

**ASH-CUM-RIDLEY PARISH COUNCIL**  
**Minutes of the Extra Ordinary meeting held on Wednesday 12 February 2025**  
**commencing at 7.45pm at the New Ash Green Village Hall, Centre Road,**  
**New Ash Green, DA3 8HH**

Present: Cllr S Fishenden  
Cllr M Aspinall  
Cllr R Brammer  
Cllr J Clucas  
Cllr F Cottee  
Cllr C Gorton  
Cllr S Hobbs  
Cllr A Jauch  
Cllr P Kirtley  
Cllr I MacLeod  
Cllr G Pender

In attendance: Alison de Jager – Parish Clerk  
Karen Law – Deputy Clerk and Finance Officer  
Megan Johnson-Hodges – Assistant Clerk  
94 members of the public

**8913/25 Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs J Scott, M Manley, V Ngwenya, C Clark (Prior commitments).

**8914/25 Declarations of Interest**

a. None.

**The meeting was suspended at 7.47pm**

**• Public Session**

Concerns raised by members of the public included; no very special circumstances have been given, not against solar but the proposed site but there are better locations within the parish, high pitched hum (50hz), access for emergency services – Kent Fire & Rescue require two access points, protection of ancient woodland, disruption caused by construction traffic, class C roads to access site, proposal will cover 30% of Ridley making it inaccessible for the next 40 years, adverse effect on amenity for residents of parish, destruction of Green Belt, not enough research into health (cancer) concerns and facts need to be checked, cement will damage the soil, no benefit to local residents, draw attention to the Public Rights of Way and archaeological survey, shade from panels will kill the soil, rain water run off, land will be irreversibly damaged concerned about the number of applications for solar farms in the local area, roads and infrastructure are inadequate, noise impact will be equivalent of an urban street, the proposal will be bigger than New Ash Green, Kent Police have requested increased height in fences, CCTV and lighting.

**The meeting reconvened at 8.13pm**

**8915/25 Planning**

**24/03422/FUL: Various Sites Including Land South of Idleigh Court Road and East of Hartley Bottom Road, Kent – Proposed development of a photovoltaic solar array farm**

with photovoltaic solar array farm with associated battery storage system, ancillary infrastructure, cable route and grid connection. New access track.

Cllr G Pender PROPOSED that although there is a consensus to object, the Secretary of State may approve this application. In that event, the following should be secured:

1. We welcome that the southern most section will be retained as Greenland.
2. Request the physical screening of surveillance equipment.
3. To register that the Parish Council is not against solar energy in general as the country needs more domestic power.
4. The life span is suggested at 40 years, to request that a bond or fund is established to cover the costs of restoration of the land.
5. Management of vegetation

This proposal did not find a seconder and the motion FALLS.

Cllr F Cottee PROPOSED that the Parish Council strongly objects to this application on the following grounds. The proposal would cause substantial harm to the Green Belt, agricultural land, the landscape, ecology, and local amenity, with no overriding benefits that justify its approval.

### **1. Green Belt Protection**

The proposed development is within the Green Belt and conflicts with both national and local planning policy. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states that inappropriate development in the Green Belt should not be approved except in very special circumstances. The applicant has failed to demonstrate such circumstances. The land in question is high-performing Green Belt, which contributes to maintaining the openness of the countryside. The applicant's assessment underplays this designation by asserting that the area is Grey Belt land. This is not the case as the land shows significant biodiversity (including Ancient Woodland), is widely used for public enjoyment and is not previously developed land. We urge the planning authority to give full weight to Green Belt protection.

### **2. Loss of Agricultural Land**

The application undervalues the agricultural productivity of the site. Local knowledge, including information from a landowner, confirms that the land is of significant agricultural value. The NPPF emphasises the importance of safeguarding the best and most versatile agricultural land (Grades 1-3a). The amount of soil disturbance and concrete necessary for the elevated panels ensures that the land cannot be returned to productive agriculture at the end of the proposed operational lifetime. Given the national need for food security, the permanent loss of productive farmland for solar infrastructure is unjustified.

### **3. Landscape and Visual Impact**

The topography of the site necessitates an elevated positioning of solar panels, increasing their visibility in the landscape. This will lead to significant adverse effects on the character and appearance of the area, which is designated Green Belt land. The proposed mitigation through planting will not be sufficient to screen the development effectively. In addition, the fencing off of the infrastructure and amount of video surveillance requested by Kent Police will reinforce the industrial appearance of the development.

### **4. Ecological Concerns and Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) Issues.**

The Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) and Ecological Impact Assessment (ECIA) do not comply with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) concerning irreplaceable habitats. The applicant has failed to correctly classify ancient woodland (~16.416ha) as irreplaceable and plans to remove 0.02ha of ancient woodland, which is unacceptable under biodiversity policies. The assessments contain inaccuracies, and the methodology used is questionable, particularly regarding habitat classification and biodiversity net gain calculations.

The impact on local flora and fauna, including ancient woodland ecosystems, has not been adequately considered. Neither has the effect of the deep trenches and defensive hedging required by Kent Police. The presence of ancient woodland nearby means that shading from trees will also reduce the efficiency of the panels whilst altering the local ecosystem.

## **Ecological Impact Assessment (ECIA) Issues**

- **Survey Deficiencies:** Botanical surveys were conducted outside optimal periods, reducing accuracy. Key species such as Great Crested Newts, Hazel Dormice, and reptiles have not been adequately surveyed, and assumptions about their absence are unreliable. Birds like Turtle Dove and Corn Bunting are overlooked despite the site being a priority area.
- **Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) Concerns**
- The proposal fails to meet the emerging 20% net gain target, achieving only 14%.
- Unrealistic habitat proposals: The feasibility of creating Lowland Deciduous Woodland and Wildflower Grassland is questionable, with inadequate methods outlined.
- Soil suitability has not been assessed properly, raising doubts about habitat creation claims.

## **Need for Expert Review**

A professional ecologist should review habitat classifications, survey methods, and policy compliance while proposing alternative biodiversity solutions.

The application contains serious flaws in ecological assessments, breaches national policy on irreplaceable habitats, and fails to maximize biodiversity net gain. Further professional scrutiny and revisions are required.

## **5. Fire and Safety Concerns**

The development includes lithium battery storage, which carries a significant fire risk, particularly given the site's limited access for emergency services. The amount of water required to control a lithium battery fire could cause severe environmental contamination, including potential groundwater pollution. The risk assessment provided does not sufficiently address these concerns.

## **6. Highway and Access Issues**

The proposed access routes for construction and maintenance vehicles are unsuitable, all depending on one C grade road. The narrow rural roads leading to the site are in poor condition and not designed to accommodate large construction vehicles. This will cause severe disruption to both local residents and the neighbouring Parish and would also lead to prolonged construction timelines. Furthermore, the required cabling works will pass close to residential properties, exacerbating disruption for residents.

## **7. Heritage and Visual Impact on Local Settlements**

The application fails to fully acknowledge the heritage value of the surrounding area. The proximity to Berry's Maple and other historically significant sites raises concerns about the visual impact on the local character and cultural heritage. Any industrialisation of this rural landscape is contrary to the original vision of New Ash Green, which was designed to maintain a green and open environment.

## **8. Site Selection and Justification**

The justification for selecting this site is weak. The applicant has not demonstrated that this is the most suitable location for a solar farm relative to the grid connection point. More appropriate sites exist that would have a lesser impact on the Green Belt and local communities. The claim that power generation must be evenly distributed across the county is not a valid planning justification, as the National Grid is designed to transport power where needed.

## **9. Noise Pollution**

The noise assessment for the battery storage area is insufficient. Given the valley's topography, sound is likely to carry to nearby residential areas, impacting residents' health and well-being. There is minimal background noise in this location, making even minor noise emissions more intrusive.

The Parish Council fully supports the request from the Senior Archaeological Officer, Heritage Conservation at Kent County Council, for further archaeological investigations to

be undertaken. Additionally, the Council endorses the concerns and recommendations put forward by the West Kent Area Manager – Public Rights of Way & Access Service.  
SECONDED: Cllr S Hobbs. Cllr R Brammer PROPOSED an amendment to the proposal. Should this application be approved by the Secretary of State, the Parish Council recommends that instead of digging up Redhill Road, the adjacent grass verge,(owned by the New Ash Green Village Association) is used instead subject to wayleave being granted. SECONDED: Cllr J Clucas FOR: 3 AGAINST: 8 ABSTENTIONS: 0 The motion FALLS. Vote on unamended PROPOSAL FOR: 10 AGAINST: 1 ABSTENTIONS: 0.

The meeting closed at 8.51pm

Signed: ..... Date: ..... Chairman