

STEWKLEY PARISH COUNCIL

MEETING TO DISCUSS DORCAS LANE WIND FARM PLANNING APPLICATION

Thursday 9th February

A meeting organised by Stewkley Parish Council was held last night, Thursday 9th February, at St. Michael's School, Stewkley. The parish council organised the meeting so parishioners could gain a better understanding of both sides of the issues surrounding the recent planning application for four 125meter high wind turbines at Dorcas Lane, Drayton Parslow.

Local residents had first been made aware of the proposal at a presentation in July 2011 by the developer, Force 9 Energy, at the sports ground in Stoke Hammond. At that presentation, it became clear that local views were mixed; many opinions were expressed against the proposal based on landscape and environmental grounds, whilst some strong views were expressed in favour of renewable energy. Many people were, however, undecided, lacking information, interest or understanding of the potential impact of wind farms in general, and in particular at this site.

Force 9 submitted a planning application to Aylesbury Vale District Council (AVDC) in December 2011, by which time further information had become available, both from the internet and other sources, including Force 9 Energy and from the Stop Dorcas Lane Turbines (SDLT) action group. Many more opinions were put to Stewkley Parish Council, predominantly against the proposal, promoted by the active campaign of the SDLT action group.

Stewkley Parish Council delivered a leaflet to all parish households, inviting residents to the meeting held last night, giving everyone, including the silent majority who had not as yet expressed an opinion, the opportunity to hear more.

At the closed meeting arranged for Stewkley residents only, 15 minute presentations were given by our local AVDC councillor, Mrs Janet Blake, on the planning framework within which the planning authority would make a decision, David Butterworth of Force 9 Energy on their case for the project, and Mark Cunningham of SDLT, on the case against. The meeting was chaired by an independent chairman, Rev. Jim Gorringe, formerly Minister of the Methodist Church in Stewkley and now the Vicar at North Marston.

In a packed school hall it was standing room only with over 125 Stewkley residents in attendance. A wide range of questions were put to the panel and a lively debate followed. There was support for renewable energy projects and for wind farms in general, but concerns were expressed about costs, effects on wildlife and the environment, and in particular, the proximity of large turbines to residential properties: some properties in Hollingdon could be between 600 - 700 meters from the proposed turbines.

At the end of the meeting, residents were asked to record a written vote whether, 'based on what they had heard tonight', did they think that Stewkley Parish Council should respond to AVDC that it has 'No Objections' to the application, or that they should 'Oppose' the application. Of the 125 people attending, 8 had 'No Objections', 111 were 'Opposed' to the application, 3 were undecided, and there were 2 spoilt votes.

Following the meeting, Chairman of the Stewkley Parish Council, Paul Smith, said: "I am delighted so many parishioners have braved the cold weather to attend the meeting tonight. My thanks to the principal speakers for their interesting and informative presentations that sparked such a lively debate both for, and against, the proposal. The feedback will be extremely helpful to us in forming our response to the planning authority, AVDC".

-Ends-

Note to editors:

In order to allow unrestricted comment, particularly by residents, the press were not invited and no video or sound recordings were made. However, notes were made by the Assistant Parish Clerk, and these will be made available on the village web site, www.stewkley.org

Stewkley Parish Council will be discussing the application at their next meeting on Monday 5th March.