

MINUTES OF HORSMONDEN PARISH COUNCIL
PLANNING MEETING HELD IN HORSMONDEN VILLAGE HALL, HORSMONDEN
AT 7.30 P.M. ON 19TH AUGUST 2014

Present: Cllr March (Chair), Cllrs Isaacs, Stevens, Davis, Russell, Lawrence and Stanton.

In attendance: Clerk (Lucy Noakes), 36 members of the public present.

Declarations of Interest: Declarations of pecuniary and non-pecuniary interests in accordance with the Code of Conduct were invited, none were recorded.

1. ELECTION OF PLANNING COMMITTEE CHAIR.

Cllr Stevens proposed that Cllr March act as Chair of the planning committee, seconded Cllr Russell. Unanimous.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Cllr Hughes – out of the country. This was proposed for acceptance by the Chair. Unanimous.

3. PUBLIC SESSION

A number of parishioners had registered with the Clerk to speak regarding planning application TW/ 14/501537/FULL - Os Plot 2952 Land Adjacent Gaffords Bridge Cottages Maidstone Road Horsmonden Tonbridge Kent.

The speakers were allowed three minutes each and spoke in the following order: Mr Wheeler Mr Pemberton, Mr Lucas, Mrs Wood, Mrs Pemberton, and Mr Hemming. Transcripts of the parishioners' speeches are attached to the end of these minutes, listed as Appendices 1-6.

4. PLANNING

4.1 Applications/Submissions:

Council members agreed largely with the points made by the six parishioners in the public session regarding application TW/14 501537 and after much discussion, agreed the statement as set out in the comments section below:

Planning Application No:	TW/ 14/501537/FULL
Proposal:	Stationing of one mobile home, one touring caravan, one utility building formation of a car park for one gypsy family
Location:	Os Plot 2952 Land Adjacent Gaffords Bridge Cottages Maidstone Road Horsmonden Tonbridge Kent
Recommendation:	Refusal
Proposal:	Cllr Lawrence, seconded Cllr Davis, unanimous.
Comments:	In an area which is already subject to marshy ground and flooding, there would be an increased risk of flooding to neighbouring properties and the road. The property is below the road level and needs a ramp for access. This increases the risk to road users due to fast moving traffic along this section of road (which is within a 50 mph limit). The KRS Environmental report was inaccurate in several important respects and clearly the author of the report did not have intimate knowledge of the surrounding area and its associated flood risks. The Parish Council concurs with the points raised in the six parishioners public session reports (Parish Council minutes 19/08/2014) which we understand have also been submitted to TWBC.

Planning Application No:	TW/14/502127/LDCEX
Proposal:	Lawful Development Certificate (Existing): Siting of a mobile home for residential purposes
Location:	Bassetts Farm And Land Maidstone Road Horsmonden Tonbridge Kent
Recommendation:	Approval
Proposal:	Cllr Lawrence, seconded Cllr Stanton. Carried.
Comments:	Approval, subject to evidence that the mobile home has been lived in since 2012(to date).

Planning Application No:	TW/14/502118/TPO
Proposal:	T2 -Oak - raise crown to 5m. T4 Dawn Redwood - raise crown to 5m. T5 Norway Maple - fell. T6 Norway Maple - fell. T8 - Silver Birch - fell. T9 Sycamore - remove small central stem. T11 Crimson Norway Maple - raise crown to 5m. T12 Common Oak - reduce crown by 1.5m. Raise crown to 5m.
Location:	Boundary Cottage Maidstone Road Horsmonden Tonbridge Kent TN12 8NE
Recommendation:	Approval
Proposal:	Cllr Davis, seconded Cllr Russell. Unanimous.
Comments:	Approval, subject to the approval of the TWBC Tree Officer.

4.2 **Reports of Applications Granted and Refused**

None

5. **The Institute Building-plans for the front of the building.**

Cllr March had discussed the William Lambert plaque with David Scully, Heritage Officer, at TWBC. It was suggested that the Clerk email details of the plaque and the council's plans to install it at the front of the Institute Building, so that Mr Scully could comment on whether planning is necessary or whether the council could apply for a heritage grant for these works.

The Social Club wishes to improve the front of the building by putting down non slip paving and installing a ramp for use by the disabled. The idea was that a couple of tables and chairs could be placed there for club use during good weather. They were also suggesting that they may install oak posts to mark out the parking area and memorial garden. The Clerk was asked to write to the Business Centre to request that they remove the large bin from the area in front of the club, as this was no longer used by the club and was unsightly.

It was proposed from the Chair that in principal the Council is happy to have improvements made to the area in front of the Institute Building, and that the Club should bring their plans to the next available Parish Council meeting. Unanimous.

6. **Farmsteads Assessment Guidance for Tunbridge wells Borough (supplementary planning document) Public consultation Monday 14th July to Friday 22nd August. Comments already sent to TWBC, but any further representations/comments?**

The Council had no further comments to make.

7. **Other planning matters (Discussion only)**

It was generally felt by the Planning Committee that parishioners and Council members should be vigilant for unauthorised caravans and mobile homes in the area, as once these had been located for over ten years they became a lawful development.

The mobile home at Banfield's was mentioned, as although an application had been received and withdrawn on this, there had been no further plans submitted. It was felt that this was still occupied at present. TWBC enforcement to investigate this.

Cllr Stevens mentioned that there was another mobile home at Bassett's and requested that the clerk ask TWBC planning about this. It is located on the right hand side of the yard behind the modern oast.

It was also mentioned that there is a mobile home still present at Bassett's Farm, Old Oast. The mobile home is visible from the Maidstone Road on the side adjacent to the bund of soil. This was originally allowed whilst renovations took place on the Old Oast, but has since been moved around the side and still remains on site. TWBC to investigate when this will be removed, and enforce if necessary.

It was also noted that there is a motor home in Bassett's yard, but this does appear to move around. TWBC to investigate if this is being lived in and enforce if necessary.

Mousetrap Farm was also mentioned as there still appears to be a mobile home located behind the main building. This was investigated some time ago and was reported as not being lived in at that time. TWBC to reinvestigate this and record accordingly? The main building was originally given permission to operate for storage, but now seems to be operating as a repair works for lorries – Clerk to ask TWBC to investigate.

The Clerk was asked if she could obtain a list of all the mobile homes which are licensed in the Parish, so that the Council is aware of these. This should also be passed on to the Emergency Planning team, as they need to be aware of those who might be at greater risk in a mobile home, during adverse conditions.

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 9.10pm.

Appendices 1-6 follow:

Appendix 1 Mr Wheeler:

As the adjacent farmer, I wanted to inform the meeting of the site's flooding history and that of the nearby areas, for the long-term benefit of all involved parties.

The field in question has been the most flood-prone field for miles around, which reflects its past use as a soak-away, not being suitable for crops or even winter livestock and it is markedly sunken below the road. It is bordered by ditches either side of the main road to the east.

My father had been offered this land during the 1960s by the owner, Mr. Pemble, but he had turned it down as it was too wet, so there was no point buying it. Even recently in 2004, when someone locally tried to graze their horse on this field, they had to remove it because of flies and midges due to the wet.

Twenty yards away is Gafford's Bridge Cottages, which itself has suffered extensive flooding over the years, including the most recent time in December 2013. Other years when they were flooded were: 1962, 1976, 1987, 2000 and 2001.

In order to alleviate this significant problem, the ditch was enlarged and a 5' diameter pipe was installed for the total length of the cottage frontage. Unfortunately, due to the increase in flood water over the years, this investment has proved to be largely ineffective as a flood defence measure, as there is no lower-lying outflow.

Many buildings in the immediate area continue to be flooded, both dwellings and outbuildings, as the well-documented effect of global warming increases the frequency of such events.

The proposed gypsy site is between the many flood-affected buildings along the road and all the local dwellings in the latest 2013 floods were under threat of saturation, some escaping by only a few inches and others with the help of artificial aids such as sand-bags and specialist door-seals.

All these local properties are subject to the constant threat of flooding and increasingly more-so in the future, according to Government and EA scientific reports. The anguish and discomfort of being a flood-victim is HUGE as the problem cannot be banished or annulled.

These victims are still in alternative accommodation **eight months** after the floods, with the knowledge & concern that this is **even** more likely to happen again in the future if this site were to go ahead.

Can I please finish by saying we believe this field would be a totally inappropriate area for development of any kind, now or in the future.

And also, I would like to leave the Parish Council with a letter from my Insurance Company regarding the most recent claims I have had to make.

Thank you very much.

Appendix 2 Mr Pemberton:

Thank you for allowing me to speak and I would begin by saying that having read the planning application and the applicant's supporting letters I have sympathy with their situation. However the field adjacent to Gaffords Bridge cottages is not suitable for human habitation due to its flooding history.

The applicant's flood risk assessment report is misleading, it cherry picks from the National Policy Planning Framework, and is inaccurate in fact and should not be used to make an informed decision in favour of this planning application.

The report was written from an office in Huddersfield without making a site visit and we have an email from the author's office confirming this. Pulling source material from the internet and making it fit with the requirements of an application is simply not acceptable.

On page 11 the report states that it and I quote "has assumed that the site has not flooded in the recent past (i.e. the last thousand years) and did not actually flood in 1960" unquote and also states that the site did not flood in 2000.

On page 9 it states that the site is located within the Environment Agency flood zone 2 and argues that the Environment Agency is wrong and the site should be located within flood zone 1 and therefore has a low probability of flooding with less than 1 in 1000 annual probability.

Comments such as these are grossly inaccurate. The field flooded in December 2013 for which there are photographs to prove it and these will be handed to the committee afterwards.

Furthermore a resident of Gaffords Bridge cottages has signed an affidavit stating that the field also flooded when Gaffords Bridge flooded in 2001, 2000, 1987, 1976 and 1962 and on numerous other occasions when the field and surrounding land flooded. This history means the field should be located in flood risk zone 3, i.e. a 1 in 100 or greater chance of flooding each year. The report quotes the Environment Agency as only having records showing that the field flooded in 1960 but does not mention that the Environment Agency goes on to say that "our records are not comprehensive. We would therefore advise that you make further enquiries locally with specific reference to flooding at this location". We do not believe any local enquiries were made because the author of the flood risk assessment had little interest in establishing the facts.

Thank you

Appendix 3 Mr Lucas:

This letter represents the residents of Gaffords Bridge Cottages, comprising of:

Mr. & Mrs. Lucas, Mr. & Mrs. King & Mrs. Banks

We are all long term tenants who have extensive knowledge of Gaffords Bridge & surrounding area.

We would like to put forward our collective comments and opposition to the development of the land adjacent to Gaffords Bridge, (the field) because of the direct impact to the properties we live in, other local properties & road users, due to:

Excessive flooding,
Increased traffic,

Dangerous proposed exit
Misleading errors in the application & KRS Environment report.

Gaffords Bridge has flooded many times over the last 50 years and I have a sworn affidavit from Mr S King outlining the history of the flooding spanning 50 years. We also know the front doors were removed in the 50's to stop flood water entering, although this cannot be directly documented.

Mr King, in his affidavit has confirmed flooding in 1962, 1976, 1987, 2000, 2001 and 2013 and goes on to explain these were the dates when Gaffords Bridge Cottages flooded, and that in fact the field has flooded on a more frequent basis.

With regard to the most recent flooding of 2013, which was badly contaminated with raw sewage due to no main drainage in the area, No's 2 and 3 flooded so badly that both families had to be re-housed. They are still waiting for the builders to complete works 8 month's on. With this in mind we now have the added worry that the 'field' will possibly be developed with concrete laid, which will unquestionably cause more excessive flooding to occur. The flood risk assessment produced by KRS Environmental is misleading and factually incorrect.

Further to this flooding Mr M Wheeler has received a grant called 'the repair and renew grant' from Tunbridge Wells Borough Council to try to stop flood water entering the property again by raising floor levels. This shows, **by association**, that the environment agency is expecting the area to flood again. A copy of the documentation will be supplied.

With regard to the proposed exit: the land lays approximately 1.1 metres (3'7") lower than the main road therefore the entrance/exit ramp will cause a **dam** to the middle of the field which would compound any future flooding.

We can testify that the exit position would be very dangerous due to the volume of existing traffic and the speed of that traffic. Even the exit from Gaffords Bridge can be hazardous and this has much longer views of oncoming traffic. Further increases in traffic will result in an increased road hazard.

With regards to the errors within the Planning Application:

1. It states on page 3 that there is an existing hard standing for 4 cars. There never has been any hard standing for any vehicles. **This land is a field.**
2. On page 4 it states that the application will not propose an increase in flood risk. **It will.**
3. Again on page 4 it states that the last use for the site was 'Agriculture'. In fact the site was used briefly as a horse field. The owner of the horse deemed the land unsuitable for livestock due to the boggy ground and fly/midge infestation after less than a month's occupancy. I have a letter from the horse owner stating this.

I thank you for listening to our concerns.

Appendix 4 - Mrs Wood:

I've decided to speak, having lived in this area for most of my life so know this little field, and you cannot do ANYTHING in it that will not increase the flood risk!!! There hasn't been much time to look into this; we were only informed less than a fortnight ago that a Planning Application had been made. We had been led to believe the water & electricity installations over the past months were for livestock only. So I'll just make these points:

- 1) When my mother had a bad fall in 2000, and I was trying to get to her from Horsmonden along this road, the B2162, I couldn't drive along it as the flood-water covered it. I tried other routes but couldn't get to her. **Nor could the doctor. And nor could the ambulance. So flooding and safety is a big problem in this area.**
(Email evidence available)
- 2) In the Flood Assessment Report by the man from Yorkshire who admits/ he didn't even visit the site (a "Desk Exercise"), I can't see what relevance "Collier St Village Hall" has - you'll see this on the top left of some of the pages - as this doesn't relate to this site at all. The Report ignores any mention of the 2013 floods and states "there is no risk of flooding" - I can't understand this statement, as everyone knows how much "risk" there is, not only risk but **actual** flooding. In KCC's "Flood Risk Management in Kent" p.92, it says: "*It is indisputable that there would be increased storm run-off caused by urbanisation and climate change*". **We feel this Report is not worth a jot.**

And my last point: To have seen the adjoining Gafford's Bridge Cottages at Xmas, but especially to have been with the family in the cottages as the water was pouring in around their treasured possessions (there was no time to lift anything off the floor) was **truly** heart-breaking. All the beautiful Xmas decorations gathered over the years completely wrecked. The Fire Brigade came to pump out the water which was rushing in, but this took several hours - as the field in question was feeding the flood entering the cottages.

So just to sum up, I cannot say **enough** how strongly we feel this small field must not be altered in any way, least of all because of the impact on the landscape and character of the locality by having: three Units (one appears nearly as long as all three Gaffords Cottages together!), presumably lighting, a cess-pit, car-parking concrete for **EIGHT** ...cars, was it? Plus all the to-ings and fro-ings of postmen, refuse collectors, associated traffic all exiting up a ramp onto the main road from this field - it would be a disaster. And NO family should inhabit a field that floods. *Thank you.*

Appendix 5 Mrs Pemberton:

Having lived through the flooding of this area in 2013 I feel careful consideration must be given to any Application for Planning and would like to raise the following points.

The area from Churn Lane to Gaffords Bridge has seen very little development over the last 250 years.

We are an agricultural community and recognise the consequences of creeping urbanisation and all that is associated with it – the laying of concrete, the removal of hedgerows to facilitate access points, lighting pollution.

The planned foul drainage is also an issue because of the high water table. A Septic Tank discharges liquid effluent into a soakaway system. Any soakaway system is very much dependent on the sub soil permeability. The operation of a soakaway is greatly affected by the level of the natural water table. If the water table rises above the base of the soakaway the capacity to function is greatly reduced.

The characteristics of this section of Maidstone Road are that of old homesteads of which there are four in less than half a mile. Whilst not unique this has an exceptional indigenous quality. The average age of the roadside buildings referred to is approximately 1750, the most recent being circa 1880. Several are Grade II Listed. The element of proposed urbanisation would present a very stark contrast indeed to that which exists at present.

The report by the Campaign to Protect Rural England states that an area the size of Southampton is lost to development every year. 'All the while', says the report 'climate change threatens to undermine the long – established natural processes in the countryside, and our response to the associated extreme weather...could cause more damage still' The report reminds us that 'we cannot continue to consider the countryside as a limitless resource, infinitely able to recover from repeated damage...'

Thank you

Appendix 6 Mr Hemming:

I have known the Bramble Street area since moving here in 1959 and in that time I have seen four occasions when the Furnace Stream, between Horsmonden and the River Tiese, burst its banks near the junction with Churn Lane.

Much of this water floods six inches deep across the B2162 and will be familiar to local motorists. It then escapes to the Teise along fields beside the road, including the site of this application. My concern therefore is not with the nature of the proposal, but the idea of any development at all where it is clearly likely to obstruct this water draining away.

A hard standing would add to the run-off instead of helping to soak it up as at present, and the exit ramp required up to road level would act as a dam since no culvert could handle the volume involved.

I was also informed by a local naturalist only this afternoon, so have had no time to produce evidence, that this field because of its dampness contains a large population of great crested newts whose habitat is protected by law and must be taken into account by planners. I therefore submit that this development would be against the public interest.