of this in due course (before June 2).

However, some residents are upset with how this meeting took place and some of the comments made by Bedford Borough Council. <https://www.bedfordindependent.co.uk/letters-councillors-own-communities-and-environments-are-under-threat/>

East West Rail - Bedford Borough Council supports 4 track route

Bedford Borough Council commissioned SLC (who are consultants) to write a report on whether a 4 track route would be viable for EWR. They believed that EWR should be able to go ahead with a 4 track route. Hopefully, this would lead to those residents whose homes are at risk under a 6 track plan, being allowed to keep their homes.

EWR have also responded to some residents' complaints, which included the following: "Following the 2019 consultation, we carried out further work to assess if the existing Midland Mainline tracks north of Bedford Midland station would have sufficient capacity to accommodate the new East West Rail services without reducing the existing passenger and freight capacity. After considering a full set of options we found four tracks would not be sufficient, and this is why we are presenting a six-track proposal during this consultation."

You can see BBC's official press release along with report here: [Council Calls for Protection of Homes North of Bedford Station · Bedford Borough Council](#)

We do continue to strongly urge you to respond to the EWR consultation before it closes on 9 June: <https://eastwestrail.co.uk/consultation>

Fusion facilities now open

All Fusion facilities apart from Oasis Swimming Pool are now open. Oasis Swimming Pool will open on Wednesday 19th May.

Bookings can be made up to seven days in advance, via download of the Fusion Lifestyle app or visit www.fusion-lifestyle.com to register and use the booking facility.

For centre opening times and timetables please visit www.fusion-lifestyle.com/centres/mowsbury-golf-and-squash-centre

Boundary Commission update

On May 11 the Boundary Commission released their latest draft recommendations. They are available to look at on the following website where you are also able to respond:

<https://consultation.lgbce.org.uk/have-your-say/20441>

The deadline for responding is 5th July.

They have also written a report explaining their decisions here: <https://s3-eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/lgbce/Reviews/Eastern/Bedfordshire/Bedford/New%20Draft%20Recs/Bedford%20new%20draft%20recommendations%20report.pdf>

Bedford Borough libraries reopen

Bedford Central and Kempston libraries reopened from 12th April 2021, with Putnoe Library opening on 19th April 2021. Bromham and Wootton libraries opened on 26th April 2021. You can check the website for opening hours and further service updates on the Virtual Library website. Initially the libraries will be open for managed browsing, allowing you to select your own books. Essential computer use will also be available and people are encouraged to book a session in advance if they can, as fewer computers are available due to social distancing. You

can book a 45 minute session at <https://bedford.imil.uk/> Please wear a face covering when you visit the libraries, unless you have a legitimate reason not to, and remember to make space between yourself and other people and to regularly wash or sanitise your hands. Customers will also be asked to use the NHS Test and Trace app, or if you are not able to your contact details will be taken for the same purpose.

With libraries opening, the current Select and Collect service will reduce. Staff selected bundles will no longer be available, but you can request individual titles for free using the library app or by calling the library. The books will be issued to your card when they are ready, so all you need to do is pick them up from the collection shelves in the relevant library. During this initial period of reopening, please don't worry if you are unable to visit a library – loans have been extended for a further period plus you can renew your books online or by telephone. The Mobile Library also returned from the week beginning 12th April 2021. Due to the small space, customers will not be able to browse the shelves on the vehicle, but will be able to request books using the Select and Collect service and collect them from a Mobile Library stop. A temporary change to routes will be in place and details will be available shortly via the Virtual Library.

Bedford Borough takes action on fly-tipping

At an Environment Scrutiny Committee on April 22, the officer in charge for waste management announced that Bedford Borough Council has started taking action against fly-tipping. In fly-tipping hotspots the Council have put up cameras and those caught face prosecution and fines.

Bedford Borough Council wants to hear your views on local bus services.

Your responses will help the Council establish its priorities and what the most important things are for residents, when it invites bids to run the rural bus services across Bedford Borough later this year. The Council is looking to understand how residents of the Borough currently use transport, if this has changed during COVID, and how the public transport offer could be improved in the future. Residents and interested parties can have their say via the quick and easy form on the Council website at www.bedford.gov.uk/bustravel or by calling 01234 718005. The deadline for responses is Friday 11 June.

COVID-19 Update

The Government has now set a roadmap out of lockdown, we are now into step 3

STEP 1 8 March	STEP 2 No earlier than 12 April At least 5 weeks after Step 1
EDUCATION 8 MARCH - Schools and colleges open for all students - Practical Higher Education courses	EDUCATION As previous step
SOCIAL CONTACT 8 MARCH - Exercise and recreation outdoors with household or one other person - Household only indoors	SOCIAL CONTACT - Rule of 6 or two households outdoors - Household only indoors
BUSINESS & ACTIVITIES 8 MARCH Wraparound care, including sport, for all children	BUSINESS & ACTIVITIES - All retail - Personal care - Libraries & community centres - Most outdoor attractions - Indoor leisure inc. gyms (individual use only) - Self-contained accommodation - All children's activities - Outdoor hospitality - Indoor parent & child groups (max 15 people, excluding under 5s)

STEP 1 8 March	29 March	STEP 2 No earlier than 12 April At least 5 weeks after Step 1	
TRAVEL 8 MARCH - Stay at home - No holidays	29 MARCH - Minimise travel - No holidays	TRAVEL - Domestic overnight stays (household only) - No international holidays	
EVENTS - Funerals (30) - Weddings and wakes (6)		EVENTS - Funerals (30) - Weddings, wakes, receptions (15) - Event pilots	
STEP 3 No earlier than 17 May At least 5 weeks after Step 2		STEP 4 No earlier than 21 June At least 5 weeks after Step 3 All subject to review	
EDUCATION As previous step		EDUCATION As previous step	
SOCIAL CONTACT - Maximum 30 people outdoors - Rule of 6 or two households indoors (subject to review)		SOCIAL CONTACT No legal limit	
BUSINESS & ACTIVITIES - Indoor hospitality - Indoor entertainment and attractions - Organised indoor sport (adult) - Remaining accommodation - Remaining outdoor entertainment (including performances)		BUSINESS & ACTIVITIES Remaining businesses, including nightclubs	
TRAVEL - Domestic overnight stays - International travel (subject to review)		TRAVEL - Domestic overnight stays - International travel	
EVENTS - Most significant life events (30) - Indoor events: 1,000 or 50% - Outdoor seated events: 10,000 or 25% - Outdoor other events: 4,000 or 50%		EVENTS - No legal limit on life events - Larger events	

Borough COVID Information

As of the 9th May in Bedford there have been 13,711 cases since the start of the Pandemic and there have been 146 registered cases in Bedford in the last 7 days.

If you would like the latest COVID snapshot (as of 9th May) please find it below:

<https://bbcdevwebfiles.blob.core.windows.net/webfiles/Social%20Care%20Health%20and%20Community/Covid19/Covid19-weekly-statistics-12May.pdf>

The Indian variant, which is believed to spread rapidly is now the dominant strain in Bedford. Bedford Borough are asking residents' to proceed with extreme caution and it is believed that the number of cases will continue to rise.



Bedford Borough #HandsFaceSpaceFreshAir @BedfordT... · May 15 ···

Cases are rapidly rising in Bedford Borough and we're urging everyone to remain cautious and take steps to slow the spread of COVID-19. With a variant of concern identified locally, it's important that we all play our part.

✓ Follow the Hands, Face, Space and Fresh Air advice.



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Bedford Borough Council have also written to the Government to ask them for a surge in vaccinations to protect all residents quicker.

More information available at: <https://www.bedford.gov.uk/social-care-health-and-community/public-health/coronavirus/>

COVID rapid tests in Bedford

You can have an assisted rapid test at the Faraday Community Centre, Kelvin Ave, Bedford MK42 9ND (no need to book, just turn up on the day). Testing is available from 7am to midday, and from 1pm to 7pm, Monday to Friday.

Alternatively you can collect a pack of 7 tests to use at home from the following locations, or they can be [ordered online for home delivery](#).

Home test kit collection sites:

- Faraday Community Centre ([search location and opening times](#))
- Participating community pharmacies ([search location and opening times](#))
- Prebend Street and Polhill Avenue local testing sites ([search location and opening times](#))
- Bedford Central, Kempston, Putnoe, Wootton and Bromham libraries during their normal opening hours

Rapid tests are quick and easy to do, but their accuracy improves with practice and training, so if it is your first test we recommend that you have an assisted test at the Faraday Centre before collecting your home test kit.

Anyone testing at home will need to register their results online or by calling 119. If the result is positive they should self-isolate and book a confirmatory PCR test by visiting [GOV.UK - get a Coronavirus test](#).

Bedford residents who are in contact with other members of the public as part of their work are now able to access free, rapid Covid-19 (coronavirus) tests and are encouraged to take a test twice a week.

This includes retail workers, childminders, bus and taxi drivers, construction workers and tradespeople like plumbers or electricians. Testing is also available for pregnant women and their partners prior to attending key maternity appointments.

2021/053. Planning

- It was resolved not to comment on the following planning applications.

Application number	Type	Description	Location	Deadline	Link
21/01070/FUL	Full Planning Application	Part barn conversion to create assisted living accommodation (annexe) including roof extension to form car port and change of use of land to residential use.	East Chapel Cottage 7 Chapel Close Honeydon Bedford Bedfordshire MK44 2NE	26/05/2021	21/01070/FUL
21/01098/FUL	Full Planning Application	Replacement of existing office and garage block with new oak framed traditional office and garage block with annexe above.	Lower Goodwick Farm Begwary Bedford Bedfordshire MK44 2NX	21/05/2021	21/01098/FUL
21/01054/FUL	Full Planning Application	One and two storey rear extension and front porch	60 Staploe Lane Staploe St Neots Bedfordshire PE19 5JA	21/05/2021	21/01054/FUL

- Four members of Staploe Parish Council considered the following application. It was recommended that the air source heat pump be sited at the north-west corner of the garage so that it faces the owners field and not the neighbours garden to the East as air source heat pumps can be noisy.

Application number	Type	Description	Location	Deadline	Link
21/00955/FUL	Full Planning Application	Installation of air source heat pump, below ground gas tank, below ground Klargest, below ground soakaway, and provision of bin store for new dwelling approved under 20/00034/FUL	Land West Of Woodfield Honeydon Road Colmworth Bedfordshire	12/05/2021	21/00955/FUL

Due to an oversight the Clerk did not consult the Parish Council on 21/00193/FUL and therefore the Parish Council made no comment.

Application number	Type	Description	Location	Deadline	Link
21/00193/FUL	Full Planning Application	Siting of temporary structures and mobile home during the construction of the dwelling approved under application reference 20/00034/FUL	Land West Of Woodfield Honeydon Road Colmworth Bedfordshire	15/03/2021	21/00193/FUL

Response to Intelligent Alternatives regarding their proposal to develop a 50mW solar farm on the land south of High Wood.

- It was resolved to thank all the residents who had commented and in particular to thank Tom Tagg for the detailed research he had undertaken.
 - It was resolved to respond to Intelligent Alternatives regarding their proposal to develop a 50mW solar farm on the land south of High Wood in the following way and copy our response to Bedford Borough Council and Hunts District Council:
 - The Parish Council would like to thank Intelligent Alternatives for their openness regarding their plans.
 - They would ask that Intelligent Alternatives continue to keep us informed and that they send us a copy of the planning application before it is submitted.
 - They would like to invite Intelligent Alternatives to attend our next meeting on 15th July to update us on their plans
 - Although there is, as yet, no formal planning application the Parish Council wish to make the following comments on the draft proposal:
1. The Parish Council believe that this should not be considered as a separate entity to the existing solar farm at High Wood. As it is currently proposed it will be directly adjacent to and partially encircling the existing solar panels, the electrical substation will be adjacent to the existing one, they share an access track and the landowner and developer are the same. Therefore, the proposal should be submitted as a solar farm of >50mW and considered as a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project and subjected to the commensurate level of scrutiny required for a project of this size.
 2. We are concerned about the scale of the development. We understand the need for renewable energy but we estimate that the existing solar farm at Top Farm and High Wood would generate one fifth of the electricity required for properties in Bedford Borough Council and believe that it is reasonable to expect other areas in the Borough to provide some of the area for solar power and we believe that much of the area could be provided on the roofs of new homes to be built in the Borough or on existing warehouses. We would like to see a significant reduction in the area of the scheme and, in particular, we would like the fields in sight of homes and closest to popular walking routes not to be developed with panels and for the panels to be set well back from popular walking routes (Footpaths 29, 31 and the east west section of 26) and developed on only one side of them.
 3. We are concerned about the amount of high quality agricultural land to be used for the proposal. Bedford Borough Council's Local Plan 2030 states that large scale solar power projects should not be developed on high quality agricultural land. The land on which this site is proposed is all high quality Grade 2 land. Huntingdonshire District Council's Local Plan to 2036 similarly states that lower agricultural value in preference to land of higher agricultural value should be used and any development should recognise the character and beauty of the countryside and not adversely impact the use and enjoyment of the countryside by others.
 4. We are concerned that biodiversity should be protected and significantly increased by the project (>10% biodiversity gain) and that it is critical for the Ancient Woodland at High Wood and Huntingdon Wood to be protected. We would like to see features such as green corridors (particularly for wildlife access to the ancient woodland), wildflower meadows, hedges around the whole perimeter, ponds, and insect banks.

5. We are concerned about how the biodiversity features will be maintained. It appears to have taken a long time for the hedges to be planted at the existing High Wood site and many of the whips have fallen over / died. We would like to see the biodiversity features maintained to a high standard over the life of the project. We are conscious that wildflower meadows need careful maintenance over a long period of time to be successful and would like to know who will cut them and maintain them and see a protected budget for maintenance of all the biodiversity features.
6. We would like to see operational impacts minimised. Eg. silent piling / augering nearer residential areas and popular walking routes. We would like to see the noisy operations such as piling conducted Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm and Saturday morning 9am to 12 midday.
7. We would like to be provided with a map showing the infrastructure constraints eg. underground pipelines / cables

- **Developments at Little America.**

Lampposts/ CCTV masts are being erected around the perimeter of the site and on the gates of 5 Acres (4m to 6m tall) and people have been reported working inside the buildings in the middle of the night and there is a lot of activity on the site once more. Deborah Jeakins (enforcement officer at Hunts District Council) has explained that they are considering the request for pre application advice for additional waste uses at the site and if the officer advice is that an application can be supported then this is likely to result in the submission of a planning application to regularise the development that has already taken place. She has noted that there is more unauthorised development taking place and has spoken to the agent and land owner about this recently to advise the operator and his agent that any works that are being undertaken without the necessary planning permission are at the developer's own risk, i.e. if permission is subsequently applied for and refused and / or enforcement action is considered necessary then the unauthorised development will need to be removed. She explained that temporary stop notices are only used in very extreme circumstances where the unauthorised development being undertaken will cause very serious and irreparable planning harm and, from the evidence that she has to date, this is not the case. Although Stop Notices can be served to address development that is causing serious harm, they must be accompanied by an enforcement notice and the County Council's investigation is not yet at a stage to consider whether it is necessary and expedient to serve such a notice. Whilst she is not suggesting that there is no planning harm being caused by the development at the site, any formal enforcement action has to be evidence based and justified and as it would be premature to initiate formal action at this stage. The Clerk has asked for Bedford Borough Council's support but they said they did not get involved with applications in other planning authorities.

- Borough Cllr. T. Wootton expressed surprise that Huntingdonshire District Council were not issuing a stop notice and asked to be copied on the correspondence. He offered to take this up with the planning department at Bedford Borough Council.
- Cllr. J. Thomson offered to capture an image of the site from Google Earth so that comparisons can be made.

- **Update on the Local Plan Review (which will decide on sites for 26,000 new homes in the Borough).** Provisional consultation dates are 28th June to 3rd September. It was resolved to hold an extraordinary meeting to discuss the consultation on Thursday 8th July before the next ordinary Parish Council meeting on 15th July.

2021/054. Neighbourhood Plan

- Housing Needs Survey. The Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group have conducted a survey and there were a small number of housing needs. The group are taking advice from a Planning Consultant and will provide further information on next steps shortly.
- Budget and grant application. **It was resolved to accept the following budget proposed by the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group and to apply for a grant from Locality.** Cllr. G. Meola suggested that funds be made available for a Housing Needs Assessment (HNA) if required. This is different from a Housing Needs Survey and provides detail of different types of housing required within the Borough's housing requirement figure. The Clerk will investigate the need for / cost of a HNA. Proposed by Cllr. G. Meola and seconded by Cllr. E. Meola.

Item	Cost ex VAT	Comments
Green Infrastructure Plan Production Fee (BRCC)	3,824.00	
Green Space Designation Assessment	500	
Advice from planning consultant	£1,100	For two days work at £550 each
Printing	150	
Stationary and print cartridges	40	
Mileage for members / project manager eg. deliveries / publicity	60	Assumes 5 miles per month
Postage	150	For return of questionnaires and other correspondence
Hall hire (in case it is permitted before the end of March)	160	Assumes four x two hour public meetings in the main hall at Colmworth / Wyboston
Zoom account	172.68	Currently using Parish Council account. Likely to stop theirs soon as in person meetings resume.
Survey Monkey Account	350	Annual subscription to be renewed in Jan 2022
Total	6,506.68	
£423.58 already spent in previous grant application: NPG-11925 in Jan - March 2021. £9576.42 still available.		

- **It was resolved to approve the motion proposed by the Neighbourhood Plan steering group: “The Staploe Parish Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group have carried out two surveys and these have shown that there is no support for large scale development in the parish. The group would like to request that the Parish Council communicate this to Bedford Borough Council in advance of their next consultation on the Local Plan Review 2030.”** Proposed by Cllr. E. Meola and seconded by Cllr. J. Ibbett.

2021/055. Insurance

- The land and buildings asset register was reviewed without amendment
- The following insurance quotes were presented:

Supplier	Quote	Term (yrs)	Employers liability	Public liability	Fidelity	Terrorism	Legal	Excess
Current (Norris & Fisher)	444.83	3	£10 million	£10 million	£100K	£5 million		£250
Norris & fisher renewal	485.54	1	£10 million	£10 million	£100K	£5 million	£100K	£250
Norris & fisher renewal	461.26	3	£10 million	£10 million	£100K	£5 million	£100K	£250
Community Action	355.15	1	£10 million	£10 million	£100K	£5 million	£250K	£250
Community Action	338.29	3	£10 million	£10 million	£100K	£5 million	£250K	£250
BHIB	506.24	3	£10 million	£10 million	£50K	0		£125
BHIB	537.2	1	£10 million	£10 million	£50K	0		£125
Came & Company	550.25	1	£10 million	£10 million	£150K	N/A		
Zurich	Do not want to quote - do not think they will be competitive							

It was resolved to accept the insurance quote of £461.26 from Norris and Fisher for a 3 year term. Although Community Action were cheaper their terms were couched in complicated legal language and questions from the Clerk asking for clarity had not been answered. Proposed by Cllr. J. Thomson and seconded by Cllr. G. Meola.

2021/056. Playing Field, Village Hall car park and site and Community Cabins

- Electrical cable for Community Cabins. British Gas Lite have installed a new electricity meter in the GRP kiosk at the village hall car park. They have advised the Parish Council that they think the electrical cable which feeds the cabins and which is the responsibility of the Parish Council should be buried. It is currently cable tied to the fence and trailing on the ground to the rear of the site. We chose not to bury it initially because we need to know where it is when working on the new village hall. The electrician who installed it has advised that the cable is not dangerous as it is armoured cable and it is adequately fused so if it were to be caught or damaged then the supply would switch off automatically. The Clerk has obtained a quote of £450 to bury the cable. **It was resolved to include the £450 in our VERU application and meanwhile put signs up to warn people of the trip / electrical hazard.**
- Report on progress at the Community Cabins and consider budget for future works
 - VERU grant. It was resolved to apply for a grant to

Task	Cost
Burying electrical cable to make safe	£450
New roof for both cabins (1-layer SBS hot mineral finish)	£1,490
Replace rotten sleepers beneath cabins	£600
Reconnect CCTV	£250
Fit extra electrical sockets	£400
Replace and fit broken over sink water heaters x 4	£700
Supply and fit hand washing sink for kitchen	£120
Line kitchen walls (food safety)	£400
Paint and sundries	£150
Electricity and water during renovation	£250
Total	£4,810

- Play area and field inspections. These are being carried out by Adam Tarran and the Parish Council expressed their thanks to him.

2021/057. Courtesy Signs

- There have been some incidents of dogs worrying livestock in Duloe. **It was resolved to erect A3 Countryside Code signs in Duloe on the gate near Duloe graffiti bridge, another on the gate at the end of Woodhouse Lane and one by the pylon in Woodhouse Lane.** Printhat have quoted £43.13 for 5 foamex signs. Cllr. R. Squire will provide a wooden board to mount them on the gates and by the pylon. Borough Cllr. T. Wootton suggested that Cllr. R. Squire erects “Private track please keep dogs on leads” signs on the track which runs east - west from the end of Woodhouse Lane to Footpath 16. **It was also resolved to erect some temporary signs requesting that dogs be kept on the path or on the lead during nesting season for ground nesting birds.**

2021/058. Waste and recycling

- Options for glass recycling (potential locations for bottle bank, wheelie bins).
 - Several residents responded to the Neighbourhood Plan questionnaire requesting glass recycling. Bedford Borough Council do not offer doorstep recycling because they say that it is expensive and mixed glass is not recycled into high quality glass and tends to be used for building materials. They can offer us glass recycling credits for £40 per tonne of glass recycled or a glass recycling bank if we can offer a suitable location on hard standing with an adequate turning point for a large lorry. There are few recycling facilities in St Neots because Hunts District Council offer a doorstep collection service.
 - Cllr. R. Squire offered to host a glass recycling bank at College Farm, Duloe or at Falls Farm but residents present said they would object due to the noise it would create. The Clerk has obtained quotes from Cheaper Waste for provision, collection and recycling of wheelie bins for glass. Total cost for three bins (one in each hamlet) would be: £96 x 3 = £288 for the duty of care transfer note, £263.12 x 3 = £789.36 for the collections £50.96 x 3 for bin rental = £152.88. Total of £1128.32 per year. Alternatively we could have one bin in Staploe emptied weekly. This would be £96 for transfer note + £526.24 for collections + £50.96 for bin rental = £673.20
 - **It was resolved to publicise the bottle bank at Top End Stores in the first instance as many residents are not aware of it.**
- Bulky Waste. The Clerk has objected about the loss of our free rural bulky waste service but Bedford Borough Council have stated that it cannot be provided because of Covid. Residents can arrange their own bulky waste collections which are provided by Bedford Borough Council for £37.55 for up to 5 items or £57.95 for 6-12 items plus £18.80 administration charge.
- The fly tipping on land at ex Traveller Site in Upper Staploe has been reported to the Borough Council who have said that it is the responsibility of the landowners to clear this. However, they are unable to contact the landowners. **It was resolved to request that Bedford Borough Council clear the land and add it to the outstanding debt that already exists on the land.**

2021/059. Bridge repairs

- The footbridge at the Old Chapel has been repaired in Honeydon at a cost of £330. £164 will be met by Staploe Parish Council from our earmarked reserve using money saved when the defibrillator was installed for free by Peter Banks and £166 will be met by Thomas Morris Estate Agents who own the Old Chapel. Staploe Parish Council are not responsible for the bridge but offered to contribute to the repairs as a gift to Thomas Morris as they are kindly hosting the defibrillator.

2021/060. Ward Fund

- **It was resolved to request repairs to the noticeboards and litter bins for the end of Woodhouse Lane if Bedford Borough Council will empty them.** Proposed by Cllr. D. Smith and seconded by Cllr. J. Thomson.

2021/061. Consultations

- The Clerk reminded those present to complete Bedford Borough Council's bus travel survey by 11th June (see Borough Cllr. T. Wootton's ward report).

2021/062. Crime and Policing

- The Clerk will discuss suitable dates for a Ward Forum on zoom with Borough Cllr. T. Wootton and invite Festus Akinbusoye (new PCC) to present at the forum.

2021/063. Highways, Rights of Way and Rail

- East West Rail. See Borough Cllr. T. Wootton's ward report at agenda item 2021/052. Staploe Parish Council will formulate a response in a future meeting before the deadline of 9th June.
- A428 / Black Cat. The application for a development consent order for the A428 Black Cat to Caxton Gibbet improvements scheme has been accepted for examination by the Planning Inspectorate. The Clerk has been provided with a memory stick containing the application documents and will put links and information on the website. Representations should be made on or before 10th June 2021.
- Highway issues. The Clerk continues to report potholes, broken or missing signs etc. There were no other issues reported.
- Definitive rights of way map. **It was resolved to order 2 updated copies on A3 for the new footpath representatives at a cost of £7.15 each using the earmarked reserve for literature and information.**

2021/064. Finances

- Receipts and payments are listed on p15-16. They were examined with the invoices in advance of the meeting and proposed for payment by Cllr. D. Smith and seconded by Cllr. J. Thomson who also signed the schedule of regular payments and cheques.
- The bank reconciliation is listed on p17-18. This was compared with the bank statements in advance of the meeting by Cllr. D. Smith and Cllr. J. Thomson.
- The earmarked reserves are listed on p19
- **Having been previously circulated it was resolved to approve the 2020-21 accounts and these will be uploaded to the website.** Proposed by Cllr. D. Smith and seconded by Cllr. G. Meola. The Clerk will circulate a typed version of the internal audit as some Councillors found the hand written report difficult to read.
 - The internal audit was conducted on 6th May by Kim Webb and no issues of concern were raised. Some councillors found it hard to read the writing on her detailed audit report. The Clerk will produce a typed version for the website.
 - The Annual Governance Statement was approved and will be signed by the Chairman after the meeting.
 - The Accounting Statements were approved and will be signed by the Chairman after the meeting. They are listed on p20
- £4426.26 of VAT for non-business activities has been reclaimed from 2020/21
- It was resolved to continue direct debits for:
 - Electricity with SSE Energy for street lights (approx.. £27-£33 per month on 19th)
 - Electricity with British Gas Lite for the Community Cabins (26.17p per day / approx.. £7.96 per month standing charge plus 16.52p per kWh)

- Water and sewage for the Community Cabins (£25.63 per quarter in Feb, May, August and November on 20th plus £1.42 per unit water and £1.59 per unit sewage)
- Information Commissioner (£35 per year on approx. 17th July)
- Zoom £14.39 per month from debit card account on 15th of the month to be reviewed in July.

2021/065. Policies

- The Code of Conduct was reviewed without amendment
- The Financial Regulations were updated to reflect the fact that there is only one councillor authorising each online payment. Barclays will only allow one person to set up the payment and one to authorise it. The Clerk has to be the one setting it up so there is only one councillor authorising the payment. However, two Councillors sign the schedule of payments and two councillors examine the invoices before each meeting. There was also a change to permit the Clerk's pension to be paid by BACS during the Covid pandemic as Bedford Borough Council are not accepting cheques.
- The risk assessments were updated.

2021/066. Clerk's Contract, Salary and Pension

- The Clerk's appraisal was conducted by the staffing committee (Cllr. R. Squire, Cllr. G. Meola and Cllr. J. Ibbett) on 13th May 2021
- The Clerk's contract was updated to reflect the additional hour per week she is working on the Neighbourhood Plan
- Salary review. The Clerk remains on salary point 17 and the National Joint Committee have yet to agree on salaries for 2021/22 so she will continue to be paid the same as in 2020/21 until they agree.
- Pension. The Clerk is enrolled in Bedfordshire government pension scheme. The employer pension contribution has increased to 25.8% of the Clerk's salary.

2021/067. Next Meeting

- Possible meeting to discuss response to the E-W rail consultation before 9th June
- Extraordinary meeting on Thursday 8th July to discuss Local Plan Review
- Ordinary meeting on Thursday 15th July

Summary of Transactions for Staploe Parish Council for Approval at Meeting on:

20/05/2021

2020/21 Accounts

In addition to the transactions listed from this financial year there were two payments made in the 2020/21 accounts which were not on the list of transactions approved in March

Ref	Date	Payee	Details	Type of transaction	Cheque / Ref Number	Amount
151	25/03/2021	Ebay	Post cap for decking area	Debit card		£2.75
150	31/03/2021	Norris & Fisher	Additional insurance for revalued cabins	BACS		£11.23

2021/22 Accounts

Main Account Payments

Ref	Date	Payee	Details	Type of transaction	Cheque / Ref Number	Amount
7	23/04/2021	SSE Energy	Electricity for street lights	Direct debit		£30.12
8	23/04/2021	BATPC	Affiliation fees 2021-22	BACS		£93.00
9	23/04/2021	SLCC	Membership for Clerk	BACS		£112.00
13	26/04/2021	Groundwork UK	Unspent Neighbourhood Plan Funds	BACS		£6,015.42
15	30/04/2021	Bradgate	Grass cutting playing field & Common 2 of 8	Standing order		£139.66
16	30/04/2021	Mark Ibbett	Highways grass cutting 1 of 8	Standing order		£180.00
21	20/05/2021	Wave	Water and sewage bill Community Cabins	Direct debit		£11.60
22	20/05/2021	Eon	Final Electricity Bill	BACS		£51.24
23	20/05/2021	Mark Compton	Repairs to bridge at Old Chapel, Honeydon	BACS		£330.00
25	22/05/2021	SSE Energy	Electricity for street lights	Direct debit		£31.81
26	20/05/2021	L. Crawford	Clerk's expenses Mch - Apr	Cheque	100935	£15.21
27	24/06/2021	L. Crawford	Clerk's pay Q1	Cheque	100936	£992.27
28	24/06/2021	Bedfordshire Pension Fund	Clerk's pension Q1	BACS		£310.77
Total						£8,313.10

Debit Card Account Payments

Ref	Date	Payee	Details	Type of transaction	Cheque / Ref Number	Amount
1	06/04/2021	Timpson	Cutting keys for cabins & GRP cabinet	Debit card	0	£34.90
3	15/04/2021	Zoom	Monthly subscription	Debit card	0	£14.39
4	16/04/2021	PC World Business	McAfee Total Protect virus protection	Debit card	0	£19.02
5	16/04/2021	Microsoft	Office 365 Personal	Debit card	0	£59.99
10	23/04/2021	Amazon Business	Metal putty for containers	Debit card	0	£5.20
18	03/05/2021	Amazon Business	Metal putty for containers	Debit card	0	£5.20
17	15/05/2021	Zoom	Monthly subscription	Debit card	0	£14.39
Total						£153.09

Main Account Receipts						
Ref	Date	Payee	Details	Type of transaction	Reference	Amount
20	13/05/2021	Bedford Borough Council	Precept	Credit	0	£1,389.51
24	20/05/2021	Thomas Morris	Contribution for repairs to bridge at Old Chapel	Credit		£166.00
Total						£1,555.51
Payment Account Receipts						
Ref	Date	Payee	Details	Type of transaction	Reference	Amount
19	05/05/2021	PC World Business	Refund for postage of virus check	Debit card	0	£5.98
Total						£5.98
Savings Account Receipts						
Ref	Date	Payee	Details	Type of transaction	Reference	Amount
29	04/05/2021	Barclays	Interest on savings	Credit	0	£0.10
Total						£0.10
Transfers						
Ref	Date	Recipient	Details	Main Account	Debit Card Account	Savings Account
11	23/04/2021	Staploe Parish Council	Transfer from payments to main	£0.00	-£280.25	£0.00
12	23/04/2021	Staploe Parish Council	Transfer to main from payments	£280.25	£0.00	£0.00
Total				280.25	-280.25	
Posted balances after the above transactions clear						
Community Account 30833940				£7,878.39		
Debit Card Acc 13099075				£10.78		
Base Rate Savings 43461580				£10,889.12		

STAPLOE PARISH COUNCIL BANK RECONCILIATION 1st APRIL 2021 TO 18/05/2021

Date of bank statement		18/05/2021						
Prepared by Mrs. Lucy Crawford, Parish Clerk								
			BARCLAYS					
			Community Account 30833940					
DATE			Receipts		Payments	Transfers	Balance	
1-Apr-21	Balance bf	£3,548.47						
18-May-21	Posted balance per accounts	£9,455.29	£12,196.77		£6,570.20	£280.25	<u>£9,455.29</u>	
Unpresented cheques / uncleared payments:								
	None							
	Total				£0.00			
18-May-21	Balance as per bank statement	£9,455.29						
18-May-21	Posted balance - cleared balan	£-						
18-May-21	Balance cf	£9,455.29						
			BARCLAYS					
			Base Rate Savings 43461580					
			Receipts		Payments	Transfers	Balance	
1-Apr-21	Balance bf	£10,889.02						
18-May-21	Posted balance as per accounts	£10,889.12	£0.10		£0.00	£0.00	<u>£10,889.12</u>	
18-May-21	Balance as per bank statement	£10,889.12						
18-May-21	Posted balance - cleared balance	£-						
18-May-21	Balance cf	£10,889.12						

				BARCLAYS				
				Payments Account 13099075				
				Receipts		Payments	Transfers	Balance
1-Apr-21	Balance bf		£438.14					
18-May-21	Posted balance as per accounts		£10.78		£5.98	£153.09	-£280.25	<u>£10.78</u>
18-May-21	Balance as per bank statement		£10.78					
18-May-21	Posted balance - cleared balance		£0.00					
18-May-21	Balance cf		£10.78					
Summary for all accounts				Receipts		Payments	Transfers	Balance
1-Apr-21	Balance bf		£14,875.63					
18-May-21	Balance per accounts		£20,355.19		£12,202.85	£6,723.29	£-	<u>£20,355.19</u>
18-May-21	Balance per bank statements		£20,355.19					
18-May-21	Balance cf		£20,355.19					

Staploe Parish Council Reserves				20/05/2021					
Earmarked Reserve Category	Category breakdown	Funds Reserved 01/04/2021	Receipts to reserve to 20/05/2021	Payments from reserve to 20/05/2021	Balance to 20/05/2021		Balance forecast to 31/03/2022		Comment
					Breakdown	Total	Breakdown	Total	
Village Hall Rebuild Reserve	General Village Hall Rebuild Fund	£3,752.90	£1,500.00		£5,252.90		£5,252.90		Refund for Village Hall heaters. (£140 used towards bus shelter, remainder to be used to purchase items for new hall).
	Heater refund (from Ward Fund 2018)	£660.00			£660.00		£660.00		
	Total Village Hall Rebuild Reserves					£5,912.90		£5,342.90	Infrastructure payment for Anglian Water for connection to main due 21st May 2021
Election fund		£510.29				£510.29		£510.29	
Literature & info fund		£48.41				£48.41		£34.11	£14.30 for copies of definitive map
Grass & hedge cutting field		£217.00	£45.00			£262.00		£262.00	
Hedge cutting Duloe Common		£75.00	£30.00			£105.00		£105.00	
Play area assets		£53.38				£53.38		£53.38	Towards installing the defibrillator, inspection of lights, noticeboard repairs
Maintenance		£164.13		£164.13		£0.00		£0.00	Old Chapel bridge repairs
Defibrillator		£60.00	£50.00			£110.00		£110.00	
Asset replacement (eg. laptop, noticeboards)		£100.00	£125.00			£225.00		£225.00	
Tree works		£350.00	£253.00			£603.00		£603.00	
Neighbourhood Plan		£6,015.42		£6,015.42		£0.00		£0.00	Due in 2023/24
Street light inspection		£0.00	£434.00			£434.00		£434.00	
Total earmarked reserves		£12,006.53	£2,437.00	£6,179.55		£8,263.98		£7,679.68	
Available reserves		£2,869.10				£10,715.21		£9,632.95	
Total funds		£14,875.63				£18,979.19		£17,312.63	
Earmarked reserves = funds set aside for a specific purpose. These can only be allocated to another purpose if the council passes a resolution to do so.									
Available reserves = total balance in the accounts less the earmarked reserves. This should be 50-100% of our precept ie. £6351 - £12702									
Therefore £9632.95 is within the recommended range.									

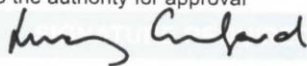
Section 2 – Accounting Statements 2020/21 for

STAPLOE PARISH COUNCIL

	Year ending		Notes and guidance
	31 March 2020 £	31 March 2021 £	
1. Balances brought forward	14,071	25,552	Total balances and reserves at the beginning of the year as recorded in the financial records. Value must agree to Box 7 of previous year.
2. (+) Precept or Rates and Levies	10,500	11,554	Total amount of precept (or for IDBs rates and levies) received or receivable in the year. Exclude any grants received.
3. (+) Total other receipts	28,497	15,996	Total income or receipts as recorded in the cashbook less the precept or rates/levies received (line 2). Include any grants received.
4. (-) Staff costs	4,041	4,130	Total expenditure or payments made to and on behalf of all employees. Include gross salaries and wages, employers NI contributions, employers pension contributions, gratuities and severance payments.
5. (-) Loan interest/capital repayments	0	0	Total expenditure or payments of capital and interest made during the year on the authority's borrowings (if any).
6. (-) All other payments	23,475	34,096	Total expenditure or payments as recorded in the cashbook less staff costs (line 4) and loan interest/capital repayments (line 5).
7. (=) Balances carried forward	25,552	14,876	Total balances and reserves at the end of the year. Must equal (1+2+3) - (4+5+6).
8. Total value of cash and short term investments	25,552	14,876	The sum of all current and deposit bank accounts, cash holdings and short term investments held as at 31 March – To agree with bank reconciliation.
9. Total fixed assets plus long term investments and assets	44,504	45,381	The value of all the property the authority owns – it is made up of all its fixed assets and long term investments as at 31 March.
10. Total borrowings	0	0	The outstanding capital balance as at 31 March of all loans from third parties (including PWLB).
11. (For Local Councils Only) Disclosure note re Trust funds (including charitable)	Yes	No	The Council, as a body corporate, acts as sole trustee for and is responsible for managing Trust funds or assets.
	✓		N.B. The figures in the accounting statements above do not include any Trust transactions.

I certify that for the year ended 31 March 2021 the Accounting Statements in this Annual Governance and Accountability Return have been prepared on either a receipts and payments or income and expenditure basis following the guidance in Governance and Accountability for Smaller Authorities – a Practitioners' Guide to Proper Practices and present fairly the financial position of this authority.

Signed by Responsible Financial Officer before being presented to the authority for approval



Date

11/05/21

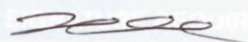
I confirm that these Accounting Statements were approved by this authority on this date:

20/05/21

as recorded in minute reference:

2021/064. Finances

Signed by Chairman of the meeting where the Accounting Statements were approved



Appendix A Comments about the Solar Farm

The following comments were received in advance of the meeting:

1. John Hobbs (Duloe) via website 23rd April 2021

Dead against the eastern extension of this solar farm, far too close to housing in Duloe. I see Mr Jamieson is based in Glasgow, I bet he hasn't got one of his "installations" up against his back fence. Also don't be seduced by the "community benefit funding", it's nothing more than blood money, a bribe. I assume Staploe Parish Council will be dead against this proposal, if they aren't they should resign en masse.

2. Dale I (non resident walker) via website 3rd May 2021

I walk my dog around the public footpaths within this area on average 6 days a week. Whilst I am glad to hear no PROW will be closed later in the letter it states any changes will not be significant and will be mitigated. This seems ambiguous to me. I would like to see full details of any proposed changes to public rights of way.

3. Bob Tucker (non resident from St Neots Facebook group) via website 3rd May 2021

Sounds like a good plan. Thumbs up.

4. John Ray (non resident from St Neots Facebook group) via website 3rd May 2021

Excellent idea. 50MW is a significant amount of power, to help us rely less on coal/gas power stations, and to help us fight against the climate emergency.

5. Jane Arnold (resident of Staploe) via website 6th May 2021

As much as I am in support of renewable energy I feel that the expansion is too much. There are 100s of houses being built in St Neots that all have roofs why can't they be utilised rather than our arable land. We are in danger of having a huge community with lots of energy but no food! Yes this can be imported but how sustainable and environmentally friendly is it long term. I feel like this is the easy option made by someone who will not be affected in any way by his "installation" other than reaping the rewards to benefit a community 100s of miles away. I must admit I have walked the fields between Duloe, Staploe and Hail Weston for over half my life and as much as I understand we can't stand still and we need to embrace progress it saddens me when we see nature being drowned in glass mud and weeds taking down trees that are hundreds of years old and saying that planting a 100 blackthorn bushes brings the environmental impact to a negative is rubbish we all know that these plants are chucked in and left to die but the box has been ticked so no one gives a second thought.

6. Lara Davenport-Ray (non resident from St Neots Facebook group) via website 14th May 2021

We currently face a climate crisis. Every village, parish and town should contribute what it can to help turn the tide of the changes that are overwhelming our planet. We have very little time to reduce CO2 emissions to a level that will restrict global warming to 1.5°C. With this crisis in mind, I am in favour of the expansion to the solar farm on land to the south of High Wood.

I agree in principal that solar farms are better placed on rooftops, allowing agricultural land to continue production and supply our local economy. However, we need to take action now to build up the sustainable energy supply in our communities. The land south of High Wood has been made available by the former agricultural owner, is adjacent to an existing solar farm, and has existing access for vehicles. The development company is ready to proceed with a plan to provide 50MW of power to our National Grid.

To supply this amount of power through non-sustainable methods would require the building of sites that would introduce air pollution or nuclear waste into our communities. A solar farm has less of an effect on the health of our residents and can be constructed in a way that the site could (someday) be returned to arable land.

For a stable national grid, we need micro-generation sites of renewable energy spread across our island. This will help prevent specific districts or counties from being overrun with renewable energy projects. If we do not contribute to this effort, our region runs the risk of being targeted for much larger projects (like the 500MW solar farm being developed by Sennica in East Cambridgeshire). National Strategic Infrastructure Projects like this will bypass local government and take decision-making away from District and County councils.

The developer suggests that “the land can be utilised for sheep grazing for the duration of the proposals.” The region would be better served by allowing the plot to lay un-cut and un-grazed throughout the application process and during the lifetime of the solar farm. This would better foster biodiversity in the area.

Every community needs to participate in sustainable energy production. This is a well-timed opportunity for Staploe to play its part. I urge Staploe Parish Council to support the application for the expansion to the solar farm on land to the south of High Wood.

-Lara Davenport-Ray

7. Tess W (resident of Duloe) via website 15th May 2021

This will entirely ruin the countryside around Duloe. It's much too close to housing. The area is being devastated to line the pockets of another with money. Don't be fooled into thinking its about being green. How are they compensating for the impact to the local homeowners who moved here to be somewhere rural? How are they compensating (properly) for lost habitat? The area is being totally ruined.

8. Rod Thompson (resident of Duloe) via website 19th May 2021

Being one of those living in Woodhouse Lane the proposed solar farm extension affects us more than most and reading the responses I can see the arguments for and against.

The need for renewable energy is obviously the way forward but agricultural land is equally vitally important and not something you can make any more of.

During the pandemic which is here to stay, the paths and bridleways through the fields that will be affected have seen a huge increase in the amount of locals using them.

Mental health is a massive problem in our society and it has been well documented the benefits of exercising in nature can have but I do not think somehow, that walking/cycling through tens of thousands of solar panels will have quite the same effect.

So to me it is all about finding a balance, one that addresses the problems and meets the needs of all the above, looking at it surely that is exactly what we have now, so why change it?

If this vast extension goes ahead it will change the whole rural landscape that we all enjoy living in and benefit from into one which would resemble an industrial area.

Please do not be seduced into being made to feel guilty for the need for renewable energy on our doorstep, we already have it and the people behind this vast project are in it for one reason and reason only – for the money.

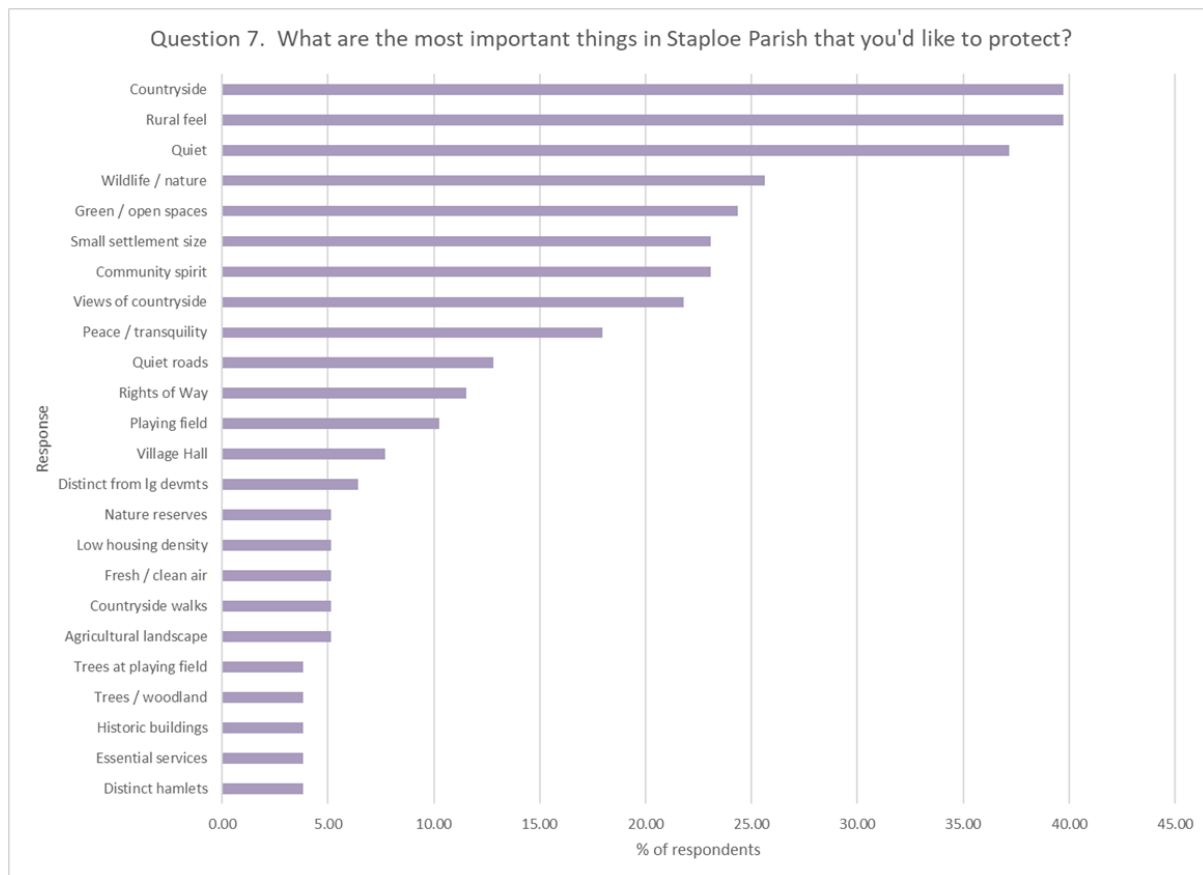
Much of Duloe is in a Conservation Area it has taken us 10 years and a lot of money to be granted a small extension on the back of our cottage because of the blinkered and restrictive views of a Conservation Officer that hates change and would not allow us to have double glazing let alone a solar panel on a building that nobody could see. But we are expected to see from our garden fields of unsightly solar panels which we could literally throw stones at – this reeks of double standards

9. Neighbourhood Plan Committee Meeting Tuesday 27th April

At a meeting of the Staploe Parish Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group on Tuesday it was agreed that I should write to the Parish Council to highlight the top five priorities that people wanted to protect in their responses to our first Neighbourhood Plan questionnaire. The group would like these to be taken into account as the Parish Council consider the planning application for the extension to the solar farm.

These were:

1. The countryside
2. The rural feel
3. The quiet
4. Wildlife / nature
5. Green / open spaces



10. Wildlife Trust – Brian Eversham & Martin Baker

A resident of Staploe has obtained some advice from the Wildlife Trust regarding the proposed new solar farm south of High Wood. They note that High Wood and Huntingdon Wood both appear in the Ancient Woodland Inventory Ancient Woodland (England) | Natural England Open Data Geoportal https://naturalengland-defra.opendata.arcgis.com/datasets/a14064ca50e242c4a92d020764a6d9df_0?geometry=-0.350%2C52.242%2C-0.295%2C52.251> so are likely to be County Wildlife Sites (the woods are just over the Cambs border). Looking at the aerial photos online, the existing hedges in the area are fragmentary and feeble, with few or no hedgerow trees - very few wildlife species would recognise them as linkages of any sort.

Looking at the late 19th century Ordnance Survey maps Side by side georeferenced maps viewer - Map images - National Library of Scotland (nls.uk) <https://maps.nls.uk/geo/explore/side-by-side/-zoom=16&lat=52.24806&lon=-0.32060&layers=6&right=ESRIWorld>> shows High Wood was more than twice the current size, but still without strong habitat links, though they suspect that, at that time, South Brook, running along the then northern edge of High Wood, would have been a good wildlife corridor to Huntingdon Wood to the east. High Wood was still its larger size at the time of Stamp's Land Utilisation Survey in the 1930s, Magic Map Application (defra.gov.uk)< <https://magic.defra.gov.uk/MagicMap.aspx>> (to view click on Landscape, then Landscape Classification, then Dudley Stamp Land Use Inventory, and zoom in), and separated from Huntingdon Wood by arable land, though there was a lot of grassland in the area, and they would guess the arable and grass may have rotated, so at times the woods would be loosely linked by pasture, in which case there may well have been functional hedges.

They suggest the solar farm should provide substantial wildlife corridors between the two woods, comprising a diverse and fairly tall hedgerow with a strip of nectar-rich grassland alongside, and preferably also a grassland link between the wood and South Brook. If the developer is willing, there may be opportunities to create grassland of a sort between and beneath the panels.

The best scheme they know of locally was at Shingay-cum-Wendy, where the German company BayWa implemented a scheme in partnership with local landowners and the parish council which restored a length of the Mill River, provided significant accessible natural greenspace and circular walk for the villagers, and contributes to a community fund for the parishes to spend from profits. They think this scheme is an exemplar.

[BRE Guidance](#)

11. Correspondence between Intelligent Alternatives and Tom Tagg by e-mail 12th May 2021

From: James Jamieson >

Date: 12 May 2021 at 10:52:00 BST

To: Tom Tagg

Subject: Re: Proposed Solar Farm on Land South of High Wood

Morning Tom,

Please note that this isn't an extension project. Rather it's a standalone project in terms of commercial agreements, the grid connection and the planning application, although clearly the cumulative impact of the proposed solar farm with the existing solar farm will be taken into account.

I trust this assists and is of interest, please let me know if you've any further queries at this stage.

Kind regards,

James

On Fri, 7 May 2021 at 12:43, <Tom Tagg > wrote:

For the attention of James Jamieson and Roy Amner.

Dear Sirs,

I understand that Intelligent Alternatives has written to the Staploe Parish Council regarding a proposed extension to the solar farm north of Staploe. I live in Staploe and have the following questions that I would like you to answer please, so that I may provide my comments on your proposal to the Parish Council?

- 1. Please explain why the size of the proposed extension to the Solar farm has been selected? The intention is to develop a 50MW solar farm, which is the largest that can be applied for under the Planning Act (rather than the project being a >50MW Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project) to maximise the likelihood of the scheme being viable.*
- 2. Please explain why the location of the proposed extension to the Solar farm has been chosen as shown on your plans? Why have the specific fields been chosen? This is based on a review of the land from a planning and technical point of view, and will be refined through the EIA screening, LPA pre-application and community engagement processes, as well as based on the feedback from the consultants (ecologists, heritage advisors, landscape architects etc). More land than is required is shown on the EIA Screening request, and this area will be reduced before the application is submitted.*
- 3. Please explain what will happen to Public Rights of Way around and within the proposed extension area to the Solar farm:*
 - a. During construction – will they be retained in place or will they be diverted? retained in place*
 - b. After construction – will they be retained in their original locations or will they be relocated? If relocated – to where? retained in original locations*
- 4. Please confirm the duration of the construction works and when these works are planned to commence? c. six months for the main construction activity. Subject to planning, a planned 2023 build*
- 5. Please confirm the capacity of the existing substation/connection point? 50MW*
- 6. Please confirm how much of this substation capacity is used by the existing Solar farm? 50MW as far as I'm aware (not really a planning issue)*
- 7. Please confirm how much of this substation capacity will be used by the proposed extension to the Solar farm? None, separate project in terms of legal agreements, grid connection and planning process*
- 8. Will a new substation be required for the proposed extension to the Solar farm? If so where will it be located? What will it's capacity be? Yes. Subject to design and detailed grid discussions, but ideally it will be adjacent to / a physical extension (with a separate connection and unique MPAN) of the existing substation*
- 9. What is the design life of the proposed extension to the Solar farm? 40 years as things stand just now*
- 10. What is the planned operating life of the proposed extension to the Solar farm? Anticipated that it will be a 40 year consent as things stand just now, with the scheme decommissioned thereafter and the land restored to current condition*
- 11. What is planned at the end of the operating life of the proposed extension to the Solar farm? Will it be removed or will it be replaced by new panels. Anticipated that it will be a 40 year consent as things stand just now, with the scheme decommissioned thereafter and the land restored to current condition*
- 12. Do you have plans for further extensions to the currently proposed extension to the Solar farm? If so, what are they? Not currently*
- 13. Please advise what actions will be deployed and how the solar farm will be managed for maximum ecosystem benefits. This will be fully detailed in the planning application, although NextEnergy place great importance and weight on securing substantial Biodiversity Net Gains (BNGs) on all their sites, and this will become a legal requirement once the Environment Bill becomes an Act. Happy to provide further details at this stage if you want; please advise.*

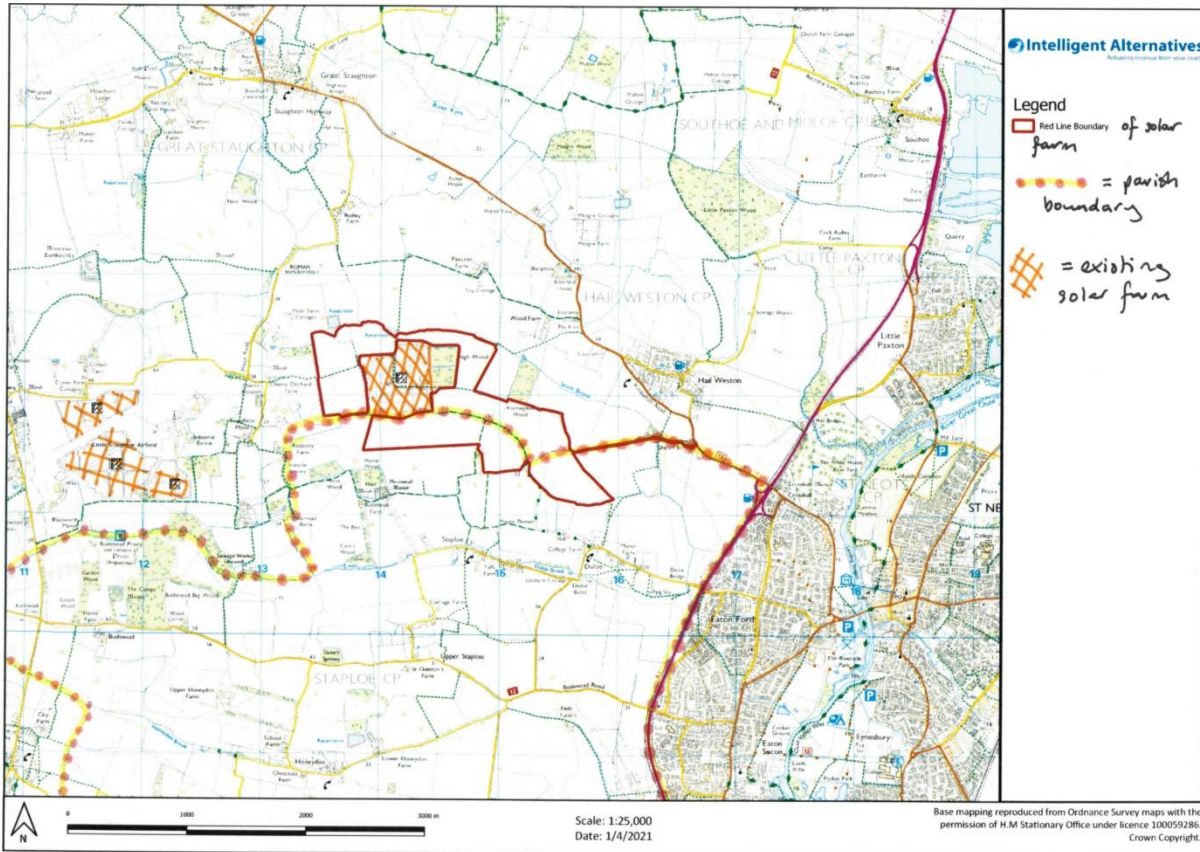
12. Walking Group Questionnaire (results given below after the questionnaire on p28)

The Village Walking Group

Solar Farm and Impact on the Community and its Footpaths and Bridleways.

Please could you read the information below about the impact of the proposed solar farm and let us know your opinions.

A The map below shows the size and site of the proposal crossing Parish boundaries. Detailed information regarding the proposed extension to the existing solar farm in our Parish, by Intelligent



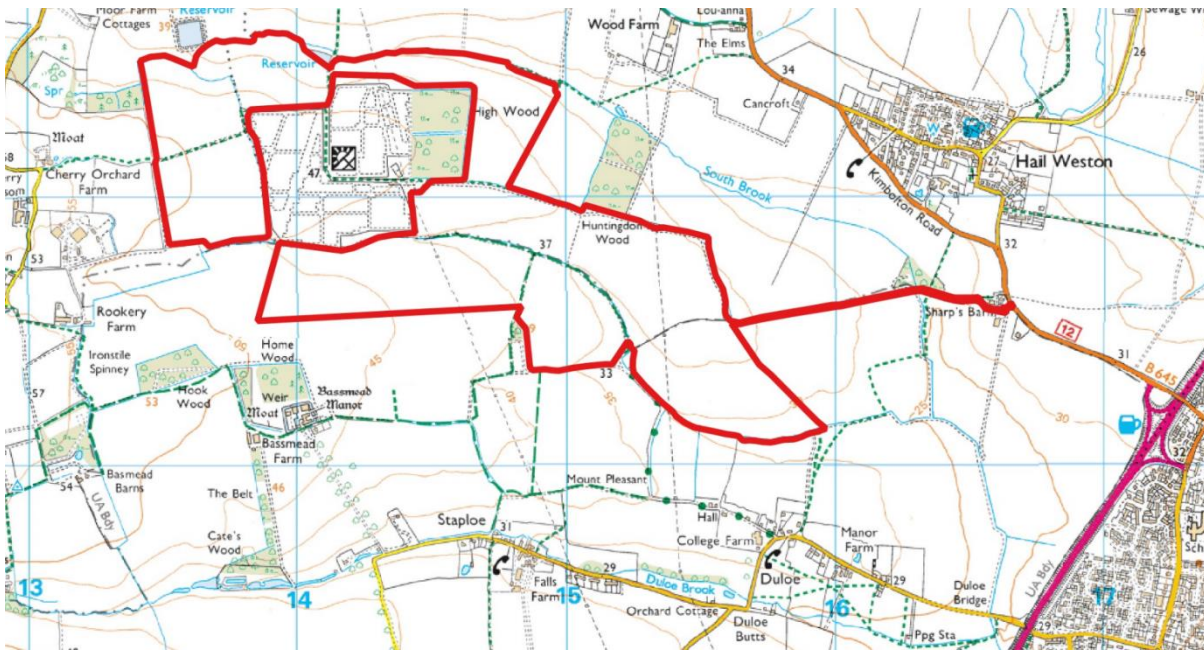
Alternatives, is provided on the Parish Council website.

<https://staploe-pc.gov.uk/proposed-extension-to-solar-farm/>

The recent Neighbourhood Plan survey in our Parish showed that the majority of local residents were in favour of promoting green energy use in our area. There was also a great desire to keep the natural environment as it is or plant more trees, hedges and wild flowers. Despite Intelligent Alternatives (IA) stating that 'impacts on the Public Rights Of Ways (PROW) would not be significant and can be mitigated against', the Solar Farm will affect countryside views and current popular walking and riding routes for many in our Parish. IA have said that they will protect Rights of Way and plant trees and mixed hedges to screen **the boundaries**. We have been fortunate that the local landowner has allowed use of the tracks as Permissive paths for many years but **these are not PROW**. **There is a Sec31 order in place preventing anyone claiming these as such**. However, as they are valued by the community and, as an act of goodwill, when constructing the Solar Farm, it would be a good opportunity to formalise access in perpetuity. This solar farm should also be considered as an extension to the current site and not a new project as can be seen clearly on map A. As such, it should be considered as a 100MW site (not 50MW) and subject to the more stringent planning process required of a large scale project. Apart from the impact of the size of this project, the Ancient woodland of High Wood will be surrounded on all sides by solar panels and wildlife will be cut off from waterways and adjacent countryside.

B The map below shows a closer view of the whole area and the footpaths that it would impact.

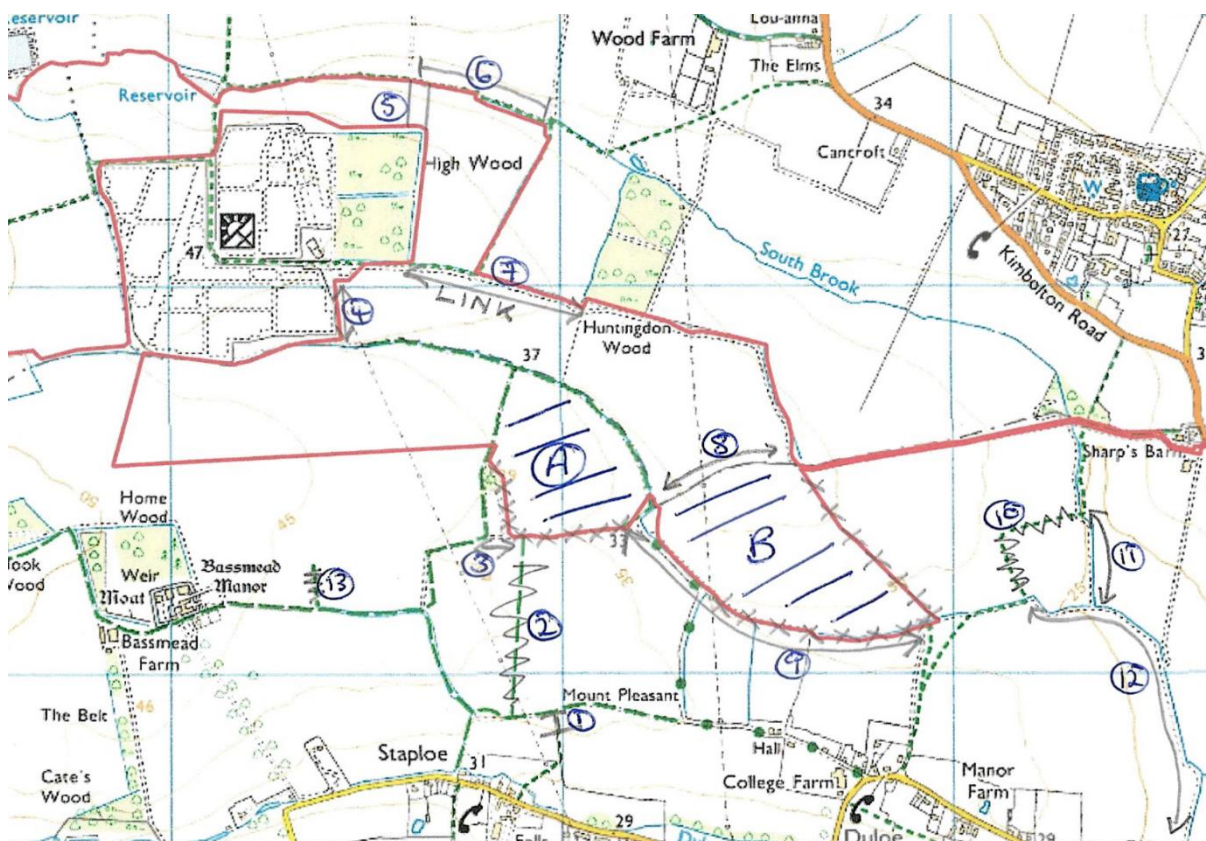
We would like the developer to protect existing hedgerows and trees, link the existing Ancient



Woodlands of High Wood and Huntingdon Wood, provide wildlife green corridors between High Wood and South Brook and provide wildflower meadow areas that are so important to local rare or endangered species such as Skylarks, Yellowhammers, Corn-buntings, the Small Eggar moth and Bath Asparagus. The developer has also indicated that **not all** the area would be covered by the solar panel array and so we would hope the wildflower planting areas mentioned would be meadows. Water features such as ponds are suggested by BRE to increase diversity and access for wildlife.

<https://www.bre.co.uk/filelibrary/nsc/Documents%20Library/NSC%20Publications/National-Solar-Centre---Biodiversity-Guidance-for-Solar-Development>

Here are some Suggestions to improve views and routes



Allocate Areas **A** and **B** as wild flower meadows. If this is not possible, they should be retained as agricultural fields.

XXX-hedgerow and trees along boundary

- 1.Join footpaths together where they are currently unlinked as it an access route to Hail Weston.
- 2.Lose this bridleway.
- 3.Create a footpath/bridleway link here as the area around field A is a very popular walking route for Parishioners and people from St Neots.
- 4.Convert this Permissive way into a Footpath to join the two footpaths.
- 5.Create a 'green corridor' of hedgerow and trees between High Wood and South Brook.
- 6.Provide a tree and hedgerow corridor along the boundary in front of the brook between High Wood and the Footpath.
- 7.Create a 'green corridor' of trees, hedgerow and grassland strip to link these two woods. This is deemed essential to the survival of the wildlife.
- 8.Keep this hedgerow and convert the Permissive Way to a Footpath.
- 9.Create a Footpath/bridleway along this track as it is regularly used by walkers from St Neots and the villages. This is highly visible from houses in Duloe and so a hedge is essential here.
10. Lose this Footpath.
11. Create a Footpath here to replace 10.
- 12.Create a Footpath here to link to St Neots. No pavement is present to allow safe pedestrian access from Duloe or Staploe to St Neots.
- 13.Lose this Footpath.

-Do you support this proposed extension to the existing solar farm?

Y/N other comment.....

-Is your support dependent on some or all of the above suggestions?

Y/N other comment.....

-Any other comments?

.....

If you agree with some or all of these suggestions, please could we have your permission to use your name in support of these proposals? Y/N

The Walking group comprises: Caroline and Steve Kent, Gill and Tom Tagg, Lucy Crawford and David Stead

Results: Do you support this proposed extension? Y-10 N-2

Is support dependent upon some or all of the suggestions? Y-10 N-2

Comments

These were answered as households not individuals.

Res 1-against solar proposal

Res 2-accepts all suggestions but concerned that losing bridleways opens the field to future development.

-they do not want area B to be developed

Res 3-not supporter of solar farm proposal but would support walking group proposals if it goes ahead.

Res 4-the development is too large

-agree with all walking group suggestions

Res 5-agrees with all walking group suggestions

I am a supporter of solar, but it has to be in harmony with the community and the environment – not just dumped where it is easy to build with minimal low cost attempts at environmental mitigation/enhancement as currently proposed. The surrounding and isolation of Ancient Woodland is taboo. If the issues regarding proximity to residential areas, views, footpaths/bridleways can be resolved and a high quality extensive scheme and management system for ecosystem and biodiversity enhancement is put in place then I can support the scheme.

Res 6-agree with all proposals but bridleway reroutes interdependent

-regarding the width of the solar panel field behind High Wood, they suggest using the whole width.

-footpath 8-whole length to Sharps Barn and metalled track to become a permissive way or footpath

-hedges around entire perimeter

Res 7-I ride bridleway 2. Could it be replaced with an upgrade of footpath to Huntingdon wood?

-path 8 could it also be a bridleway?

-if too close, reduction in house prices

Res 8-support all suggestions but concern about marooning of wood and field areas and strongly in support of green corridors.

Res 9-support all suggested

-footpath improvements needed.

Res 10-support all suggestions

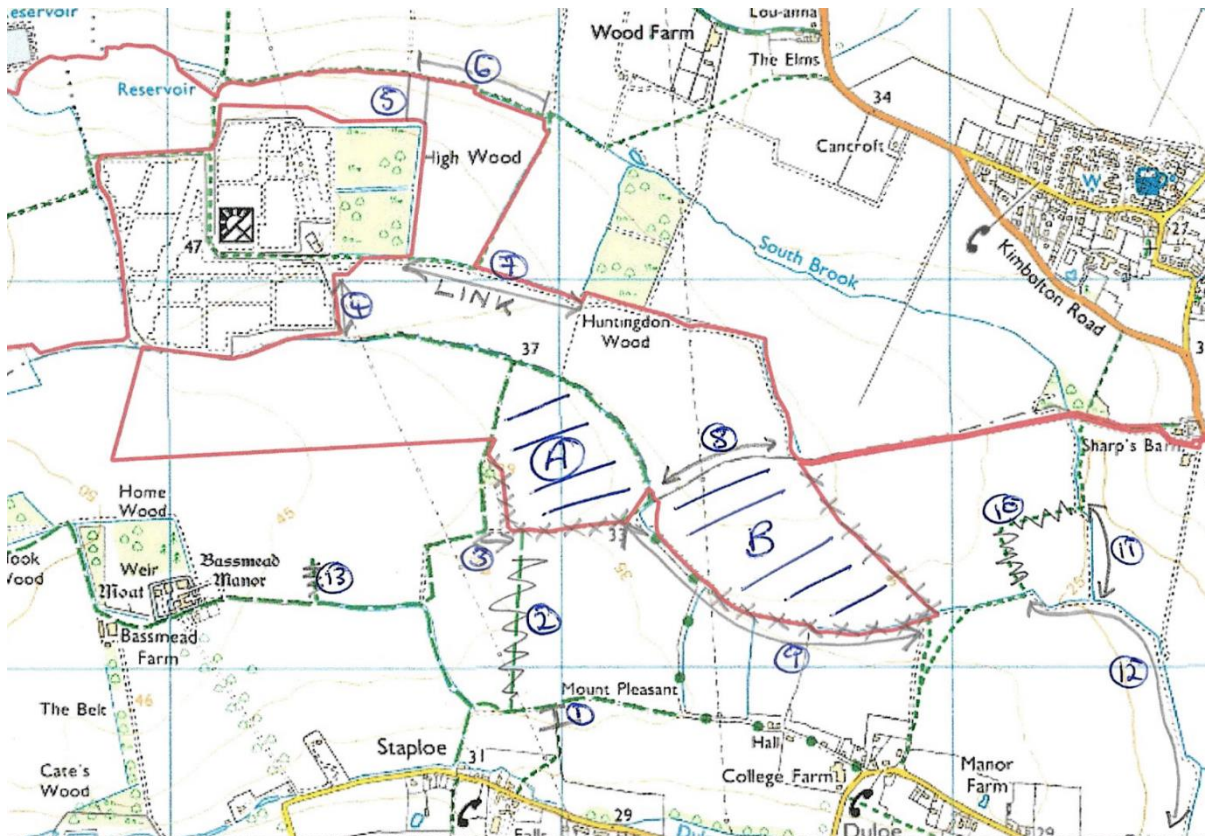
Res 11-support all suggestions

13. Gill Tagg, Prescott, Staploe

I am writing to you as the Parish clerk, with my views on the proposed extension to the Solar Farm to the south of High Wood.

Whilst I am in favour of green, solar energy and its important role in preventing climate change, I feel that this extension to the existing solar farm, is too large and too close to housing in the villages of Staploe and Duloe.

Intelligent Alternatives, the developers, should reduce the size by not siting solar panels in areas A and B, as shown on the map below.



If IA are unable to reduce the size, the areas equivalent to A and B should be relocated away from the villages and to other areas of the landowners estate - such as the fields north and west of Bassmead Manor.

This would leave some of the more popular footpaths and bridle ways outside of the boundaries of the proposed solar farm extension. It would also retain more of the rural views and open countryside close to housing, which residents have said that they value so much in the recently conducted neighbourhood plan.

I am upset and alarmed to see that the solar farm will completely surround High Wood, an ancient woodland, which has been in existence since at least 1600AD.

Ancient woodland currently makes up only 15% of all UK woodland and tree cover.

High Wood is now only 38% of the size it was in the 1970s. Its biodiversity will be severely damaged if it is isolated from the surrounding countryside.

In the GOV.UK Protected sites and species document - "guidance for Ancient woodland, ancient trees and veteran trees: protecting them from development" - it states planning permission should be **refused** if development will result in the loss or deterioration of ancient woodland.

I am also very concerned, regarding the effect that the solar panel array will have on ground nesting birds such as Skylarks. There are large populations of Skylarks nesting and breeding in these fields.

The Skylarks along with Yellow Hammers and Corn Buntings (which are also resident here), are on the “Birds of Conservation Concern 4” Red list, and therefore a wild bird survey will be required as part of the planning application for this project.

A full Environmental Impact Assessment should be completed.

If the solar farm development is approved, a major mitigation factor should be to protect and enhance the existing wildlife, ancient woodland, trees and flora. High Wood should be connected to the surrounding countryside at South Brook by a green, wildlife corridor. Mixed hedgerows, trees, field margins, and wild flower meadows should be planted. Ditches should be protected and enhanced for wildlife and new ponds created. The BRE (Building Research Establishment) “National Solar Centre Biodiversity Guidance for Solar Developments” document gives information and guidance for good practice. The solar farm should be developed to establish habitat enhancements, (particularly for those species under threat such as Skylark) and ensure it is properly managed with diligence, throughout its 40 year lifespan, leading to improved local wildlife & ecosystem biodiversity.

This could be an opportunity to improve wildlife diversity in the area if done well. However, I am somewhat cynical that the developers will want to embrace this chance to invest in and improve the biodiversity of the area in a meaningful way. Just sowing grass and grazing sheep is not good enough and an easy option. Will the developers want to cut into their profits by investing in a scheme that costs more to develop and manage over the long term? As stated by BRE, a Biodiversity Management Plan (BMP) should be written for each solar farm and written by a qualified (and hopefully independent) ecologist. This BMP should be submitted as part of the planning application. A final version should be agreed with all the stakeholders and the local planning authority prior to consent or alternatively afterwards as part of a planning condition. The BMP should be readily accessible to the public.

Kind Regards,

Gill Tagg

14. Graham Fry, Staploe

Planning applications for solar farms of 50MW and below are submitted to the local authority under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. Larger solar farms count as nationally significant infrastructure projects, and proposals are submitted to the Planning Inspectorate under the Planning Act 2008 and are subject to more rigorous national assessment. In this case I suspect that the developers are attempting to bypass this procedure, and their answers to Tom's questions (below) reinforce that suspicion.

They claim that their two projects are separate on the basis that they have structured the legal arrangements in that way. But it is obvious that if their present application is approved, there will be a continuous solar farm with a total capacity of 100 MW in the area around High Wood, built, owned and managed by the same companies and using the same infrastructure of access roads etc. For all practical purposes it will be a single entity. (In the old phrase, if it walks like a duck, swims like a duck and quacks, it probably is a duck.)

In my view, therefore, the local authority should reject the planning application on the basis that the new project is in fact phase 2 of a 100 MW solar farm and should be considered nationally. At the very least, they should obtain independent legal advice on this point before proceeding, as otherwise they might leave themselves open to the possibility of judicial review.

I am also opposed to the development on substance. The guidance makes clear that large solar farms should not be built on high-quality agricultural land if that can be avoided.

If, even so, approval is given, there should be binding conditions about the environmental mitigation, and I have already sent you the advice of the Wildlife Trust on that point.

15. Tom Tagg, Prescott, Staploe

See separate 7 page letter at Appendix B

16. Ann Kennedy, British Horse Society which references the numbers in the village walking group proposals (response 12)

You should be aware (it is a matter of public record on the BBC website and I would expect that the parish council have been informed though not sure) that the BHS has submitted a DMMO to record a bridleway for the section marked 3 on the map and also another from the end of the lane out from the village to join with the bridleway (there is currently a small gap). Both of these are supported by solid historical evidence.

We also believe that there may be sufficient evidence to support a DMMO for the route that is 8 on the map, extending out to the B645. This requires some more research now that the archive office is open. I am not doing the research myself.

There are also some routes identified for research in Cambs to the north of your parish along the south and western edges of the current solar farm (and so would be affected by any proposal to expand – has an application been made yet?)

The BHS's starting point would be to object to the removal of the bridleway at 2 unless there were compensating gains which at present I don't see in these proposals. Most of the additional PROWs suggested are footpaths. The 'new' bridleway at 3 is already claimed with solid evidence and so not a real gain other than perhaps one of speed. The creation of the footpath/bridleway at 9 would be a gain ... if it went anywhere! But as proposed it would be a dead-end. If the footpath into Duloe were upgraded that would be a real gain.

17. Tom Tagg, Staploe

In IA's message to the Parish Council, they offer a community benefit fund.

I don't really agree with this in principle as if this proposal goes ahead, I would just want them to do a good job of the development by addressing all our issues and use this money to go the extra mile on the environmental aspects so we could say that they had done an excellent job.

However if they still insist on this fund, then I would offer the following suggestions for the Parish Council to consider:

1. If they do not address this within the project, create a nature area on the land planned to be used to the north and east of High Wood, including tree planting to recover lost areas of High Wood in perpetuity. Trees would also address the tree planting initiative that the Queen has put forward as part of her Jubilee celebrations.
2. If this is to be a monetary sum then we should aim much higher than the ~£8,000 contribution to parish funds that was received from the previous solar development. On the basis that this new farm will cover an area 2.5 to 3 times the current solar area and have a much more significant impact on the landscape and our enjoyment of it, a minimum starting point should be 3 x £8,000 – i.e. £25,000.
3. Alternatively, they could fund the construction of the new village hall – in total, or with a grant of, say, £100,000.
4. Alternatively, as they will make significant profits every year for the next 40 years they could provide annual funding for the following:
 - a. Running costs of the village hall.

- b. Free electricity for all properties in the parish! With only ~150 properties and a solar farm producing enough power for 15,000 homes, this would only be 1% of their output. While difficult to administer this could be an equivalent payment to the Parish Council to reduce our Council Tax.

Let's not forget that Next Energy have plenty of money and they will be making serious annual profits – any sums paid now can be amortised over the life of the project, so will cost them very little.

18. Anonymous, Staploe

A resident of Staploe has asked whether Intelligent Alternatives would consider supplying and fitting solar panels to the roofs of parishioners who want them as part of this scheme

19. Richard Squire's response to the Walking Group leaflet (response 12)

I just wanted to say there are some very good ideas and discussion points raised in your pamphlet.

I would like to correct a few points and highlight a few.

Firstly the Little Staughton Solar scheme was 40 Mega watts not 50 and two thirds of it is on Little Staughton airfield . I'm not certain exactly how many megawatts were installed beside the High wood but think it is about 13.

The Intelligent Alternatives map of the proposed area is slightly unfortunate as to the north west of the High Wood there is already a new belt of trees and north of the trees is a grass sward which is establishing nicely (see photo attached) . This area wont be in any new panel scheme . Wildlife will not be cut off from waterways and the adjacent countryside . There are also two very healthy ponds within the wood.

There will be no hedgerows removed, as with the previous scheme more will be planted .

1/ The access to Hail Weston is open . A few years ago Hail Weston parish Council asked me if I could provide a permissive path so that walkers from Hail Weston did not have to walk along the B645 with no footpath to access the field footpath 16 that runs from B645 to Willow Row spinney (where the Round Barrow is) . This was easily sorted out and walkers can cross over the road from Bird Lane straight into my field with a permissive footpath and be away from the traffic and access the rest of the paths through the farm. (also see note 12 re access to Hail Weston from Sharpes barn)

2/ It is very difficult and expensive to move bridleways and footpaths.

3/ This is already in progress with Bedford Borough council

4/ I am generally squeamish about committing to new permanent rights of way because they are so difficult to move if there ever was a need in the future.

5/ I only own half of this distance but suspect my half could be done as part of the planting scheme

6/ There is a fibre optic cable beneath this bit which I suspect has a wayleave right of access over it and so trees on it might not work but a hedge beside it probably would. That would need checking.

7/ I don't see heaps of dead wildlife at present any where , why is a corridor suddenly so essential for wildlife to continue to survive ? As you can see the actual fencing used it allows all birds, amphibians,

reptiles, rabbits and hares access and most badgers and foxes can easily get through it if they want to
.

8/I will not let this hedgerow be removed

9/Completely agree about the hedge

10/ and 11 it's a nice idea if it was possible

12/ From Duloe you can currently walk all the way on footpaths into St Neots .Head north out of Duloe on the footpath 16 (see plan attached) continue along footpath 16 to footpath your number 10 (or you could use my hard farm track) you link to the bridleway 43 that heads East up the Shapes Barn hill remain on the bridleway to the north side of Sharpes barn cottages and cross the B645 on to the tarmac footpath West into Hail Weston go east and you can walk all the way to the Eaton Oak pub or into town along the pavement.

Whilst I am trying to diversify my cropping with green manure crops and catch and cover crop techniques within my arable rotation. I accept that a field of wheat is a monoculture and so potentially less diverse for wildlife . I do believe that as the grass matures beneath the panels it will become richer and richer in a diversity of wildlife particularly as these areas are almost completely undisturbed for most of the year and any cutting of the grass should be after late July when ground nesting birds have hatched .

Outside of the solar farm area 10 percent of my cropped arable area has now gone into environmental schemes for the benefit of insects, butterflies, bees, and birds.

20. Tim Ibbett via E-mail 20/5/2021

Please see below my comments regarding the proposed new solar farm:

1. If the proposed upgrade for A1 were to go ahead to the west of its present route it would take it straight through the solar farm.
2. The view across the valley will change from green fields to solar panels, but unlike Top Farm solar farm the village of Duloe is a lot closer to the proposed panels also if there a reflection or radiation implication?
3. If the proposal were to go ahead then the developers should contribute a substantially to the rebuilding of the village hall.

Kind regards

Tim

Mr TV Ibbett

The following representations were made at the meeting:

Tom Tagg (Staploe)

I am a supporter of solar power as a means to address climate change and I agree that solar installations must be made now.

However, I do NOT support the scheme as proposed by IA.

The recent neighbourhood plan survey of parishioners showed that the rural green open countryside, wildlife and walking routes were the most important aspects that the majority of people wanted to preserve. This scheme will degrade most of those aspects.

Why brownfield land and land of no agricultural value are not being used first, I don't understand.

However, with sufficient attention to layout, views, Ancient Woodlands and the provision of significant biodiversity enhancement, to produce a high-quality best-practice scheme, I could accept that the losses to the countryside would be my sacrifice to help address climate change.

My reasons are as follows:

Although this is stated to be a new 50MW solar farm which is legally and electrically separate from the existing solar farm west of High Wood, it will cumulatively impact the landscape as if it were a 70MW solar farm. In my opinion this cumulative effect has not been sufficiently considered in the proposals.

I foresee that the developer will have to overcome five significant hurdles:

1. An EIA will be required due to the cumulative impacts.
2. For planning purposes a 70MW scheme should be treated as a Nationally Significant Infrastructure project.
3. IA will have to justify why their plans fail to comply with the Beds BC and Hunts DC Local plans for 2030 and 2036, which do not allow the construction of solar farms on high quality agricultural land, which this is.
4. Government planning advice states that permission should be refused for schemes that have a direct or indirect impact on Ancient Woodland. The proposal to completely encircle the Ancient Woodland of High Wood will have such an impact.
5. Gain Local community acceptance.

Specific issues required to improve the scheme:

The IA proposal basically says that the topography is flat and that visual issues can be mitigated by planting hedges. This is incorrect – the rolling landscape means that the solar farm will be overlooked by properties in Duloe and Staploe and will be easily visible from many vantage points on the popular footpaths and bridleways in and around the area. It will be visible for miles and I expect that glare and glint will be an issue. Screening with hedges will not mitigate these issues.

The proposed location appears to have been chosen to bring the solar farm close to Duloe, while flatter areas to the north and west with a few scattered houses and little-used footpaths, have been ignored. Why is this?

These issues may be mitigated by careful selection of location. Only approx. 60% of the area proposed by IA will require solar panels to achieve 50MW output, based on the same density as the existing solar farm. I have therefore proposed a reduced area that moves the solar farm away from Duloe and does not encircle the Ancient Woodland of High Wood. These areas could then be used to significantly enhance biodiversity.

IA state that they will be targeting a 10% biodiversity net gain (as will soon become a basic requirement of the government's new Environment law). However there is currently limited biodiversity on the intensively farmed arable land. So 10% of not a lot is not really a target! Despite the lack of biodiversity, there are rare species such as skylarks, yellowhammers and corn buntings. Take a walk on the footpaths today and listen to the air full of birdsong from the population of skylarks that use these fields.

Although IA propose grass and sheep grazing below the solar panels I would expect to see significant biodiversity gains being targeted and achieved through design that would include large wildflower areas, mixed habitat, hedges and tree planting – all in accordance with the Best Practice biodiversity guidance provided by the BRE National Solar Centre.

The popular footpaths in and around the proposed solar farm must not become alleyways between solar panels. While hedging is proposed this should be accompanied by wide wildflower verges – the Village Walking Group has made proposals on footpath and bridleway preservation and enhancement which I support.

The final issue is construction – particularly noise. As the proposed solar farm is approx. 3 times the size of the existing, we will be subjected to piling noise that is either 3 times as long or 3 times greater. This needs to be mitigated and not be allowed to continue to 8-9pm as previously. In summary, if I am to sacrifice my countryside benefits, then I would only do this for a high- quality best-practice scheme and not the lowest cost option that I feel has been presented so far.

I would be happy to work with the Parish Council, IA and the landowners to improve the proposal. I would also ask the Parish Council what will be done to co-ordinate with Hail Weston and Great Staughton Parish Councils?

Graham Fry (Staploe)

He agreed with Tom Tagg and the wellbeing of the ancient woodland is his primary concern and feels there will be a need for very, very extensive mitigation around it. If solar panels are to be in place for 40 years then the mitigation needs to be sustained for 40 years. He also expressed concern that Intelligent Alternatives are arguing that this is a separate project. The rules are clear that schemes of over 50mW are regarded as major infrastructure projects for planning purposes and he does not believe it was the intention of parliament to allow several 50mW schemes to be created to avoid exceeding this threshold and avoid the resulting additional scrutiny. He expressed concern about whether we can trust Intelligent Alternatives and Next Energy if they are trying to exploit loopholes in planning – will they keep their promises in future?

Roy Amner (Intelligent Alternatives) on behalf of Next Energy

He explained that Next Energy are a large, stock market listed company. They are the owner and operator of the existing scheme. They are engaging with the Parish Councils and proposing an area larger than is needed to capture comments and then scale back. He said that the new solar farm would have an independent electrical connection from the existing one and therefore should be considered as a separate project not an extension.

The proposal is at pre-consultation stage with the local authorities (Bedford Borough Council and Huntingdonshire District Council). He thanked everyone for their comments and these will feed into their proposals.

Regarding their credibility and long term obligations – there are conditions attached to maintain the land and to reinstate the land at the end of the project. Landowners want to ensure they are not left with a non-operational solar farm on their land.

Many of the BRE recommendations on biodiversity have come from Next Energy solar farms. The stipulation that there should be a 10% net gain in biodiversity should become legislation within a year and Next Energy implement a 10% net gain minimum and much more in many cases. They include wildflower mixes, meadows, tree planting, beetle banks etc. He cited a solar farm on the edge of the M5 where they have planted extensive wildflower meadows, trees and public access areas with benches etc.

He stated that Next Energy had no intention of damaging Ancient Woodland and emphasised that this would be protected.

He explained that they would need to look at the land pattern and the existing constraints in order to work out the best layout and design. This is why they have highlighted more land than they will need.

He explained that the deed of community benefit payment is not conditional on the Parish Council's response to the planning application.

He expects the planning application to be submitted in late August as they need to do a geophysical survey after harvest.

Tom Tagg: if a solar farm is built on three sides of an existing solar farm it looks very much like an extension not a separate site.

He asked whether Intelligent Alternatives would be submitting a biodiversity plan and Roy said that they would. Tom pointed out that the current plans do not show much buffer around the ancient woodland.

Steve Kent (Staploe)

Under what circumstances would the scheme stop producing? Roy replied that there were no circumstances until the end of the scheme (40 years) and that Next Energy were highly, highly unlikely to go out of business.

Richard Squire (landowner) explained that the initial solar farm had a bond on the farm to return the site to its original state at the end of the scheme. The last thing he wants is a non-operational site on his land. He does not want to damage the biodiversity or the ancient woodland and feels that the grass under the current panels is better than monoculture for biodiversity.

Lucy Crawford (Staploe) explained that she walks the footpaths a lot and is particularly keen not to be walking with solar panels on either side – even if screened by hedges. If they could avoid solar panels on two sides of the most popular paths she would appreciate it.

Graham Fry asked what the relationship is between Intelligent Alternatives and Next Energy. Roy explained that IA are the agents for Next Energy and they manage the planning process, discharge of conditions, negotiate with landowners etc.

Philip Yockney (Duloe)

He recognises the need for solar energy but is concerned that sometimes discharging the conditions results in a “row of twigs” and these are not looked after or replaced when they die. Sometime mitigations are box ticking exercises. He requested that this site be made a showcase example of good practice and a gain for our community.

Damian Smith (Duloe) asked why the choice of solar energy vs wind. Roy explained that Next Energy only do solar. Until recently the conservative government were against onshore wind but this is now changing. He explained that wind is higher maintenance and less reliable than solar.

Richard Squire explained that large wind turbines can be seen for miles. They are controversial and not for him.

Emilio Meola (Duloe): as IA have “overclaimed” the area to be built how much can they scale back? Roy replied that they will be able to scale back by at least 10% but they need to do the modelling because there is an underground disused MOD oil pipe, a high pressure water and gas main, fibre cable, pylons. They need to look at archeology. They can’t commit to scale back to a fixed amount at this stage but our feedback will feed into the design and they will come back to us with more information before the planning application is submitted.

Tom Tagg: the existing solar farm requires 1.6ha per mW so he believes IA will only require 60% of the area to generate 50mW so he is expecting a 30-40% reduction.

Jane Thomson (Honeydon): people are looking for clarity and want a smaller area to be built.

Ged Meola (Duloe): she and many of her neighbours feel that it is too close to the houses on the north side of the road in Duloe. Roy acknowledged that this message had been received and would be taken into account.

Beth Minter (landowner's agent): solar developers usually outline larger areas and then scale back after they have looked at archaeology, underground infrastructure, woodland etc. This is normal practice.

Appendix B Letter from Tom Tagg regarding the solar farm

Prescott,
Staploe,
St. Neots.
Cambs,
PE19 5JA.
18th May 2021

For the attention of the Clerk to Staploe Parish Council.

Dear Lucy,

Proposed Solar Farm on Land to the South of High Wood

Please could you forward this letter to the Staploe Parish Council members, other than any conflicted members.

This letter is written to express our views on the proposal by Intelligent Alternatives (IA) for a new 50MW solar farm on land to the South of High Wood.

Intelligent Alternatives are seeking an EIA Screening Opinion and pre-application advice for their proposals from Huntingdonshire District Council and Bedfordshire Borough Council. Our views are based on the information in the IA proposal documents and on the answers provided by IA to questions from parishioners.

Although the proposal is for a new 50MW solar farm it is planned to surround an existing section of the 50MW Little Staughton Solar Farm that commenced operation in December 2019. The combined and extended physical, visual and ecological impacts of the existing and proposed Solar Farms must therefore be considered as a whole.

Existing Solar Farm

The existing 50MW Little Staughton Solar Farm is in two separate sections covering ~50Ha (~30MW) of brownfield land at Little Staughton Airfield and ~30Ha (~20MW) of previously farmed land to the west of High Wood.

Proposed Solar Farm

The proposed land-take shown on the IA drawings is shockingly large. It covers very large swaths of rolling open farmed countryside; overruns many popular public footpaths/bridleways; encircles the Ancient Woodland of High Wood; and extends east and south to within 250m of residential properties in Duloe. This new solar farm will be very visible to residents in Duloe and Staploe. It is surprising that the areas proposed are so close to residential areas, while largely uninhabited areas with scattered dwellings to the west and north have not been selected.

Climate change

We understand and support the fact that the UK must move to greener energy production to combat climate change and that solar power will play a key part in this transition. However, as with all developments, solar farms must be developed by listening to the concerns of the local communities, being sensitive to the landscape and protecting the ecological value of the land. Renewable energy deployment must take place in harmony with the natural environment.

The Planning Process

1. EIA Screening Opinion

The developer has stated that an EIA was not required for the existing Little Staughton solar farm and that they consider that their proposals will not have a significant effect on the environment – hence no EIA is required for the proposed new solar farm extension.

This is incorrect – an EIA is required for this scheme under the criteria in Schedule 3 of the EIA regulations for the following reasons:

- The Characteristics and potential impact due to: the size and design of the whole development; cumulation with the existing development; the magnitude and spatial extent of the impact; the cumulation of the impact;
- The significant impact on the environment, e.g. the impact on the Ancient Woodland of High Wood; the loss of nesting habitats for rare birds (e.g. skylarks).

2. Correct Application Process?

IA have stated that their intention is to develop a 50MW solar farm, which is the largest that can be applied for under the Planning Act, to maximise the likelihood of the scheme being viable. However IA recognise that while the new solar farm will be electrically and legally separate from the existing solar farm, it will form one continuous solar farm by encircling the existing operating section to the west of High Wood. This section has a capacity of ~20MW, so the total capacity will be ~70MW. The developer should therefore apply for this extension through the process for a project being a >50MW Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project, where it will receive the rigorous level of national scrutiny required for a project of this scale. Otherwise what is to prevent repeated 50MW additions covering Bedfordshire or Cambridgeshire?

Alternatively the developer may wish to reduce the size of the proposed scheme so that when combined with the existing operating section to the west of High Wood it does not exceed 50MW in total.

3. Rejection of Proposed Scheme

It is our opinion that the scheme as currently envisaged must be rejected for the following reasons:

- a. The Bedford Borough Council Local Plan 2030 states that large scale solar power projects should NOT be developed on high quality agricultural land. The land that is proposed to be used is Grade 2 land with a high agricultural value.
- b. The Huntingdonshire District Council's Local Plan to 2036 requires proposals for solar farms to apply national guidance and to follow industry best practice guidance such as that available from the Building Research Establishment (BRE). It also notes that developers and landowners considering such proposals should be aware of the high proportion of high quality agricultural land (grades 1 and 2) in the district, with reference to the requirements of policy LP 10 'The Countryside'.

LP10 states that All development in the countryside must:

- i. seek to use land of lower agricultural value in preference to land of higher agricultural value.
 - ii. recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside; and
 - iii. not give rise to impacts that would adversely affect the use and enjoyment of the countryside by others.
- c. The project plans to encircle the Ancient Woodland of High Wood.

Gov.uk planning guidance states that Ancient Woodland takes hundreds of years to establish and is an irreplaceable habitat. It is any area that has been wooded continuously since at least 1600 AD.

Planning permission should be refused if development will result in the loss or deterioration of Ancient Woodland. Nearby development can have an indirect impact on Ancient Woodland and the species they support. Examples include:

- breaking up or destroying connections between woodlands and ancient or veteran trees
- reducing the amount of semi-natural habitats next to Ancient Woodland
- changing the landscape character of the area.

The proposal impacts the Ancient Woodland in all these ways and permission must therefore be refused.

However should the Councils consider that the proposals can be considered under the Planning Act, then the developer should demonstrate why he is not using brownfield land for the development as a first priority, or land with no agricultural use. He should provide a scheme that follows the best practices for siting, land use and community engagement in building and managing solar farms that the industry has developed and should follow the BRE National Solar Centre Biodiversity Guidance. We strongly request that the following material issues are considered and appropriate conditions and controls placed on any planning permission that may be granted to ensure the developer complies with all his obligations during construction and for the operating life of the solar farm.

Issues for Consideration

IA have issued their proposals to elicit the opinions of the Councils and have invited the opinions of the local community. With appropriate attention to the following issues we may be able to accept that if the development were to be approved, we would be able to live with it.

1. Visual Impact
2. Proximity to residents
3. Size of land-take
4. Impact on Ancient Woodland
5. Improvements to ecosystems
6. Impact on public footpaths
7. Construction impacts
8. Operational impacts

We comment specifically on each of these below:

1. Visual Impact

The Staploe Parish Council have recently completed a survey of the residents in the parish as part of the development of a Neighbourhood Plan. The top priorities that parishioners wanted to protect included:

1. Countryside
2. Rural feel
3. Quiet / Peace / Tranquillity
4. Wildlife / Nature
5. Green / Open spaces
6. Views of the countryside
7. Rights of Way

The solar farm should be located and designed to avoid, minimise and mitigate any impacts to all the above key aspects.

IA state that the land has a flat topography. This is incorrect – the land is rolling countryside and if developed as planned there will be multiple properties and viewpoints that will overlook the solar arrays and it will be seen for miles around. IA also state that “Glint and glare issues will be minimal as the Site is not directly overlooked from the south.”. The site is overlooked from the south and given the elevation of the properties, glint and glare are likely to be significant.

Will properties that overlook the development be entitled to compensation for loss of amenity?

The solar farm should be designed so that there will be no visual impact to residential properties in Duloe and Staploe.

The visual impact to the hundreds of people who use the footpaths and bridleways in the area should be mitigated by hedging and tree screening as proposed, but with 15m wide wildflower margins between the footpath/bridleway and solar area fencing.

2. Proximity to residents

The proposed area for the solar farm extends from the existing solar farm east and south to within 250m of residential properties in Duloe. This is too close and is unnecessary when large open areas of farmland are available to the west of the existing solar farm, where there are isolated properties and footpaths have very limited use. The plan in Appendix 1 shows alternative suitable land areas available to the west that we request are considered for an alternative layout.

3. Size of land-take

The existing solar 50MW solar farm covers a total area of ~80 Hectares, i.e. a density of ~1.6 Hectares/MW

The potential land-take shown on the proposed IA plans for the new solar farm is ~135 Hectares. At the same density as the existing (1.6Ha/MW), this area has a capacity of ~85MW. It follows therefore that only 60% of the proposed area is required to be covered in solar panels to achieve 50MW capacity. If the alternative layout using land to the west is not adopted, then with reference to the plan in Appendix 2, it is proposed that solar panels are placed only on areas 1, 2, 5 (part), 6. This will mitigate visual, proximity and footpath/bridleway impacts and provide significant opportunities to maximise ecosystem and biodiversity improvements.

4. Impact on Ancient Woodland

The IA plans highlight that two Ancient Woodlands will be impacted by the proposed extension to the solar farm: High Wood and Huntingdon Wood. These two Ancient Woodlands are connected by open farmland and by South Brook.

The proposed extension to the solar farm will place solar panels only on the southern boundary of Huntingdon Wood.

High Wood is already bounded on its western boundary by the existing solar farm. The proposed extension will erect solar panels on its other three boundaries, completely encircling this Ancient Woodland.

High Wood was shown on the 1970 Ordnance Survey maps as being much larger. Since then destructive farming practices have removed 62% of its original size to leave only 38%.

With reference to the plan in Appendix 2, areas 3 and 4 are intended to be used for solar panels which would cut off any connectivity for wildlife with Huntingdon Wood and South Brook, thus sterilising the Wood and threatening the very survival of the wildlife.

Areas 3 and 4 should not be used for solar arrays but instead, opportunity should be taken in these areas to significantly enhance the ecosystem and biodiversity. It is proposed that historic woodland loss from these areas is recovered by tree planting to expand High Wood in perpetuity and wildflower meadows are provided to cover any remaining parts of Areas 3 and 4.

5. Improvements to ecosystems and biodiversity

There is a growing body of evidence that well-designed and managed solar farms can lead to significant biodiversity gains and provide a haven for British wildlife, including declining species such as foraging bats, yellowhammers and grey-legged partridges. Because solar farms can be in place for 30-40 years and require minimal human disturbance to maintain, there is potential for a range of conservation initiatives to be implemented.

Schemes such as planting hedgerows and creating wildflower meadows have far-reaching benefits including biodiversity and habitat provision, flood mitigation, carbon storage, soil erosion mitigation and pollination for food provision. In the light of the ongoing declines of bees, butterflies and farmland birds across the UK, it is vital that we take every opportunity to encourage more environmentally-sensitive land management.

The intensive modern arable farming methods used on the land proposed for the solar farm have over the years largely destroyed the natural biodiversity by the removal of hedgerows and trees and the use

of fertilisers and pesticides. It is essential that the proposal therefore protects the remaining current biodiversity, but it also provides the opportunity to significantly enhance the ecosystem and biodiversity. The indications in the current proposal of some wildflower areas (where and how big?) and bat-boxes are totally insufficient. The proposal to maintain farming by grazing sheep on grassed areas below the solar panels may prevent natural biodiversity being re-established and is unacceptable unless correctly managed.

To be able to accept any proposed extension to the solar farm a site-specific Biodiversity Management Plan (BMP) must be provided. The BMP should be written by a qualified ecologist and should incorporate recommendations from Habitat Surveys, Environmental Impact Assessment, tree surveys or other ecological studies, as appropriate. The BMP, at least in a preliminary form, should be prepared and submitted as part of the planning application for the proposed solar farm.

The BMP must include the following requirements:

Protection of existing habitats and biodiversity:

- a. Prevent encirclement, isolation and sterilisation of High Wood (as described above).
- b. No removal of existing hedgerows or trees (which are limited at best, as a result of modern destructive farming).
- c. Maintain habitat for the populations of skylarks, yellowhammers and corn buntings, which are all on the RSPB red list of endangered species.
- d. Maintain open drainage ditches.

Enhancement of habitats and biodiversity:

- a. Additional tree planting to extend High Wood in perpetuity.
- b. Wildflower meadows and areas of tussocky un-cropped grassland in areas 3, 4, 7 and 8 shown on the plan in Appendix 2.
- c. Wildflower meadow corridor over the high pressure gas main that crosses the proposed extension to the solar farm.
- d. Planting wild bird seed or nectar mixes, or other cover crops that will benefit birds and other wildlife. For example, pollen and nectar strips will provide food for pollinating insects through the summer period, and wild bird seed mixes will provide food for wild birds through the winter.
- e. All boundaries of solar panel areas planted with mixed species hedging and trees which can provide nesting and foraging areas, as well as a means for wildlife to move between habitats.
- f. All footpaths beside or between solar panel areas to have a 15m wide wildflower margin between the footpath and solar area fencing.
- g. Solar panels to be at a sufficient height for regular cutting or grazing to be unnecessary allowing rough pasture to develop, providing nesting sites for birds.
- h. Grazing of sheep below solar panels needs to be correctly managed, but there may be more appropriate management options for arable wildlife and farmland birds that could be incorporated.
- i. Provision of bee hives and maintenance during the life of the solar farm.
- j. Ponds and open drainage ditches.
- k. Bat-boxes

6. Impact on public footpaths

The IA proposals refer to Hail Weston footpaths to the north of the proposed extension to the solar farm. No mention is made of the footpaths and bridleways in the proposed area of the solar farm to the south and east adjacent to Duloe and Staploe. These footpaths and bridleways are actively used by hundreds of people each week for walking, running, cycling, dog walking and horse riding. In this pandemic year these have been invaluable for the health of the local community. They have also been “discovered” by many people in the adjacent town of St. Neots.

These footpaths must be preserved for the continued health of the community. IA say that they will maintain all Public Rights of Way, both around the solar farm and those that cross the proposed solar farm areas. As can be seen from the Neighbourhood survey results the open aspects and views are a key part of the local environment so the footpaths need to be designed with hedging, trees and wide wildflower margins to prevent them becoming alleyways between solar panels. The parish Village Walking Group has made specific suggestions about the footpath network, hedging and wildlife areas, to ensure that circular walks are maintained and that these standards are achieved. Their suggestions are attached at Appendix 3.

7. Construction impacts

The existing solar farm became operational in December 2019. Construction of the section adjacent to High Wood took place in 2019 with piling throughout many months in the summer and autumn. In the quiet, open rural landscape, piling could be easily heard every day in Staploe and Duloe, especially when often piling late in the evening until 8-9pm.

The proposed extension to the solar farm will be approximately 3 times the size of the existing section adjacent to High Wood. IA state that the works will take about 6 months to complete, i.e. in a similar timescale to the existing. To do this, 3 times as much plant and equipment will have to be used and the piling noise will be 3 times greater. IA only refer to controls over delivery times, but given the proposed close proximity to residents, the following construction controls will be required:

- Construction must be timed to avoid sensitive periods (e.g. the bird breeding season (March 1st-July 31st)).
- Any piling work within 1 km of residential properties to use “silent piling” methods.
- Any noisy works to only be carried out Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm.
- No works to be carried out on Saturday afternoons and Sundays.
- Users of the footpaths and bridleways to be protected from construction noise.
- Light pollution prevention from works in the autumn and winter.
- Follow-up environmental works to be put in place immediately after construction (or in the first appropriate season), rather than leave for 18 months to plant hedgerow whips, as the existing solar farm.

8. Operational impacts

The proposed extension to the solar farm needs to be designed so that any operational noise created by the substation/connection point and intermediate fans/inverters/batteries and generator type units within the solar farm cannot be heard beyond the boundaries of the solar farm. The use of “silent running” equipment or acoustic enclosures may be required.

Conclusions

The above demonstrates that significant work is required to develop the current plans to an acceptable level.

The protection of our rare Ancient Woodland is essential and the major opportunity to protect and significantly improve the ecosystems and biodiversity must be grasped.

We therefore recommend that:

- An EIA is carried out
- Planning permission is sought for a Nationally Significant Infrastructure project, or alternatively the scheme is reduced in size to allow submission under the Planning Act.
- The local communities of Staploe and Duloe are actively consulted by IA in the development of their plans.

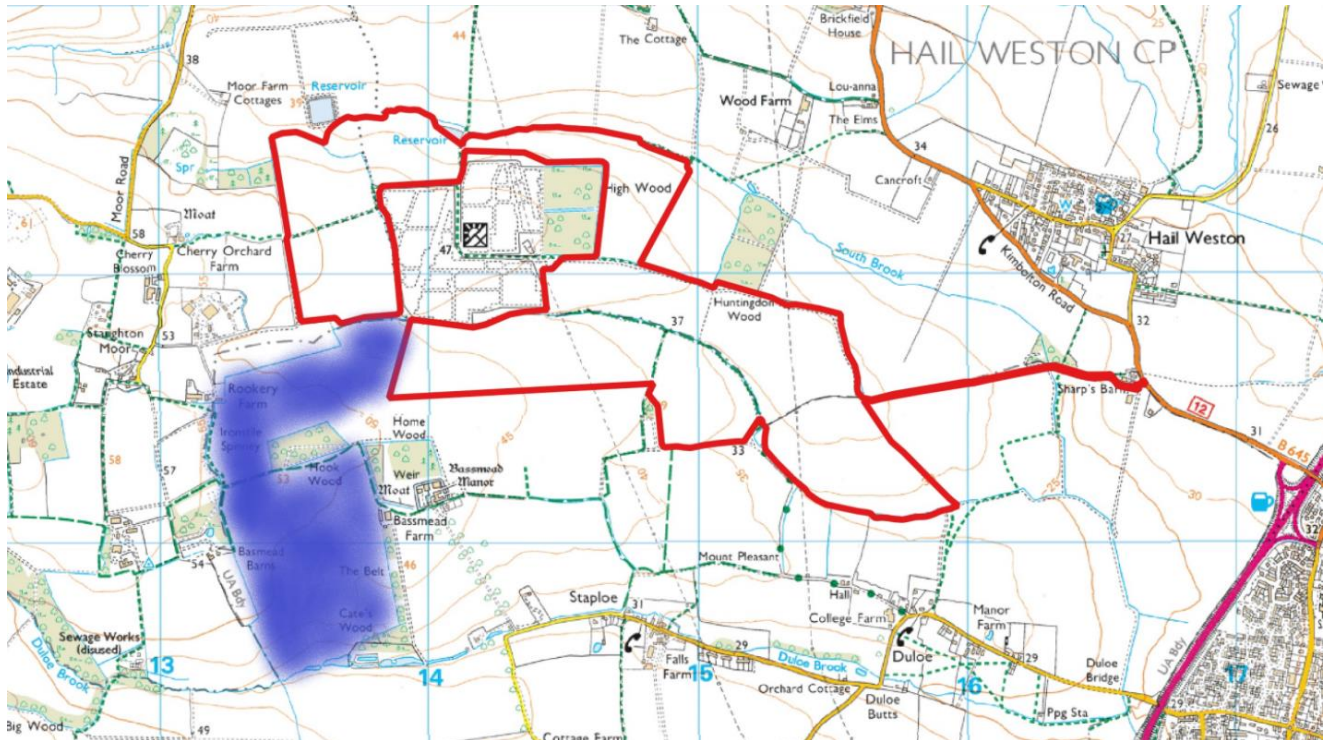
We appreciate the early engagement by IA with the community and remain available to work with the developer to achieve a solution that will be acceptable to all.

Yours Sincerely

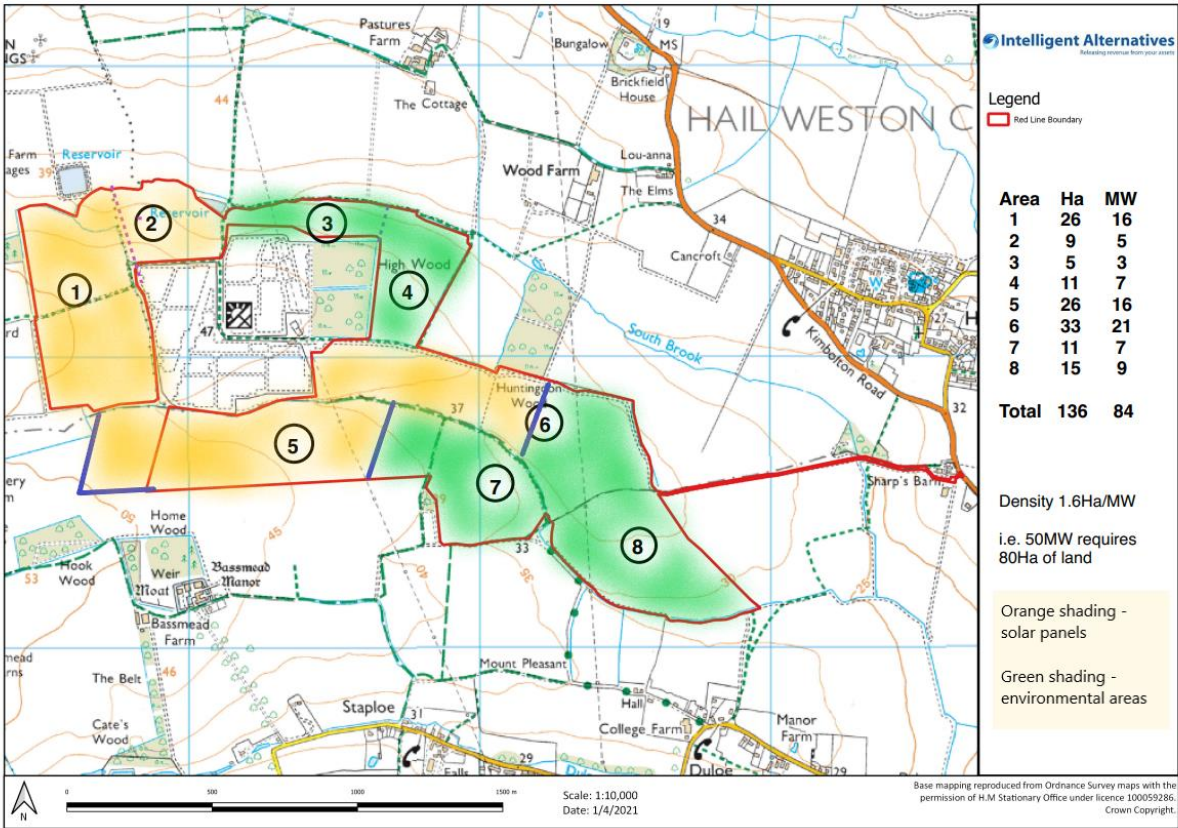
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Appendix 1 – Alternative suitable land areas

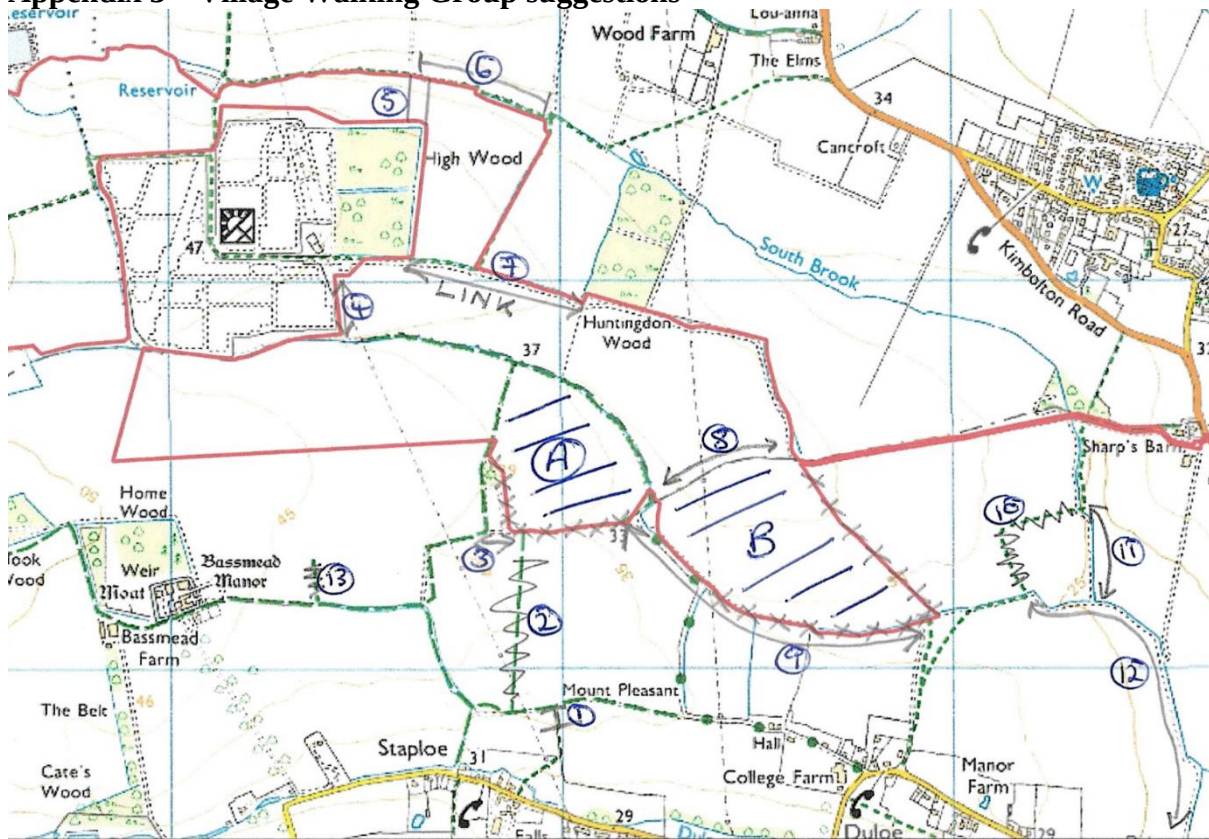
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Appendix 2 – proposed alternative layout



Appendix 3 – Village Walking Group suggestions



Allocate Areas A and B as wild flower meadows. If this is not possible, they should be retained as agricultural fields.

XXX-hedgerow and trees along boundary

1. Join footpaths together where they are currently unlinked as it is an access route to Hail Weston.
2. Lose this bridleway.
3. Create a footpath/bridleway link here as the area around field A is a very popular walking route for Parishioners and people from St Neots.
4. Convert this Permissive way into a Footpath to join the two footpaths.
5. Create a 'green corridor' of hedgerow and trees between High Wood and South Brook.
6. Provide a tree and hedgerow corridor along the boundary in front of the brook between High Wood and the Footpath.
7. Create a 'green corridor' of trees, hedgerow and grassland strip to link these two woods. This is deemed essential to the survival of the wildlife.
8. Keep this hedgerow and convert the Permissive Way to a Footpath.
9. Create a Footpath/bridleway along this track as it is regularly used by walkers from St Neots and the villages. This is highly visible from houses in Duloe and so a hedge is essential here.
10. Lose this Footpath.
11. Create a Footpath here to replace 10.
12. Create a Footpath here to link to St Neots. No pavement is present to allow safe pedestrian access from Duloe or Staploe to St Neots.
13. Lose this Footpath.