 **Minutes of Meeting held at 6.50 pm on Monday 14th November 2022**

**at Hart Village Hall**

**Present:** Cllrs. T. Britcliffe (in the Chair), K. Brown and K. Park

**In Attendance:** M. Ireland, Clerk; Emma Harding, Planning Manager, and Rupert Salmon, Development Manager, Gridserve; PC Ben Hayes.

1. **Public Forum:** No members of the public being present, Cllr Britcliffe welcomed the presence of a Police Officer and invited the Gridserve representatives to give their presentation on the proposed Electric Forecourt on the A179, close to the A19. The company are proposing to build a network of these Electric Forecourts across the UK.

The site proposed is 84 hectares, much of which will be a solar farm, which will provide the electricity on site for a variety of electric vehicle charging points; excess energy produced will be sent via the National Grid to support their other sites around the country.

The solar panels will be on trackers to follow the sun, and these will be a maximum of 3metres tall. A battery storage facility (BESS) is included, but the representatives could not give us information on the height/size of this or explain nor explain why it was situated close to the road rather than at the point nearer to the ‘industrial’ type infrastructure already existing nearby.

The actual garage forecourt will cover around 2 acres and contain retail facilities and a café. Also on site will be an Electric Vehicle leasing business, and an educational facility with a pedestrian walk around the solar farm.

Councillors were informed that a planning application had already been submitted, because of demand from the National Grid, though Gridserve would have much preferred to have consulted the PC beforehand – even though this has been in for scoping for over a year.

Of great concern to Councillors was the access to the site from the A179 being at the pinch point near the Sheraton junction, where there are traffic jams at morning and evening peak times – the very point at which so many accidents have occurred over the last couple of years, which would make it very difficult for vehicles to access the site. Cllr Britcliffe noted that at some point the road will be made fully dualled, and asked if the company had allowed for this – apparently not.

It was also noted there was little in the way of landscaping, and Councillors expressed concern at the further removal of precious farmland, which will further impact on the biodiversity of the area of Hart. There seemed to have been no thought given to the impact of this development on the residents of Hart village; the representatives stated the reduction in air pollution and noise, and the contribution the site will make to the UK economy, were seen as sufficient compensation – they were asked to reconsider this and contact the Clerk with the details they had been unable to provide during the meeting.

*The Gridserve representatives left the meeting at 7.40pm.*

1. **Apologies**: Cllrs Littlefair and Parker, Ward Cllrs Cassidy, Cook and Leedham.
2. **Declarations of Interest**: None
3. **Police Report**: PC Ben Hayes was warmly welcomed. He informed that he had additional responsibility for Rural Issues in the Borough and, he stated, he would not make promises he could not keep, but he would try to attend as many PC meetings as possible. He noted a ‘Drone’ event had taken place on the 8th related to poaching, that he was liaising with colleagues in the Durham Constabulary, as many offences were close to the border between them, and that an unmarked police vehicle would be in the area in the next few weeks. He also informed of a ‘Bike Build’ event to be held on 16th December, from 9.30am to 4.30pm, and asked that this information be widely circulated, including children. Cllr Britcliffe expressed gratitude on behalf of all Councillors for his attendance. **Action:** Clerk to request Bike Build be posted on Hart Hub.

*PC Hayes left the meeting at 7.59.*

1. **Minutes of Meeting held on 10th October 2022:** Cllr Britcliffe proposed and Cllr Park seconded the adoption of the minutes. All present being in agreement, it was r**esolved** to accept the draft Minutes a true record.
2. **Matters Arising**: (a) ***Car Park gate*** - The Clerk noted no progress had been made as yet.

(b) ***Defibrillator*** - No information received from Ward Councillors.

1. **Councillor vacancy:** The Clerk informed that HBC had now requested the Parish Council co-opt another member. **Action**: Clerk to place notice of vacancy on Hart Hub.
2. **Removal of trees from land behind Millbank Close and Voltigeur Drive:** A resident had raised concern, via email, about a number of trees removed or hard pruned over the last few years. The Clerk noted the land in question belonged to the Borough Council. Councillors recognised the resident’s concerns but noted that HBC had the legal right and a duty to manage their trees as they saw fit. **Action:** Clerk to inform resident.
3. **Chairman’s Report:** Cllr Britcliffe reported that Cllr Littlefair had informed him, prior to the meeting that:

* He had concerns about the number of street lights not functioning on the A179, especially the ones near the School Lane access, which made it dangerous for drivers exiting the village via this route
* He had purchased 2 Christmas Trees, a 16’ tree for the Village Hall and a 6’ tree for the church; these would be collected on 23rd November.

1. **Ward Councillors’ Report**: Cllr Cassidy had reported via email that the overgrown hedges reported at the October meeting had been cut by the Borough Council, with the support of the landowner, who would pay for the work. Councillors noted that nothing appeared to have been done about the wall at The Fens, reported to HBC many times.
2. **Maintenance Committee Report**: Cllr Park reported little had changed from the previous month. The Clerk had instructed the contractor to tidy the vegetation near the bridge, and noted that some of the potholes on Hart back Lane had been filled in.
3. **Financial Reports:** The Clerk presented the financial reports, which were **approved.**

**Receipts: £ Payments: £**

Interest 1.25 Affordable Landscapes (grass cutting) 856.80

Bank Charges 12.00

**Total 1.25 868.80**

The Clerk informed that the NJC agreed pay deal for 2022-23 had recently been announced. This was a flat rate across all pay scales plus, from April 2023, an extra day of holiday allowance; this would be pro rata for part-time employees such as herself. The effect of this would, if Councillors agreed, increase her pay to £13.45 per hour. It was **unanimously agreed** that the pay agreement be implemented, backdated to 1st April.

1. **Correspondence**: None
2. **Planning Applications:**

**H/2022/0304 -** Plot 8, Manor Park – **No Comment**

**H/2022/0176 -** Land at Nine Acres – **OBJECT** - Councillors noted this land had been allocated for 30 dwellings in the Local Plan, however the application was for 48 resulting in a much larger built environment, with the resultant loss of open space; ten fewer houses would help to mitigate this. The mix of 2, 3 4 and 5-bedroomed properties, with some allocated to social housing was welcomed, though there were concerns that none of the 4 bungalows was to be for sale – a considerable negative as bungalows were greatly needed locally. In fact, the design of the homes appeared to be very ‘run of the mill’ – not different to any other estate in the country, with no effort to make them visually integrate into the medieval village. It was also noted that the land allocated for leisure, which Hart village had requested, at the time of the Local Plan development, be a multi-use leisure facility with a fully equipped children’s play area, open space for ball games, dog exercise space and allotments, was considerably reduced and had no play area designated at all. Concern was expressed about the capacity of the school, already over-subscribed, to take the number of children anticipated from these extra family homes.

Councillors, whilst accepting that housing was allocated to this site in the Local Plan and Rural Plan, never-the-less expected the Borough Council to ensure that, as Hart lacks a village green, a fully equipped children’s play park and linked space for ball games is allocated in the final approved plan, as **an absolute minimum**. The land around the stream should also be planted to improve bio-diversity and wildlife, and also allow for people to walk their dogs, with the pumping station and sub-station disguised with appropriate planting. Section 106 contributions should be used to improve the road infrastructure around Hart village, with safe access into and out of the village onto the A179 a priority.

1. **Matters of Concern to Councillors:** Cllr Brown noted with concern the number of solar farms just over the border in Co. Durham, which all added to the cumulative effect on the Hart environment. The parish Council had not been consulted on some of these.
2. **Date of next Meeting of the Parish Council:** 6.45pm Monday 12th December 2022 at Hart Village Hall.

*Chairman closed the meeting at 8.28 pm*