

## 2020 - 2021 Chairman's Report for AGM of Protos Community Forum 14<sup>th</sup> July 2021

### INTRODUCTION

- Welcome to the Annual General Meeting of the Protos Community Forum. This is our 12<sup>th</sup> AGM after the liaison panel was first set up following the Secretary of State granting planning permission to the EfW site and the Resource Recovery Park.
- It's only 9 months since our previous AGM in September, which was delayed because of Covid, but the Forum wanted to return to our usual June/July timeframe, even though we are still meeting virtually. The AGM is open to members of the public and the media so thank you to everyone for navigating the technology, and I'm very pleased to "see" you here.
- For those that may not be aware, the Protos Community Forum consists of voting members representing the parish and town councils of Ince, Elton, Frodsham, Helsby, Little Stanney and District, and Thornton-le-Moors. Cllr Roy Greenwood has recently retired from Little Stanney and District Parish Council, and thus is no longer their rep on the Community Forum. On behalf of all Forum members, I'd like to thank him for many years of active contribution to the group. I, for one, am going to miss his usual wise words at the end of a long debate. I gather the Parish Council will appoint his successor when they meet on 27<sup>th</sup> July so we should have a new face at our next Forum meeting. The rep from Frodsham Town Council has also changed recently and I'd like to welcome Cllr Felicity Davies to the Forum. There have been no other changes in town/parish councillors since our last AGM and I'd like to thank my fellow councillors for being active and regular attendees at our meetings – thank you.
- The other voting members of the Forum are Cheshire West and Chester Councillors for the wards adjoining Protos – Cllr Paul Bowers for Helsby, Cllr Lyn Riley (who is now handing over to Cllr Chris Basey) for Frodsham, and Cllr Graham Heatley for Gowy Rural. The final voting member of the Forum is Justin Madders, the MP for Ellesmere Port and Neston (or his representative). Again, thank you to those members who have made the time to attend our meetings. I'm grateful to Lynn Riley for her input to the Forum over a number of years and would like to welcome Chris Basey who is now taking over from her.
- The non-voting members of the Forum consist of officers from Cheshire West and Chester Council, the Environment Agency and reps from Peel L&P. In addition to her professional role, Lois Kay from Peel has also now taken over from Keith Butterick to support administration of the Forum – thank you to Lois for her extra work on that.
- Since the last AGM on 23<sup>rd</sup> September, the Forum has met on two occasions – 2<sup>nd</sup> December and 14<sup>th</sup> April. The Community Benefit Fund, which is a sub-committee of the Community Forum, has met three times and I'll speak about that later. But first, I'm going to give a summary of activities at Protos since the last AGM.

## PROTOS ACTIVITIES

- The most recent, and probably most significant, is that after almost 12 years of planning twists and turns, construction of the Energy from Waste plant has finally started. Hence the sound of piling we're all trying to ignore until it finishes in November – we hope! Covanta are leading the consortium to develop the facility which will process 400,000 tons a year of non-recyclable waste to provide up to 49MW of electricity; that's roughly equivalent to the demand of 90,000 homes. Construction is scheduled to run until mid 2022 and the facility should become operational in early 2024.
- Sisk building contractors are undertaking the Phase 2 infrastructure work needed to support the EfW plant and also other parts of the Protos site. That work includes improving the Manchester Ship Canal berth, creating three additional ecological areas (which will be for wildlife, not open to the public) and installing road and services infrastructure. Andy Smith from Covanta and Joe Harper from Sisk gave very useful presentations to the Forum at our April meeting, which are now available on the community section of the Protos website.
- Construction is also in progress for two electricity substations which will eventually provide 124MW of total export capability and 57MW of import/supply for the Protos site. The first phase to enable 50MW export and 6MW import will be available soon, with the remainder due to complete in October 2023 ready for the EfW plant going online.
- In the meantime, the biomass plant which started operation about 2 years ago has continued to generate 22 MW of electricity from waste wood, supported by the timber recycling facility also on site. B.I.G, who operate the plant, and Peel have recently secured a £250,000 Govt grant to fund design work for a carbon capture demonstration facility, based on innovative solvent-based technology developed by C-Capture. If successful, a further £5m grant may be available to fund deployment of the technology here in the North West.
- Moving from high-tech to low-tech, the existing ecology areas at Protos – Goldfinch Meadows (which is open to the public) and Snipe Haven – have continued to flourish under the management of Cheshire Wildlife Trust. And hopefully ongoing measures by Peel and other landowners and agencies to manage drainage of the marsh will avoid past problems of these areas flooding in exceptional weather.
- Since the last AGM, a company called Enviroo have been granted planning permission for a facility to recycle PET plastic (which is used in food and beverage packaging) ready for re-use in new packaging products.
- A company called Waste2Tricity already had consent for a facility using novel technology to convert plastic waste that can't be reused or recycled either into hydrogen, which can be used to power vehicles, or to generate electricity for local commercial users.
- Both those facilities are still working through the details before any construction work starts but Peel have recently revealed a masterplan incorporating them into a wider "Plastic Park" with capacity to handle up to 367,500 tonnes [per year] of mixed recyclable waste. The Plastic Park proposal also includes a facility to separate out dry mixed recyclables, two

extra plastics recycling plants, a facility to recycle polymer laminates (such as crisp packets) and a refuelling station for hydrogen-powered HGV's. A leaflet about the Plastic Park has just been sent to all households in the CH2 and WA6 postcode addresses with a feedback form to be returned before the consultation closes 30<sup>th</sup> July. The leaflet is also on the Protos website if anyone didn't receive a copy. The application will be submitted to CWAC Planning Dept during August and a decision is expected by the end of the year.

- Elsewhere on the Protos site, a company called Progressive Energy have permission for a facility to produce Bio-Substitute Natural Gas (BioSNG) from either waste wood or refuse derived fuel. They're still working through the details to determine next steps and timescales so the Forum hasn't heard much about that development.
- The Forum has also kept an eye on the British Geological Survey "Geoenergy Observatory" project, which includes boreholes on Protos land. Although construction was due to start this summer, initial ground investigations highlighted challenges which have led to a review of design and costs. BGS have their own Community Liaison Forum which should be getting underway soon.

## **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

I'd now like to move away from the Protos site itself and give an update on related activities within the local community – air quality monitoring, newsletters and the Benefit Fund.

- Firstly, I'm not sure how many people are aware that there is an Air Quality monitoring unit at Mountain View in Helsby, on Parish Council land that used to be known as The Eccies but is now leased to RSK. It's a residential location and the aim is to gather data which – we hope – will allay public perception that developments at Protos are leading to increased levels of pollution. As a condition of planning permission for the biomass plant, the unit gathered baseline data for a year before and a year after the plant became operational (from Oct 2016-17 and then from July 2019-20) It's rather technical but that report is now on the Protos website and indicates no concerns. Everything was below limits and although some pollutants increased between the 2 phases, others decreased. Ricardo, the company who undertook the monitoring, concluded this could be due to a change in emissions from different sources beyond the biomass plant, or the result of meteorological variations.
- Other Protos developments have similar planning conditions attached and to make life simpler, Peel have now got a direct contract with Ricardo to continue monitoring and report the data every year for the next 5 years. A report covering all of 2020 has just been completed and will be on the Protos website soon. Again, no pollutants exceeded the limits. The report is interactive (and fun if you like that sort of sciency/techy stuff) so when data is added in future years, the user will be able to do their own comparisons across different time periods.
- Peel have issued two community newsletters since the AGM last September – one in April and one just recently in July. These are now electronic and I encourage Forum members to

share them as widely as possible so our local communities are aware of what's happening at Protos. There is also a sign up form on the Protos website which anyone can sign up to, in order to get notifications of future community update newsletters

- The newsletters also mention some of the community projects that have been funded by the Protos Community Benefit Fund. Again, for anyone not aware, the Benefit Fund Panel is a sub-committee of the Community Forum and allocates the money provided each year by Peel. Unlike the windfarm, Peel aren't legally obliged to make any community benefit payments but for 2021, they kindly donated £50,000, £10,000 more than in 2020. The fund is open to organisations which provide community benefits in areas covered by the Forum constituent Parish and Town Councils (Ince, Elton, Frodsham, Helsby, Little Stanney, Thornton-le-Moors). The Panel consists of one member from each Council and has continued to retain Keith Butterick as the Fund's Secretary. We've met online 3 times since the last AGM - in November, March and June and approved a total of 14 new projects. We have funded:
  - A scheme to recycle food and garden waste by Hornsmill Primary School in Helsby
  - A KeyStage2 reading scheme at Elton Primary School
  - Various activity goods for 1<sup>st</sup> Ince and Elton Scouts
  - Ince Parish Council undertaking improvements to their play area
  - Elton Gardeners Association creating a parking area at their allotment site
  - New maintenance equipment for Helsby Footpaths Society
  - Folding partitions at Elton Community Centre to enable different groups to book different sized areas and use the hall at the same time
  - We've also provided a grant to an organisation called Passion for Learning to deliver an after-school enrichment club scheme for selected children at Elton Primary School who have very limited opportunities at home. The panel provided funds for the same scheme last year but it had to be run as a "club-in-a bag" scheme because of Covid. The school fed back how valuable that support had been and we expect the face-to-face scheme funded for this year will be just as successful.
  - We've also funded a wrap-around before and after activity club at Elton Primary School, which is run by a completely different company.
  - What else...thanks to the Fund there will be a new player shelter for the Bowls Club at Helsby Community Sports Club. And Helsby Tennis Club will be buying outside furniture to allow participants and spectators to enjoy the sport
  - New signage will be installed by the Friends of Harmers Wood Trust in Helsby
  - The ongoing refurbishment works at Ince Village Hall will include security cameras and WiFi access

- And a group called Young Enterprise will very soon be running an event at Helsby High School for 220 Year 9 students to focus on their personal development and preparing for the world of work.
- As in previous years, it's a wide variety of projects across different geographical areas and benefitting different sections of our local community. If we take into account expenditure that is already committed for projects that have not yet completed, we have about £20,000 left to distribute this year. Covid lockdown has slowed things down but we're now seeing an increasing number of projects completed and new applications. We spent about £17,000 in one evening at our last meeting and still have 2 meetings left this year. So if Peel would like to continue their generosity and increase next year's donation, I don't think we'll have much trouble finding a good home for it within our local communities!
- And finally, I can't wrap up reporting on the Benefit Fund activities without mentioning that the project to restore the historic Ince village lamp, which received a grant in the early days of the Fund, has finally completed and there was a grand unveiling a few weeks ago. Congratulations to Cllr Andy Eardley who stuck with all the setbacks and delays over several years to get this landmark piece of Ince history back up and running again.

I'll end by saying thank you to all the councillors who have been involved in the Community Forum and Benefit Fund panel over the year; to Lois and her colleagues at Peel; and to folks like Andy and Joe for keeping us updated on what's happening at Protos.

Thank you everyone.