

Sonning Common Parish Council

Minutes of the meeting of the PLANNING COMMITTEE held in the Village Hall, Wood Lane, on Monday 19 July 2021 at 1915 hrs.

Present: Mr Rawlins, Mrs Lewis, Mr Settle, Mrs Diwell and Mrs Varnes, Deputy Parish Clerk, plus one member of the public.

P22/039 Apologies for absence: Mr Giles and Mr Fort.

P22/040 Declarations of interest: none.

P22/041 Public question time: Mrs Andrews attended the meeting in relation to the proposal below.

P22/042 New application:

P21/S1848/FUL Refurbishment of Buildings 12 and 13 for storage use with ancillary offices (4 units); Replacement of Building 4; Refurbishment of Buildings 14 for storage use with new archway feature linked to Building 4; Erection of Building 1 for office use; Change of use of Units 2-3 (Dutch Barn) to provide storage and distribution of gas bottles and storage and construction of wooden sheds; Change of use of land opposite Units 2-3 to display of wooden sheds; Provision of parking for proposed new uses - Part Retrospective. At Blounts Farm, Blounts Court Road, Sonning Common RG4 9PA. (Note that parts of this are in SCPC and others in RPPC – boundary shown as a thin purple line on drawings with RPPC on the left.)

Mrs Andrews, a client of the Frieze Farm Livery Stables, on Blounts Court Road, outlined her concerns about the potential adverse effects of the proposal on the use of the public bridleway running through the site and the safety of horses and riders.

After discussion members unanimously agreed to recommend to SODC the refusal of the application (see letter attached).

P22/043 Matters for future agendas: none.

The meeting closed at 1950.

Date of next meeting: Tuesday 03 August 2021 at 1915.

Chairman:

Dated:

SONNING COMMON PARISH COUNCIL

Parish Office

VILLAGE HALL, WOOD LANE
SONNING COMMON, OXON, RG4 9SL

Clerk – Philip Collings

Tel 0118 972 3616

Email: clerk@sonningcommonparishcouncil.org.uk

Ms Nicola Smith
Planning Officer, SODC
135 Eastern Avenue
Milton Park
Abingdon OX14 4SB

Tuesday 20 July 2021

Dear Ms Smith

Re: P21/S1848/FUL. Refurbishment of buildings 12 and 13 for storage use with ancillary offices (4 units); replacement of building 4; refurbishment of buildings 14 for storage use with new archway feature linked to building 4; erection of building 1 for office use; change of use of units 2-3 (Dutch Barn) to provide storage and distribution of gas bottles and storage and construction of wooden sheds; change of use of land opposite units 2-3 to display of wooden sheds; provision of parking for proposed new uses - part retrospective - at Blounts Farm, Blounts Court Road, Sonning Common RG4 9PA.

Sonning Common Parish Council's Planning Committee considered the above amended application at its meeting on Monday 19 July 2021. Members were deeply concerned about the proposal and resolved to vigorously object to the scheme.

Their chief concerns are:

1. The scale of the proposed development.
2. The intensification of the use of the site.
3. The impact on the public highway and the health and safety of users of the public bridleway which runs through the middle of the site.
4. The impact on the AONB.

1. Scale of the development

Under paragraph 17 of the application form the agent states that the existing gross internal floorspace area is 66.5 square metres and that the additional gross internal floorspace will grow to 698.7 square metres under the scheme – a more than 10-fold increase.

We note that under Local Plan policy E8 the re-use of rural buildings should be permitted for B1 and B2 uses only where floorspace in the complex does not exceed 500 square metres.

Members consider that a development of this scale within the AONB on a site which is not defined as an employment area within the Local Plan is unsustainable and will have a major, detrimental impact on local infrastructure and public safety.

2. Intensification of use of the site

This proposal represents a major upscaling of the site. The application states that largely a refurbishment of existing structures, already in commercial use, is proposed. However, since the site changed hands in 2019 local people have witnessed a major intensification of the use of the site with detrimental impacts being felt.

Previously only two main business operations were obvious to residents within the former agricultural buildings on-site – Harringtons and Kidby's Sheds. However, recently the owner of the site has acquired local development consent to significantly increase commercial operations on the site. The Old Milking Parlour to be used for a carpenter's workshop and to manufacture laboratory equipment; the Granary for offices, storage and toilets; the Old Dairy and former Farm Office for offices; the Main Barn, North End, for a workshop and storage; with, additionally, land to be used for the storage of motor vehicles. An application to create B8 storage within the former Calf's Shed is outstanding.

This intensification of use is not sustainable within this AONB location and it is putting significant strain on the local infrastructure.

3. Impact on the public highway and the health and safety of users of the public bridleway which runs through the site

Paragraph 84 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) requires that suitable developments should be sensitive to their surroundings and not have an unacceptable impact on local roads.

The Blounts Court Road, from which the site is accessed, is unarguably narrow, busy and is becoming increasingly dangerous to users, largely due to the intensification of the use of Blounts Farm.

Alarming, in response to question 22 on SODC's application form, 'Can the site be seen from a public road, public footpath, bridleway or other public land?', the agent answers 'no'. This is blatantly incorrect. As can be seen from the Parish Online map accompanying this letter, a public bridleway runs right through the middle of the site.

Horses and riders from the Frieze Farm Livery Stables, further along Blounts Court Road, routinely use this bridleway as their main access point to the fields behind the farm and off-road riding. A member of the public, who keeps her horse at livery at the yard, attended our Planning Committee meeting to explain to members the likely impact of the proposal on the public bridleway and the safety of the horses and riders who use it.

This resident has been using the bridleway for 43 years and currently rides on it three times a week. She said that she had witnessed a 'huge difference' in the intensity of the use of the site over the past few years. The access from Blounts Court Road had become particularly busy, articulated lorry movements and other activities

on-site had caused horses to bolt and run into the road, with one rider having fallen from her horse and broken her ankle, she said.

4. Impact on the AONB

Local residents regularly use the public access through this site to reach the fields behind the farm to walk, run and ride in the countryside. The ability to enjoy the countryside in this AONB setting has been particularly important to local people throughout the pandemic. This proposed development will impact on the users of this public access and their enjoyment of the countryside.

Local Plan policies G2 and G4 require that the countryside is protected from adverse developments such as this. Policy E5 requires that developments for business use, warehousing and storage should be of a scale and type appropriate to the site and its surroundings. This proposal is not.

In addition to the points above members wish me to stress that this application should be viewed in the wider context of other approved and potential developments in the immediate locality.

The planning inspector's decision last month in relation to the Little Sparrows appeal will result in a 133-unit retirement complex being built on the opposite side of the Blounts Court Road while the Johnson Matthey Technology Centre is seeking to build a major new Customer Innovation Centre adjacent to Blounts Farm.

The Parish Council is liaising separately with the county council's Highways department about the impacts of heavy development on Blounts Court Road and Widmore Lane (the latter is not considered to be fit for heavy goods traffic, according to a Parish Council-commissioned report).

Representatives of the Planning Committee would be happy to meet you in relation to this site if you are planning to visit it, which we strongly recommend.

We would be grateful if you could please keep the Parish Council informed of all developments in relation to this proposal.

Thank you.

Yours sincerely

Ros Varnes
Deputy Clerk, Sonning Common Parish Council (On behalf of the Planning Committee)