Pen Selwood Parish Council

Public Open Meeting

Minutes of the Public Open meeting to discuss new information relating to Planning Application 15/00562/CPO held at the Village Hall on Wed 3rd June 2015

Present Cllr Steadman (Chairman) Cllrs Jenkins, Carter, Appleton, Ashman, Milne and FitzGerald.

Present in the Public gallery 66 members of the public and District Councillor Mike Beech.

Jenny Steadman described how following the PC meeting of 26th February 2015 where this application had been discussed, a decision was taken to approve the application subject to the entrance being at the bottom of Salter's hill. The meeting had been sparsely attended due to the fact that many people had not known of the application. There had been disquiet in the village since then. New information had been added to the Somerset CC web site which gave a better overall view of the application.

The meeting had been called to give the residents of Pen Selwood the opportunity to have their say and have their questions answered. Jenny Steadman asked that people direct their questions through the Chair and that questions should be factual, relevant and not personal. Jenny Steadman then asked Alex Milne to summarise the information relating to the application which was currently available on the Somerset CC Planning web site.

Alex Milne read through the list of documents available to view at somerset.gov.uk/planning. It was anticipated in the application document that 13500 vehicle loads would be tipped on the site averaging 18 loads per day for the three year period .The applicant's preferred access site would be at Salters Hill to reduce traffic on village roads to a minimum. The affected footpath would be closed or diverted for the duration and any hedgerows damaged or destroyed would be replanted at the conclusion of the works. Alex also drew people's attention to the Peter Brett report which had been commissioned by the County Council.

Jane Ashman then gave details of the time line for processing the application. The original date had slipped for it being decided by the Planning Committee from 5th May to 9th July in Taunton but if all information was not available by this date then the application would not be discussed until 3rd September. She mentioned the meeting was open to the public and members of the public were allowed to speak but numbers would be limited

Jenny then asked Bill Hopkins if he would like to speak. Bill Hopkins gave details of how the council members who had visited the site in February had voted with the benefit of this experience and was pleased that all members of the new Council had now had that opportunity. Bill thought objections had been raised by people who had not seen the site and whose personal view of the applicant had influenced their judgment. Bob Foot said that this slippage problem had been caused by dumping in 1997. Bob Foot also said that the work in 1997 had received Council approval, in answer to a question. The land had a history of slippage and that his attempts to halt it in 1997 had been limited by the fact that he did not own all the land. Bill Hopkins now owns all of the land and can do the job properly. Ben Jukes mentioned that a Hopkins' company planning application for landfill at Encie Farm was turned down by the council in 1990.

Helen Stenson suggested that clearance work already undertaken had contributed to the situation. Bill Hopkins advised that top soil had been removed to save it from being buried by recent slippage and this was in a mound nearby. It would be reused to cover the land when work was complete. Hedges had been coppiced to keep them alive Helen Stenson asked if an environmental study had been undertaken and Bill Hopkins advised that one had been prepared as well as a Newt and Dormouse survey had been carried out.

Jeremy Cox stated that the most important factor to establish was, will the land benefit from this work? Jeremy then said that he had visited the site and read the report from Red Rock which raised many complex issues and questions. Jeremy Cox said that he was convinced that the work was being done for the right reasons and that he saw three benefits coming from the project. The land could be restored to its former agricultural use, that farming in PenSelwood was difficult and this would help and that the work will benefit future generations of villagers.

Jeremy Cox suggested that he did not like the "e mail electioneering" that had accompanied this discussion and thought the Public Open Forum to be a better environment to discuss these sensitive issues.

Ben Juckes stated that the Peter Brett report raised concerns over the scale of the materials to be used and proposed use of other local material already on the site to stabilise the land. The Brett report questions whether this application is the best way to address this issue. The application did not mention the AONB and Ben Jukes also recommended that the public view the AONB response to the application.

Geoff Parcell stated that he had concerns on the impact no wildlife habitat and that there were Iron Age and other archaeological sites close to the proposed working site, one which would need to be researched more to establish its exact location. Geoff Parcell also stated that he had Geology training and was aware that the area involved had a history of landslip. Geoff would like to see an alternative solution.

Colin Tanner asked if there was a plan B. Bill Hopkins said that there was not, but mentioned that work may have to be undertaken if Long Lane becomes threatened by further land slip. An audience member suggested the Brett report thought this threat was unlikely. Valerie Lee noted that at an earlier meeting Mr Hopkins had said that the work might take longer than 3 years.

Ian Steadman quoted Somerset County Council Waste Strategy Policy WSC4 in which it suggested that the applicant must demonstrate that the work be completed using the minimum amount waste to achieve the stated purpose and suggested that more work should be undertaken to establish the best way to stabilise the land. Bill responded that the estimate of landfill needed was a worst case scenario and hoped that less than 17 vehicle loads a day would be used.

Charles Buckler asked for clarification of the area to be used for the project. Bill Hopkins advised that originally the area had included all land up to hedges and roads but this had now been reduced. Bill said that the whole area had been shown in the plans as well as the landslip area and agreed with Jenny that this was to allow them to 'feather in the areas around the slip. Jenny passed round a map giving the details of the new reduced area.

Annie Harvey asked if removal of material had been considered as a way of stabilising the land. Bill Hopkins said that the two geological reports differed in their approach and that a further Red Rock report ,expected next week, would shed light on this and would answer some of the questions in the Brett report.

John Adams asked where the material would come from and Bill advised that it would come from local sources and would be sub soil, construction and demolition waste. Adrian Carter asked where was the agricultural value in doing this work on what was perceived as low grade agricultural land and Bill Hopkins replied that it was partly aesthetic and for the future well being of the land.

A member of the public asked if the roads would be maintained and how would the material being dumped be verified as legitimate. Bill Hopkins responded that the Environment Agency checks vehicle loads and that the roads would be swept and maintained. Jenny Steadman asked Tony Appleton about maintenance and he said it was highways job.

Tony Harrison suggested that the Parish needed to establish two things, firstly was there a problem? If there was not then nothing needed to be done .If there was however then this looked like an efficient way of dealing with the problem and the case for supporting the application should be strengthened. As a caveat Tony asked that if this strategy had not worked in 1997 then would it work now. The previous land owner Mr Bob Foot thought that it would work now as Bill Hopkins had access to all of the land and the gear required to create a solution.

Lorna Allen said that if this was the right thing to do then it should be allowed to go ahead and personal issues should not feature in the decision. Lorna observed that the disruption to the village appeared to be minimal due to the siting of the access road at Salters Hill, and mentioned that there were lots of ways into the village.

Megan Tanner asked what would happen if nothing was done, Bill Hopkins replied that there would be more landslip. Keith Butt said that there had been tipping on the site of Bills House and that if this is what the land would look like afterwards ,it would be OK.

Tony Appleton asked about the possibility of contamination of water sources and Bill Hopkins said that this would happen anyway due to land slip and suggested the two Red Rock reports addressed this matter. Tony suggested that villagers should read Red Rock and Brett report to gain a full understanding of the issue.

Stella Parcell thanked the PC for holding the open meeting and asked them to bear in mind all the verbal worries they have heard and the high level of written objections and be mindful that the exceptionally high turnout tonight indicated a high level of concern. She asked that members of the newly elected PC do their very best to represent villagers and therefore ensure that the right outcome regarding the site be achieved.

Alex Milne recapped on the documents available via the Somerset County web site and Geoff Parcel would put a link on the village web site to direct people to the Somerset CC site. Hazel Baker thanked the PC for having such an interesting and informative meeting which had been a great opportunity for a large part of the village to get a better understanding of this complex situation. Helen Stenson thanked Bill Hopkins for coming along and answering questions which was followed by a brief round of applause.

Jenny Steadman thanked everyone for coming and closed the meeting, reminding people that this application would be discussed at a planning meeting, next Wednesday 10th June and as with all PC meetings open to the public. Meeting ended 8.59pm

Signed as a true record

Chairman……Date……