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WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the
Uplands Area Planning Sub-Committee
Held in the Council Chamber at 2.00 pm on **Monday, 10 January 2022**

PRESENT

Councillors: Jeff Haine (Chairman), Julian Cooper (Vice-Chair), Andrew Beaney, Marilyn Davies, Ted Fenton, David Jackson, Elizabeth Poskitt, Alex Postan, Geoff Saul, Dean Temple and Alex Wilson.

Officers: Joan Desmond (Principal Planner), Phil Shaw (Business Manager - Development Management), Amy Bridgewater-Carnall (Democratic Services Manager) and Michelle Ouzman (Strategic Support Officer).

46 Minutes of Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 December 2021 were approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record, subject to the following amendments:

The fifth paragraph on the first page of the minutes should read "...noted that the site was located in the middle of Bladon";

The spelling of Councillor Postan's name be amended on pages 4 and 6.

47 Apologies for Absence and Temporary Appointments

Councillor Poskitt substituted for Councillor Chapple.

48 Declarations of Interest

Agenda Item 4 – Applications for Development – 21/03159/FUL – Diddly Squat Farm Shop

Councillor Postan declared an interest in the application because he was an acquaintance of the applicant, although he had not spoken to him for approximately twenty years.

Agenda Item 5 – Applications Determined under Delegated Powers – 21/03001/FUL

Councillor Cooper declared an interest in the above decision because he was a member of Woodstock Sports and Social Club.

49 Applications for Development

The Principal Planner, Mrs Desmond, introduced the application for the conversion of an existing building to create a café / restaurant, together with associated landscaping works and the provision of parking; creation of a new access; realignment of the existing access and a new storage compound.

Members also noted the information contained in the follow on report, which advised that 14 additional objection letters had been received, raising similar issues as previous objectors. In addition two further letters of support had been received.

Mrs Desmond advised that since the Additional Representations report had been distributed three further letters of objection and one letter of support had been received. Members also noted that the measurements detailed in paragraph 5.28 needed clarification and paragraph 5.31 contained the up to date information as per the application. Mrs Desmond summarised

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the application, highlighting the proposed new access, permission for a 60 to 70 space car park, landscaping proposals and woodland planting.

The following people addressed the Committee:

Mr Streeten, on behalf of Mr and Mrs Dewar, objecting; and

Mr Clarkson, the applicant.

A copy of the submission read out by Mr Streeten is attached as an appendix to the original copy of these minutes.

In supporting the application, Mr Clarkson noted that much had been made of the area as an Area of Natural Beauty (AONB) but felt that historically, farmers had played a large part in maintaining this. He highlighted the financial difficulties facing farmers who were having to look to diversification to survive; advised that the farm was in discussions with neighbouring farmers, looking at serving locally produced food in the restaurant and were working together as a cooperative. He stated that the lambing shed was already in existence and nothing new was being built. He referred to Local Plan Policy OS2 which supported the re-use of appropriate buildings and reiterated that the proposal would encourage and enhance local employment opportunities and tourism. Mr Clarkson highlighted the lack of objections from the Parish Council, Thames Valley Police, Ecology, Archaeology, the County Council and the Cotswold Conservation Board. In conclusion, he signposted members to the positive comments made by the Council's Business Development officer and requested that Members support the proposal.

Following a question from Councillor Davies, Mr Clarkson explained why the lambing shed was no longer in use and advised that the farm's sheep flock had been merged with a neighbouring farm.

Councillor Poskitt asked for clarification on the statement made relating to the lack of an objection from Thames Valley Police (TVP) as she had been under the impression they were not satisfied with the level of lighting on site. Mr Clarkson explained that discussions had been ongoing with TVP and they appeared to be content with revised lighting proposals.

Councillor Saul sought further detail on the produce to be used and felt that the business plan lacked information in this area. Mr Clarkson assured the meeting that they were in discussions with many neighbouring and local farmers and provided an example of a local dairy farmer who had recently stated that if it had not been for the business she received from the farm shop, she would have gone out of business. The Chairman agreed to let Mr Ireland, the land agent, provide further detail about the Business Plan. Mr Ireland advised that parties already interested in joining the cooperative included farmers from Shipton-under-Wychwood, Leafield, Pudlicote, Hook Norton, Combe and Long Compton. It was envisaged that they would provide a variety of produce including potatoes, lamb, beef and chickens and this would add greater value for the farm and for the producers.

The Principal Planner continued with her presentation, detailed the Planning Policies relevant to the application and outlined the recommended reasons for refusal.

The Ward Councillor for Chadlington, Councillor Temple, advised that this was a difficult case and reminded Members of the difficulties faced by the working classes to find employment over the years. He applauded the potential offer of local jobs and the increase in tourism and felt that Policy EHI could be seen favourably. However, he also noted that great weight needed to be afforded to areas of scenic beauty. Councillor Temple stated that he had received many messages about this application but was determined that it should only be decided on planning law. He therefore concluded that the benefits afforded were not enough to outweigh the harm to the AONB. He therefore, proposed that the application be refused in line with officers recommendations.

This was seconded by Councillor Cooper, who concurred with the comments made. He felt there were sufficient planning grounds to refuse the application, and reiterated the affect this would have on the AONB.

Councillor Postan addressed the meeting and advised that having read the recommendations, he did not feel these matched the information contained in the report and was surprised at the refusal reasons. He advised that he had undertaken his own site visits and described the view of the site driving up from Chadlington. Councillor Postan felt that the nearby caravan park was objectionable compared to this proposal and provided examples as to how the car park bookings could be managed electronically. In addition, further measures could be put in place to include appropriate signage directing traffic. He felt that the light pollution created by the caravan park was relevant and encouraged Members to support a scheme which would encourage food production, help to tackle climate change and provide employment prospects and economic benefits. Councillor Postan advised that should the proposal to refuse fall, he would propose approval subject to relevant conditions.

In response, Councillor Haine referred Members to paragraph 176 of the National Planning Policy Framework which advised that great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks.

In seconding Councillor Postan's counter proposal, Councillor Davies advised that she agreed with the applicant's comments and felt it was important to support farms and the opportunity of cooperatives. She highlighted the unprecedented hardship that farmers had been facing and stated her support for the application and the opportunities it afforded.

Councillor Jackson received clarification from officers on the current opening hours of the farm shop and the proposed operational hours of the café / restaurant.

Councillor Saul addressed the meeting and felt that there was a cogent argument that the application was policy compliant, however he had concerns that this was appropriate diversification or an application for a stand- alone restaurant, as suggested by objectors. He

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had been reassured by the comments made by Mr Ireland but felt that a more detailed business report was needed. In conclusion, Councillor Saul advised that he felt there would be a harmful impact on the scenic beauty and tranquillity of the area and a 70 space car park was not appropriate in an AONB.

Councillor Poskitt queried the location of the bin store, the entrance and egress openings of the building. She had concerns about the glazing and lighting on site and queried why the restaurant had to be located on this farm if it was a cooperative. She noted that the caravan park was shaded by trees, which reduced its impact on the surrounding area. In response to the lighting query, Mrs Desmond confirmed the Police's comments and advised that she was not aware of any additional discussions.

Councillor Beaney addressed Members and noted the Policies that he felt were relevant. He made reference to the traffic concerns and how the number of vehicles visiting the site was highlighted in the photographs. In addition, he felt that the location of the proposal in the AONB meant that the bar was set higher than normal. In response, Mrs Desmond signposted Members to paragraph 5.15 of the report and reiterated the impact, scale and nature of the proposed use in an AONB.

Councillor Davies highlighted that residents living in or near an AONB still needed employment opportunities, did not agree with the 'dark skies' argument and felt that longer opening hours would help mitigate the traffic problems. She urged Members to read WODC Business Development officer's comments.

In response, Councillor Cooper advised that the comments made relating to 'dark skies' were very relevant. He reminded Members that the AONB drew visitors to the area and provided employment. He concluded by stating that if the wrong decision was made, a development would be around for a very long time.

Councillor Postan spoke again about his proposal to include a booking scheme for the site and reiterated his concerns about the neighbouring caravan park which he felt 'dwarfed this scheme'. In addition, he felt that the proposed landscaping would further shield the caravan park from view.

Prior to the vote, the Business Manager – Development Management, Phil Shaw, addressed the meeting to summarise the officer's position on the application and comment upon a number of issues raised by the Members. He reminded Members that officers had concluded the scheme was too big for such a sensitive location and, whilst he concurred with the comments made about the importance of employment opportunities, this proposal would cause harm that had to be accorded great weight in a planning sense. He advised the meeting that not having regard of the AONB would be a mistake and stated that the Council would have no control over delivery of any cooperative being suggested and that as such it should only be given limited weight. He noted that in any event the cooperative appeared to be including farms from a large area and as such that this was not the only location within that area for this development.

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Mr Shaw did not agree with the arguments made by Councillor Postan relating to the caravan park setting a precedent for the development and reminded Members that any harm to the area that may be considered to arise from that site, should not be added to by approving this application. He concluded by stating that officers did not support the argument that this was farm diversification due to the scale and impact but that he did feel there was an acceptable smaller scheme to be found, however, the impact of this application was too great to meet WODC and national policy.

The proposal made by Councillor Temple, and seconded by Councillor Cooper that the application be refused as per officers recommendations, was then put to the vote and was carried.

Refused

50 Applications Determined under Delegated Powers and Appeal Decisions

The report outlining the Delegated Decisions taken since the last meeting were considered and it was

Resolved that the report be noted.

The Meeting closed at 3.02 pm

CHAIRMAN

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