

MINUTES OF THE ASHFORD ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT GROUP

HELD ON

THURSDAY 17th November 2022

Conference Room KICC HQ

Present: Richard Lavender,(Chair), Dan Sherlock, Maria Callow, Hugh Summerfield, Tim Sheppard, Annette Buss, Andrew Osborne, Jason Rainbird, Susan Bonett, Nathan Iliffe.

Apologies: Katie Hodson, Peter Corr, Peter Heritage, Richard Stafford, Patience Ogunbona.

Guests: Giles Frampton, Conor McNally, Charlie Vavasour, Doug Wanstell.

	Actions
<p>1. Minutes of the last meeting The minutes of the last meeting were read, agreed & signed off.</p>	
<p>1.1 Matters Arising There were no matters arising</p>	
<p>1.2 Action Register. No's 1, 2 were referred to next meeting No 3 Awaiting response from Quinn Estates No's 4,5 Closed 17/11/2022</p>	
<p>2. Chair's Briefing. RL, said that he had no further matters and apologised for the rapid opening of the meeting but wanted to give the maximum time possible for the Evolution Power presentation. He explained that this was in response to a Statutory Consultation Letter and the response would be given on by AEDG on behalf of the Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce. RL then carried out introductions of the Evolution Team and the AEDG members. RL also declared a conflict of interest as his private property at Bank Road Aldington directly bordered the development.</p>	
<p>3. Presentation The presentation was by Evolution Power regarding the Stonestreet Green Solar Farm, which consisted of 467 acres of agricultural land 1.5 miles south east of Ashford located to the north west of the village of Aldington. The project would consist of mounted PV modules, on-site electrical stations including inverters, transformers and switchgear. A project sub-station which will house the site high voltage switchgear and on-site energy storage facility. This will be totally secured by fencing and existing footpaths would be diverted in liaison with KCC Officers. There was also proposed a new hard surface cycle/footpath from Aldington to Mersham.</p>	

Time lines were explained together with the possibility for the local business community and procurement to be involved. Employment would only be for a short two year period but all endeavours would be taken to ensure this is for local people jobs.

Q&A

HS, Asked regarding the energy storage facility on site?

Answer, the site will have a storage facility to supply the National Grid when the panels are not conducting. The Inverters would invert the DC, (Direct Current), generated by the Solar Panels into AC, (Alternating Current), at individual panel sites which prevents having to have a much larger Inverter facility installed.

MC, 1/ Were the team working with other Wildlife Agencies to ensure the area is adequately protected. 2/ Was there a Social Fund available for the Village/ Area. 3/ Could or would the College be consulted regarding training for potential employees?

Answer, The team were working with several agencies regarding wildlife and fauna projects. Regarding the Social Funding there was a pot of £40k to be decided how where and when this should be used.

DS, Asked regarding the Legacy of the project and the Ethics relating to the development?

Answer, Legacy was answered by saying the area would be placed back to its original state of agricultural land after the 40 year lease was complete. Regarding the Ethics it was stated that China was the only manufacturer of these solar panels and therefore the Government when granting the Import licence had ensure strict standards were being observed through-out the supply chain.

AB, Asked how many jobs were involved in developing this site and would this be local labour, she quoted recent developments whereby contractors were brought in from South Wales whereby local Companies had machinery laying idle?

Answer, There were approximately 350 jobs involved in the project covering skilled, semi-skilled and operatives and it was hoped the majority will be employed Direct from the local area, but obviously there would be indirect skilled labour.

4.

AO, Asked about direct and non-direct jobs, together with the visual impact of the development. He also said that this project was classified as a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project and bypasses the Local Authority and goes directly to the Secretary of State for Business for approval?

Answer, Agreed with DCO process. Some of the more skilled work involved on the site may not be able to be recruited locally and In-direct labour will need to be brought In. The visual impact of the site was explained as the area chosen was in a valley hidden by natural hills and development from virtually every resident of the Village.

SB, requested an opportunity to discuss on going training that could be carried out by the Ashford College.

Answer, GF said he would be pleased to have the opportunity to discuss this area with SB.

JR, Asked for clarification regarding restrictions to inputting to the National Grid

Answer, CM explained the operation of storing the generated supply from the panels into storage batteries to supply even when the panels were not generating. Also all power generated from the site has to be supplied directly to the grid under Government Regulations which is why this method of generation cannot be supplied directly to local residents.

RL then thanked both our visitors and the AEDG team for a very informative briefing.

A closed discussion then took place regarding our response to the The Consultation.

The salient points were:

- Net positive for bio-diversity
- As a business organisation we support all Solar Installations, but there were mixed feelings regarding the Right Project but possible the Wrong Place.
- Development will have little effect on local employment in the long term.
- Good to know construction traffic will access from A20 and enter site prior to Village of Aldington.
- A big question mark remained on why Solar Panels are not developed and manufactured in the UK.
- It was felt that as a business representatives we would not oppose the development and would keep a brief regarding employment, College Liaison, and site access.

Meeting closed at 16:45

January Presentation will be by GSE re: Waterbrook Development Progress.

Next meeting will be on the 19th January 2023 at 3pm to 4:30pm, to be held in the Chamber HQ.