

HIGH EASTER PARISH COUNCIL
MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE PARISH COUNCIL
held via Zoom on Monday 15th June 2020

Present: Cllrs Andrea Davis, Neil Reeve (chair), Janet Robinson and the Clerk Allison Ward

County and District Cllr Susan Barker

During the meeting there were 38 Zoom connections from members of the public

20/34 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

The Clerk read apologies.

Cllr Robert Lodge sends apologies as he has a disclosable pecuniary interest as the joint applicant of the application under consideration.

Cllr Paul Sutton sends apologies as he has a disclosable pecuniary interest as the agent for the application under consideration.

Cllr Nigel Boreham sends apologies as he has concluded he has a personal prejudicial interest as a friend of the applicant.

Cllr Jo Windley sends apologies as she has concluded she has a personal prejudicial interest due to connections to the applicant's business.

The Clerk confirmed dispensation requests had been received from Cllr Lodge and Cllr Sutton and these would be considered in agenda item 20/36. The remaining Parish Cllrs accepted these apologies and the meeting is quorate.

20/35 APPOINTMENT OF A CHAIRMAN FOR THIS MEETING

The Clerk asked Cllrs to nominate a chair. Cllr Davis proposed that Cllr Reeve is appointed chair for this meeting. Cllr Reeve accepted the proposal, this was seconded by Cllr Robinson.

20/36 DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS FOR THIS MEETING

Cllr Davis declared a personal interest as a friend and Parish Council colleague of both the applicant and agent.

Cllr Robinson declared a personal interest as a friend and Parish Council colleague of both the applicant and agent.

Cllr Reeve declared a personal interest as a friend and Parish Council colleague of both the applicant and agent.

Cllr Reeve asked the Clerk to confirm the request for dispensations. The Clerk responded, dispensation requests have been received from Cllr Robert Lodge and Cllr Paul Sutton for this meeting only. The reason stated for the dispensation follows an invitation from this Parish Council inviting the applicants and agent to present the application in order to provide the context and relevant planning details for the benefit of residents, and in order to respond to any questions from the public or Parish Council if directed by the chair. The Clerk confirmed dispensations could only be given for the public forum, after which both would be required to leave the meeting. Cllr Reeve proposed that the dispensations be granted as outlined, this was seconded by Cllr Robinson and agreed by Cllr Davis.

20/37 PUBLIC FORUM

Cllr Reeve welcomed members of the public and confirmed the two outcomes required of the meeting,

1. For the Parish Council to take a position on the application; to support, object, or neither support/object.
2. To consider if the application should be decided by the planning committee rather than planning officers.

Signed
 Neil Reeve (Chairman of the meeting)

Cllr Reeve went on to confirm a Planning in Principle application has two stages, this first stage requires consideration to be given to land use, location and amount of development only, all other elements are considered at stage two which forms a separate and later application.

Cllr Reeve confirmed the order of speaking in the public forum. Robert Lodge will be invited to speak first and provide the context, he will be followed by Paul Sutton who will introduce the application. The three residents who have confirmed they wish to speak will be invited to address the meeting. Residents who have not notified the Clerk in advance are welcome to then raise any additional questions or points for consideration. After which the Clerk will read to the meeting a summary of the points raised in the written statements received by the Parish Council. The Chairman will then close the public forum and the Parish Council will consider the agenda items.

County and District Cllr Barker suggested this is a difficult issue to consider and she anticipates being in a conflicting position with the Parish Council asking for the application to be called in for decision by the Planning Committee, if the officers recommend approval and the applicants requiring the application to be considered by the Planning Committee if recommended for refusal. Cllr Reeve confirmed he had received a response from Uttlesford Monitor Officer who confirmed it was totally appropriate to call the application in for consideration by the Planning Committee in either or both situations.

The chair invited Robert Lodge to address the meeting.

Robert thanked the Parish Council for the opportunity to speak. He began by confirming the current situation with Covid is affecting everyone including Lodge Coaches and forecasts suggest coach hire and therefore business revenue is unlikely to return until at least Spring 2021. The business was started in 1920, recently celebrated its centenary and employs 32 staff, a third live in the village and a further third within a 10-mile radius. Lodges provides secondary school transport giving residents access to 8 secondary schools, funds the premises occupied by The Snug and rents out two units for use by local businesses, as well as providing vintage coaches, a museum and hosting car shows. Staff are furloughed and the business is looking at a number of options for post October to raise capital and this planning application forms part of that process. The site for development is less than 0.5acre and will be for up to 5 dwellings, the last thing they want to do is spoil the village. In closing Robert commented, like Vicarage Close and Boreham Court these additional houses and occupants could enhance the village and enrich the lives of the parish.

The chair thanked Robert for his statement and invited Paul Sutton to outline the application.

Paul confirmed this is a Planning in Principle (PIP) application, a form of application that was first introduced in 2017 as a way of separating the principle and the technical elements of an application. This first stage establishes whether a site is suitable in principle, with the second stage accessing the application in detail. Approval of a PIP is not planning permission. The site layout is indicative and provided to demonstrate how it might be achieved, the applicants have indicated their willingness to consider one property being an affordable housing unit, although this is not a requirement for this density of housing.

The chair thanked the agent and asked members of the public if they had any questions on what they had heard so far.

A resident asked for clarity on the limits that apply to PIP applications. The chair invited Paul Sutton to respond. Paul confirmed PIP sites have to be 'minor', 0.5 hectares or less and up to 9 dwellings. The limit of dwellings is set at the PIP stage, i.e. if the application is for up to 5, then no more than 5 dwellings could be built, although the exact number up to that limit is agreed at the technical stage.

Cllr Davis requested clarity on the relationship of the site in terms of the village envelope. The chair invited Paul Sutton to respond. Paul confirmed the site is outside the settlement, although not in the conservation area and is therefore considered development in the countryside. The key point to note is Uttlesford is unable to demonstrate a five-year housing supply.

A resident asked Robert Lodge for clarity on whether the financial benefits from the development would go to support the business or for the personal gain of the applicants. The chair invited Robert Lodge to respond if he wished. Robert replied that the current Covid 19 situation had driven their plan and the directors of the business would do everything they could to keep the business afloat, development of this site is only one of the areas they are looking at.

County and District Cllr Barker commented that the development of 5 new dwellings could add to the village infrastructure through a section 106 agreement or community infrastructure levy (CIL). Paul Sutton responded that Uttlesford does not have a CIL in place so it would have to be a section 106 agreement and reiterated that at the moment the applicants are willing to consider one affordable unit.

As there were no further points of clarity, the chair invited the residents who had registered to speak to do so in order of registration.

The first resident confirmed they were neutral to the application. They went on to say a lot of the governance and transparency has been covered, however they wished to record their support of Cllr Barkers earlier statement that the application should be referred to the planning committee to preserve the integrity of the process.

The second resident echoed the request for the application to be considered by the Planning Committee. They confirmed they live in one of the properties most directly affected and suggested it would have been neighbourly if the applicants had approached them before the application was made; the site is overlooked despite what is stated in the application. The resident raised the following points,

1. Not against sustainable and affordable housing, am against unsustainable and unaffordable housing.
2. There is no evidence of local housing need.
3. A development has to be sustainable, economically, sociably and environmentally, the applicants have failed to provide any convincing arguments to outweigh the harm that the development would cause. The village has no shops or services, local schools and doctors are oversubscribed. Anyone living here needs at least one car, the limited bus service does not support commuting or shopping.
4. In 2015 Uttlesford rejected the site in the Local Plan call for sites, stating 'It is unsuitable for housing as development of this site would not contribute to sustainable patterns of development'. Nothing has changed to make the development more sustainable. If anything, the site is now less sustainable given Uttlesford has declared a climate emergency and the site would increase car usage.
5. If this development is allowed, it will be a free for all and open the gates to sites all around the village.
6. The applicant's assurances about the development are welcome, however the applicants would be free to sell the land with the benefit of the planning permission and any purchaser would not be bound by any assurances.

The resident closed by confirming they objected to the application and reiterated the request for the Parish Council to call in the application for consideration by the Planning Committee.

The third resident raised two points. Firstly, they are concerned that the development would set a precedent for further development as suggested by the site road plan, and the potential for the field between this site and the properties on The Street becoming an 'infill'. Secondly a preliminary ecological appraisal must be taken now as the wildlife is most active in April and May.

The chair invited Paul Sutton to respond to the points raised by the third resident.

Paul confirmed the ecological appraisal forms part of the technical stage. He went on to confirm the layout of the site is indicative showing how it might look, it is not part of this stage of the approval. It is well established in planning that each application is dealt with on its own merits. Infill is generally defined as one or two houses on an established site. If there is housing on both sides of a proposed site, it could be looked at more favourably but in the case of the High Easter site directly north of The Street, it would not be considered infill.

The chair invited residents who had not registered in advance if they had any questions or points they wished to make.

A resident asked, why the land behind Lodge Coaches was recently bought and added that this suggests they do not need finances if they can buy this land.

The chair invited Robert Lodge to respond, however added this was not necessary.

Robert confirmed he was happy to respond and clarified that Lodge Coaches had not bought the land. They have agreed with the landowner that they could use and seed the land. We had two large events that were due to take place at Lodges, the village VE day event and a car show, we needed additional parking. Robert added his apologies to resident two for not discussing the application with them before submitting.

Cllr Barker added that it was an interesting reflection of views and concluded that with only three Parish Cllrs able to consider the application, she would call the application in to Planning Committee.

The chair reminded residents of the importance of submitting their own responses to Uttlesford and asked if there were any final points residents wished to make.

A resident asked for a point of clarity on the process and whether officers would still give an opinion if it was called in. Cllr Reeve confirmed officers review and make a recommendation on all applications including those that are called in.

A resident raised a point with the highway access to the site. Although the site is within the 30mph zone, speed of traffic regularly exceeds this. There is no street lighting, no pavements and from experience it is very difficult to walk safely into the village centre, making it high risk and unsuitable for families. They closed by noting they would be objecting to the application.

As there were no further requests to speak, the chair asked the Clerk to summarise the letters/emails received by the Parish Council. In total six responses had been received prior to the meeting, four of these stated they objected to the application. The key points being,

1. Out of village site is unsafe in terms of walking in and out of the village and in and out of the site entrance.
2. Village facilities and services too few to support development.
3. Impact on biodiversity is huge, presence of great crested newts at the site, the application should not be considered without the appropriate survey.
4. Meadows matter greatly. Habitat loss is one of the biggest causes of decline in insects whose value to a healthy and rich eco-system is almost incalculable. Meadows are important and should not be built on
5. Development will validate future in-building, sets a poor precedent, opens the flood gates and lays the path to 'urbanisation'.
6. The site was accessed and rejected by Uttlesford in their call for sites in 2015, this still applies.
7. Land is outside the village development area. The Parish Council has historically viewed developments outside the development limits as inappropriate; it should not be influenced by the identity of the applicants.
8. Adding further dwellings will put increased pressure on already over loaded and restricted roads.
9. Giving the likely approval of the affordable housing site and now this application, at what point does Boreham Court become an estate?

With no further requests from residents to speak, the chair thanked residents for their participation and thanked Robert Lodge and Paul Sutton for attending. The chair closed the public forum and Robert and Paul left the meeting.

20/38 To consider PLANNING APPLICATION UTT/20/1208/PIP

Cllr Reeve suggested having heard the debates in the public forum, the first question to consider is do we support, object or neither support/object. Cllr Robinson confirmed having listened to the debate she did not feel confident to make a decision either in support or objection. Cllr Davis added that she had great respect for the applicants and what they contribute to village life. Cllr Davis added that she had lived in the village for 22 years having moved into a new development and can see the benefits new residents can bring to a community, Cllr Davis stated she to is unable to make a decision in support or objection.

Cllr Reeve proposed that the Parish Council submits a response to Uttlesford in which it neither supports or objects to the application, however in doing so it summarises the comments made by residents and its opinions for and against the application. Before seeking a second Cllr Reeve went on to consider the justification for this decision. It is recognised in planning that there will be more responses from objectors than either supporters or those who remain neutral, the meeting had heard largely from those in objection. Lodge Coaches is a major employee in the village and there may be some who feel they are not in a position to object. Cllr Davis seconded the proposal, and this was agreed by Cllr Robinson.

Cllr Reeve went on to consider the comments in addition to those already noted by residents. There is a potential impact as a result of the proposed development on the entrance to the village which is identified as a key gateway (conservation appraisal); the visual impact from the development could threaten the rural character. Uttlesford has a housing need and a government target to increase the number of houses in the District from 36,000, to an estimated

54,000 in the next 20 years, a 50% increase on current stocks, it now does not have a Local Plan to set out where this housing can go. Cllr Davis commented she would rather see smaller site developments spread across the towns and villages in the district, as opposed to a large-scale development. The Parish Council recognises a new Local Plan will need to be developed over the next two years and in the meantime this leaves the doors open for developers and individuals to put forward sites for consideration.

20/39 To consider whether to call in PLANNING APPLICATION UTT/20/1208/PIP

Cllr Reeve proposed that the application be called in to be considered by the Planning Committee should officers recommend approval, this was seconded by Cllr Robinson, and agreed by Cllr Davis. The reasons for this request being the objections by the residents and the concerns with sustainable development in this location.

Before closing the meeting, the chair asked those residents remaining if there were any other points they wished to raise in relation to the application or in terms of the governance of the meeting.

A resident expressed disappointment that only three Cllrs were able to take part and asked for clarity on the difference between the declarations of interest. Cllr Reeve responded confirming this matter had been carefully considered and that Cllrs had declared different types of interest which were both disclosable pecuniary and personal pecuniary. The Clerk confirmed a paper on the definitions of types of interests would be posted on the Parish Council Councillors section of the village website which will explain the differences.

Cllr Barker commented that participation at meetings via Zoom have been high and whatever comes out of this situation it is encouraging to seem more residents participate in local government matters. County and District Cllr Barker thanked Cllr Reeve for chairing the meeting.

Cllr Reeve closed the meeting at 9.20pm.