

Poors Allotment Field Solar Project, Results of the Community Consultation and Going Forward

From the Trustees of the Enborne Poors Allotment Charity, February 2020

Solar Farm Questionnaire of Jan 2020

Letters Delivered to residences across the Parish ~230

We asked:

- were “households in the Parish in favour, in principle, of the initiative to install solar panels in part of the Enborne Poors Allotment or were they opposed.”
- Householders to respond by the 18th January, prior to a community meeting on the 20th January 2020

RESULTS

At the time of the meeting on 20th January we had:

Supportive	25	Opposed	12
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16% response rate

Of the opposed responses, 7 did not specify the location of the respondents. 1 was from Spring Gardens, 2 from Enborne Row and 2 from Woodfield Close.

Of the supportive responses, 4 did not specify the location of the respondents, 1 was from Spring Gardens, 1 from Knoll Gardens, 8 from Enborne Row and 11 were from the western and northern areas of the Parish.

We subsequently, received 1 further response from a resident of Andover Drove which was opposed and an e-mail from the Andover Drove/Woodfield Close area thanking us for arranging the meeting and supporting a feasibility study. The opinions of the Parish Councillors/Poors Trustees are not included in the totals.

Consequently, we can say the final response was:

Supportive	25	Opposed	13
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17% response rate

Respondents were approximately, 2 to 1 in favour of the initiative. Based on these results and the attendance at the meeting opposition centres strongly on Woodfield Close and the northern residences of Andover Drove. Understandably, as Woodfield Close residences overlook the western

part of the field. Support, in principal subject to the results of a feasibility study, came from all parts of the Parish

Meeting

The Trustees were joined at the meeting by Jane Grindey and Jo Slimin from Calleva Community Energy a Community Benefit Society. Calleva Community Energy are a community owned energy hub based at Calleva Park in Aldermaston, Berkshire. Further information can be found at their website. [.www.callevacommunity.uk](http://www.callevacommunity.uk).

Jane spoke about Calleva's vision and their achievements and what difference it had made to the community installing solar panels. Jane then answered questions from the public attending.

The main concern raised by the public present was the visual impact of rows of panels marching across the slope of the Poors Allotment. The subject of screening with vegetation was mooted and Calleva pointed out that this would be addressed during the feasibility study and further considered by the planners if the project ever got to the planning stage. The area of the field that would have to be given over to screening would be a critical factor in determining the economic viability of the project.

Other issues brought up and which would have to be addressed during a feasibility study were:

- Traffic flow on Andover Drove and how would this impact the community?
- Reflected sunlight?
- Electromagnetic impact of the panels on nearby radio and television reception?
- Noise pollution emanating from the infrastructure?
- Topographic and geological considerations?
- Impact on wildlife in the field?

Jane from Calleva said if the feasibility study showed that the project was feasible technically and economically sound and following further public consultations and a decision to proceed, the next step would be to apply for planning permission. Planning is a very meticulous process including public consultation and at least 12 different reports from biodiversity, archaeology, flooding, etc.

Cllr. Garrett commented on the stability of the Parish Council and the Charity Governance model and pointed out that if the Parish Council was dissolved in the future, West Berkshire Council would take control of the parish, funding and governance of the charity. This had happened in the recent past and could happen again should the number of Parish Councillors fall below three or should Parish Council meetings consistently fail to meet with a quorum.

Cllr. Leeson reminded everyone that West Berkshire Council declared a "state of climate emergency" in July 2019 and that the solar project could be one-way Enborne Parish could help in offsetting its carbon emissions. West Berkshire aims to reduce per capita CO2 by two thirds in ten years.

The Trustees thanked Jane and Jo for attending the meeting and for helping to answer questions and thanked the members of the public who attended the consultation for their views which will be considered during their future deliberations. Cllr. Leeson reminded the public we 'The Parish Council' are here to serve your community and it is great to receive feedback and hear your views and thoughts.

Following the consultation, the consensus among the Trustees was that we should pursue a feasibility study providing we can obtain the grant needed to fund the study, and then to follow this up with further public consultations. However, no formal decision to proceed was made at the meeting and the Trustees resolved to consult together before deciding whether to go ahead or not and to consider how to apply for the grant.

Views of the Trustees

The current charity governance and funding model is probably not sustainable in the long term. Given that the Trustees of the charity are the Enborne Parish Councillors the governance of the charity depends on the strength of the Parish Council as an institution. Presently, the Parish Council is weakened by the lack of community interest. It was not many years ago (2012-14) that it was subject to special measures and taken over and run by West Berkshire Council nominees. A community project using the Poores Allotment field should, in our view, stimulate community interest and participation and eventually strengthen Parish Council and the governance of the Poores Allotment Charity.

West Berkshire Council have recently declared a climate emergency and irrespective of your views on the “emergency” aspect of the declaration it is well established and accepted that the current high CO₂ content of the atmosphere and its unprecedented rate of increase are manmade. The Parish Council and we believe the residents of Enborne want to contribute to the solution rather than just be passive supporters. We believe that the solar panel project has resonance in West Berkshire at large and within Enborne Parish.

Forming or partnering with a Community Benefit Society is, in the opinion of the Trustees, the most attractive way to fund and implement the project. It brings other benefits in that it provides a vehicle for community involvement, pride and cohesion while also allowing us to tap into established expertise in implementing and managing community energy infrastructure projects. However, as we can see from those, at least initially, opposed the project also has the potential to be divisive.

The consensus among Trustees is that we should perform the feasibility study before we make a final decision and the Parish Council is prepared to support the Charity with financial help, if required, in order to submit a feasibility study grant application.

What Next?

1. Consult the Charities Commission and seek permission for the Charity to partner with a Community Benefit Society
2. Apply for and successfully obtain a grant in order to perform a feasibility study
3. Write a scope of work for the feasibility study that includes among all the technical issues the following items of community importance:
 - a. Establish whether the project is economically viable or not. It must at least not bankrupt either the Charity or the Parish Council
 - b. Determine how much of the field needs to be covered with solar panels in order to pass the economic viability test and how much needs to be given over to visual screening

- c. Must find a way to mitigate the adverse visual impact of the panels/infrastructure for the majority of the residents overlooking the field. If this cannot be achieved then the project becomes divisive and, in our opinion, will not be socially viable.
- d. Determine any other adverse impacts e.g. auditory and find a means to mitigate or eliminate these impacts