

Kelly Green Solar Park Public Meeting -

On Monday, 22nd June St Tudy Parish Council hosted a public meeting in the Village Hall attended by approx. 75 parishioners who were invited to meet with representatives from Western Power and INRG. Cllr Jeremy Rowe the local Council member was unable to attend and MP Scott Mann was represented by his constituency office.

Parish Council Chairman, Cllr Chris Selby opened the meeting convened to explain the proposed route of the electric cable being installed by Western Power from the Kelly Park Solar Farm to the St Tudy Sub-Station.

Cllr Jonathan March outlined the history of the planning application, the appeal process and the work carried out by the Parish Council in objecting to the application that was submitted in September 2013 by INRG for the solar park on land belonging to the Lamellen Estate.

(see the Jonathan March report at the end).

Mr Mike Rogers , Mr Andrew Stark and Mr Roger Merritt on behalf of Western Power, being the Distribution Network Operator, were responsible for providing the connection along the shortest and most cost effective route. Western Power had no involvement in the planning application and Kiers, the contractor working for Western Power were also present.

The strength of opinion displayed the feelings of all those attending who unanimously agreed that the village did not want the solar park, let alone the 20 weeks of disruption that they were expected to endure whilst the cable work was being completed.

Local road closures will impact immensely on the school, users of the village hall, church, chapel, the post office / shop, school and pre-school along with local businesses including the local St Tudy Inn.

Questions were raised about the operations, the reasons behind the application, the research carried out in planning the project, why the connection could not be made to the more accessible sub station in Wadebridge or by utilising the existing overhead cables in the fields, the interruption to other utilities, and the protection of pedestrians and other road users.

Western Power assured the public, that along with Kiers they would work alongside everyone affected in trying to carry out their work with minimum disruption.

Mr Tom Harlow from INRG had little information on aspects of any community fund but agreed the company would consult with the Parish Council on the matter.

MP Scott Mann has been asked to discuss the development with the Secretary of State to get the appeal decision revoked. In addition, if no other route is possible outside the village centre, the Parish Council will also ask him to take that matter up with the Secretary of State.

Kelly Green Solar Park Planning history

In September 2013 INRG Solar submitted their planning application for the proposed solar park in 3 fields of the Kelly Green farm on behalf of the land owners, the Lamellan Estate. There was no engagement with the community by way of public meetings, presentations etc and no indication at this stage of how the grid connection would be made.

St Tudy, St Kew and St Mabyn Parish Councils all objected to the planning application but in spite of this the Cornwall Council planning case officer, Michelle Billing, was minded to grant approval by delegated powers.

St Tudy Parish Council objected on a number of grounds, the main ones being the loss of 3 excellent quality fields for food production, the visual impact and the disruption to traffic on the Kelly Green hill during the construction phase. We also requested that the decision by Cornwall Council be made not under delegated powers but by the full planning committee.

In November 2013 I spoke at the Cornwall Council Strategic Planning Committee meeting and was successful in getting the Planning Permission refused.

The CC reasons for refusal were:

Firstly that the proposed development would be located on farmland of which 10 hectares is considered to be the best and most versatile, Grade 3a. For the duration of the consent the proposal would limit the agricultural productivity for which the land could be utilised in its undeveloped state. This is considered to amount to a significant loss of the best and most versatile land that is not in this case outweighed by the benefits of the proposal in respect to the generation of renewable energy and farm diversification.

Their second reason was:

The proposed development by reason of its form, scale and setting on a steeply sloping valley side would result in a prominent industrial feature within the largely rural landscape which would have a detrimental impact upon the landscape character of the area.

In January 2014 INRG Solar launched their appeal. Again no information was submitted about the village cable route, had there been, the Parish Council and the public would have had an opportunity to comment at this stage.

The Parish Council commissioned a comprehensive appeal statement from a professional planning consultant.

In April 2014 the Appeal informal hearing was held in Bodmin. I attended, spoke and took the planning inspector out on his site visit.

In June 2014 the Appeal was allowed by the planning inspector on the narrow difference of land classification. The Parish Council argued it was Grade 3a, Best and Most Versatile, INRG argued it was Grade 3b with their own soil analysis.

After 3 months in September 2014 the Parish Council saw the plans for the cable route for the first time and although Western Power said they, and I quote, 'understand the Parish Council's concerns' they decided on the village centre route anyway.

In April of this year contractors were appointed by Western Power Distribution.

I have here copies of the Appeal Decision notice and photo copies of the INRG Solar Landscape Master Plan for Western Power to look at.

All the documents have recently been scrutinised again and the last sentence of section 4 of the planning inspectors appeal decision notice you will see is as follows:

An overhead power line runs across the site which would be utilised for the grid connection.

Note the word "would", not might or could but would.

Also a document, entitled Landscape Master Plan, was submitted by the solar company showing the solar panels and infrastructure together with the existing overhead cables that cross the fields. It implies that this was the solar companies planned connection and could have led the planning inspector to make his comment. Alternatively the inspector was told at the site meeting that the overhead cables would be the method of grid connection, or both. I suggest he would not have made this up.

The Parish Council are of the opinion that the appeal was granted on the basis of the documents submitted and the information given at the site meeting. Any deviation would be a material change requiring a new application from the solar company.

We intend to take this further and will be asking our MP, Scott Mann, to get the Appeal decision revoked by the Secretary of State.

In advance of what Western Power will be telling us, we would like to say at this stage of the meeting that they have a very important responsibility not to cause serious traffic disruption and inconvenience to our community. It seems to us that they do not have an absolute right to provide a connection for a commercial enterprise, such as this, at all costs.

If no other route is possible outside the village centre, we will ask our MP to take the matter up with the Secretary of State.

We will of course keep our community fully informed of further developments.

If anyone wishes to see the relevant planning documents they are available via the Parish Council website under the heading Planning Applications.

Thank you very much.

Jonathan March