**BULWORTHY SOLAR FARM MEETING**

**A SHORT SUMMARY**

The public open meeting held on Thursday Sept 4th was well attended, with approximately 90 residents of the three parishes of Horwood, Lovacott & Newton Tracey, Westleigh and Alverdiscott & Huntshaw turning up, together with county and district councillors.

Penny Mills and Steve Crowther gave a joint presentation, not only on solar farms in general, but also guidance on what could and could not be considered in a planning response.

They pointed out that the application in respect of Bulworthy Farm was considerably lacking in detail with respect to several aspects of the project, and also that the battery storage did not appear to be connected in any way to the solar farm. It should therefore be treated as a separate application.

It should be remembered that any decision on the solar farm would be specifically for its construction, without any consideration of whether or not it could be connected to the National Grid. This at present is unlikely, as it was established several years ago that the substation at Alverdiscott is unable to accept much additional capacity, and that this situation is unlikely to be resolved until the Grid finalise their upgrade plans in the next few years. This implies that if the farm were to be built, it would simply sit there doing nothing apart from potentially increasing the market value of the land.

While not relevant to any planning approval, it was also pointed out that the government is currently paying millions of pounds annually to solar and wind farm owners not to produce power at certain times, as this would overload the grid network. With the national total of power produced being 120% of the nation’s requirements, and virtually all new homes being required to have solar panels installed, the question arises as to whether this farm is needed at all.

Farmers are regularly being bombarded with offers from installers to put solar farms on the land; many of these firms are one-man bands jumping on the bandwagon without having the necessary financial backing to proceed. There have been several instances where such companies have gone bust, leaving half completed projects.

Following the meeting, a WhatsApp group has been set up under the name of Bulworthy Solar Action Group. Their first formal meeting was held on 11th September. It is also likely that a Facebook group and a website will be set up.

By the time you read this, Sir Geoffrey Cox will have held his surgery on 19th September, at which he was apprised of the situation and the progress so far by representatives of the action group.