

Pen Selwood Parish Council

Planning Meeting

Minutes of the Planning meeting held at the Village Hall
On Wed 10th June 2015 at 7.30 pm

Present. Jenny Steadman, Adrian Carter, Peter FitzGerald, Andrew Jenkins, Jane Ashman, Alex Milne, Tony Appleton. 24 members of the public.

Jenny advised that the meeting would be split into two parts. The first part would consider item 4 with an open public forum before the application was discussed. Once a decision had been made item 5 would be discussed preceded by a further public open forum.

2 Apologies for absence –none

3 Notices of interest – none

4 Planning Application Number 15 /01886 /Full – 2 Grove Close Coombe Street.

There were no comments from the public. Following a discussion of the application the PC expressed reservations with the following aspects of the plans.

- 1 The proposed road access development to the property would create a dangerous access point to the road.
- 2 The materials used were not in keeping with other materials used in extensions /developments nearby.
- 3 Surrounding houses had a right of way over a footpath within the boundaries of the proposed development site and there was a concern this access may be compromised.
- 4 There was a concern that a dangerous precedent could be created should this development be supported. This property formed part of the village's limited affordable housing. Should the project be approved another affordable home would be removed from this category.

The PC concluded that this application should be resubmitted as two items, one relating to the house and one to the access changes. The PC agreed in principal that the property was in need of refurbishment but was unable to support the application in its current form. Vote 7-0 to oppose the application. Clerk to advise SSDC of the outcome.

4 Planning application 15/00562/CPO Pen House Farm.

The council will review the application, taking into account the views expressed at the public meeting on 3rd June and all the information now available on Somerset County Council's website and consider whether it wishes to make a new submission to Somerset County Council.

Jenny asked if anyone from the public would like to speak and if so they could limit the content to three minutes.

Elizabeth Carter . Stated that her views were not a result of any personal animosity to Mr Hopkins and was angry with herself for not having spoken up at the public meeting the week before. Elizabeth stated that she had read all the documents on the website and said “ I object to this application. because I do not want to see a beautiful valley of ancient pasture, geological, historic and ecological interest at the entrance to the village I live in being buried in building rubble. I object because I am not yet convinced the landslip area cannot be made safe without the import of building waste. I object because I have not yet been convinced that what is proposed will stop the historic tendency for land to slip, given that there are a number of springs in the area and bearing in mind the extensive nature of the geological feature. I object because, even if the import of some rubble is needed, I am not convinced that what is proposed is proportionate to the problem. I do not believe there is any benefit to the community in this.”

Elizabeth hoped the Council would oppose the application. Elizabeth had raised a petition opposing the application which had been signed by 76 parishioners. A copy had been sent to SSDC and SDC and the Clerk would retain a copy for the PC. Elizabeth said that not everyone she had spoken to had signed the petition but no one saw a benefit to the village from the application.

Geoff Parcell suggested that all gathered should read the SSDC and AONB documents regarding the application which were not discussed at the original planning meeting. Geoff, who has a Geo-technical background, said that he thought there was a greater problem than the one which currently exists at the application site. The risk of landslip runs the full length of the Mere Fault and landslip is in evidence in places as far away as Cucklington but is most evident at Ballands. Geoff thought the Red Rock report, to its detriment, does not suggest an alternative solution and thinks even if this work was carried out there maybe further risk of landslip. Geoff did not think the PC have all the technical answers but should be asking the relevant questions.

Helen Stenson- Read a letter from Sharon Rossitter who was not able to be present. Sharon thought the landfill would be detrimental to the landscape and that policing of what gets tipped at the site would be difficult. Sharon stated that the application contravenes the Village Plan guidelines and that all the views of villagers should be taken into consideration.

Helen Stenson- Expressed her concerns that ecological factors were being neglected. Trees had been felled and burned and that the PC needs to be aware of all the facts before it makes a decision. Helen cast doubt over the existence of any previous ecological surveys prior to work on the site and suggested that hedgerow removal which had taken place, was not always necessary. The SSDC tree officer was now involved and after contacting the Forestry Commission she had been advised that a license should have been sought for previous tree clearance.

Tom Stenson- thought that the discrepancies outlined should make the Parish suspicious and he was not filled with confidence the right decision had been made. Tom perceived there were three facts to consider. 1 The two geological reports can be argued either way. 2 There are no benefits to the community. 3 The facts concerning the nature of the land and its geological disposition need to be considered in depth.

Ian Steadman- Stated that he could not find details of any personal attacks on the applicant on any items submitted to the SCC website. The only approval for the application is from the PC. Ian then went onto list the ways in which this application ran contrary to the Village Plan.

Richard Gething- Gave an account of how a recent traffic incident involving a reversing low loader on Salters Hill might be an example of the risks to motorists should the application be approved.

Gill Bradley- Said that given the weight of public opinion she did not understand why the PC did not just object to the application. If there were further queries of the geological necessity for the work then more soil samples should be taken to establish what was dumped there in the past. Gill concluded that the Pen Selwood Cherished landscape Evaluation should have been considered and that a computer generated image of how the land might look after the work is completed may be of assistance.

Bernard Sullivan- Who is a walker from another village gave an account of how he had been made aware of the intended planning application 10 months prior to submission during a conversation with a neighbor of Mr Hopkins. He believed the work on the site had started in April 2014.

Stella Parcell- Stated that she thought the previous Parish Council had acted in good faith when it made the original decision in Feb 2015. Stella thought that the Red Rock report was weakened by the absence of alternative considerations and had been updated by subsequent reports. Stella drew attention to the section of the Peter Brett report which stated “the normal approach to be looked at first would be to employ drainage measures and re-distribute the materials already present at the land slip area”. More examination of all the material available is required and she hoped the new PC would revise its decision in light of the new evidence.

Belinda Heale- lives at Encie Farm, the neighbouring property and described the poor condition of the farm when she and her husband took over. Bill Hopkins had played a big part in getting the farm back into shape and most of the good work he had done had been unseen by the public. Belinda thought that Mr Hopkins plans for Pen House Farm were the right ones and she supported the application.

Bill Hopkins- Stated that he had listened to many uninformed ideas on how to tackle this issue. Mr Hopkins farms 3500 acres and this section of land is in by far the worst condition. He wishes to return it to good pasture land for his animals. Mr Hopkins has employed experts to assess the situation and stated that the volume of spoil to be tipped is not yet decided, the figures stated were a worst case scenario. If nothing was done the slippage could move up hill toward the road.

Jenny thanked the public for their views and asked Parish Councilors' for their thoughts following the public meeting and representations that evening.

Alex Milne said that having now looked at all of the information currently available she would object to the application and referred to a 1994 report , which backed up the Peter Brett report in stating that landfill was not an appropriate solution to the problem on this site.

Jane Ashman discounted the accusations of personal bias as a smokescreen and suggested that all of the scientific reports available are subjective to a point. This meeting and the public meeting had represented the diverse views held within the village and that the democratic process should be used to establish the best course of action. Jane thought the Red Rock report was commissioned by the applicant and was biased; Jane thought the Peter Brett report gave a better overall view of the situation. Jane also thought policing of the tipping would be impossible to enforce.

Peter FitzGerald clarified the position of the previous PC on the issue and said that the final decision should be left to the experts. Either way something needed to be done to address the landslip problem.

Andrew Jenkins reiterated that we can only judge the application as it sits before us and cannot propose alternatives because we are not experts. Access to the site is best from the bottom of Salters Hill and before a decision is made all of the relevant expert advice needs to be considered.

Tony Appleton stated that the site is currently not an area of outstanding natural beauty due to the landslip and that something needed to be done. The land was currently unsuitable for even the most basic agricultural activity. All new information should be considered before a decision is made.

Adrian Carter quoted extracts from the Red Rock and Peter Brett reports which did not support the applicant's statement that if nothing was done the road would subside. He said it was important to be clear why a review of the earlier Parish Council decision on this application was justified. In Adrian's view there were three reasons for looking again at the issue: the information which had become available since 26 February on the SCC website; the failure of the Parish Council on 26 February to have any regard to its own priorities and planning policy; and procedural deficiencies in the conduct of the 26 February meeting. The last of these was disputed by Peter Fitzgerald and it was agreed that it was less significant than the planning policy issue as justification for review. In Adrian's view the Planning Statement issued by the applicant's agent understated the negative impacts on the community in three areas in particular: it understated the number of lorry movements by 100%; it understated the visual impact of the works by exaggerating the extent of screening from Underhill; and it failed to acknowledge the very long term impact of the destruction and replacement of wildlife habitats. While he acknowledged the benefit to the applicant from the application, he saw only detriment to the community as a whole and considered the current application unacceptable in relation to the parish planning policy.

At this point the Clerk was asked to clarify how to proceed with a review of the application. Clerk advised that under standing orders no application can be reviewed within 6 months of the original decision and that this date was Wed 26th August. However if it was considered necessary the standing orders for the PC could be suspended and a new motion be proposed. Jane Ashman proposed that the standing orders be suspended in order that a new motion be discussed, seconded by Adrian Carter.

Peter FitzGerald proposed that the PC does not amend its original decision to support the application seconded by Andrew Jenkins, there was a 4 to 3 vote against this motion.

Adrian Carter proposed an amended motion that "The Council has reviewed the application taking into account the views expressed at the public meeting on 3rd June 2015 and all the information now available on the Somerset County Council's web site and considers that the application in its present form offers no community benefit and should be rejected by the County Council and the applicant be encouraged to bring forward a fresh proposal which is more respectful of the location and of the Parish and District Planning Policies."

This motion was seconded by Jane Ashman. The motion was approved 4 votes in favour 3 against. Jane suggested that should new information become available than the PC should give this due consideration before the application is heard at SCC Taunton on 3rd September 2015.

Jane Ashman proposed the standing orders be reinstated, seconded by Adrian.

Meeting closed 9.23pm

Signed as a true record.....

Kevin Stow, Clerk to the Council Limetree Cottage, Underhill, East Knoyle SP3 6BS Tel: 01747 830431

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