

Minutes of an Extraordinary Meeting of Staploe Parish Council held Online at 7.45pm on Thursday 15th October 2020 on Skype

Present: Cllr. J. Ibbett (Chair), Cllr. V. Zwetsloot, Cllr. R. Squire, Cllr. G. Meola, Cllr. E. Meola, Cllr. D. Smith, Cllr. J. Thomson, Lucy Crawford (Clerk) and three members of the public.

2020/087. Declarations of Interest

Cllr. V. Zwetsloot declared a local interest in the planning application at St. Dunstan's item 2020/088 as she is a neighbour but she will join the discussion and vote. Cllr. G. Meola declared an interest in the football item 2020/092 and will withdraw from the discussion and any voting as she lives in Woodhouse Lane and feels she would be affected more than most by the decision. Cllr. E. Meola declared an interest in the football item 2020/092 and will not withdraw from the discussion or voting.

2020/088. Approve the Minutes of the Parish Council Meeting held on 17th September 2020

Having been previously circulated the minutes were approved as an accurate record of the meeting. Proposed by Cllr. R. Squire and seconded by Cllr. E. Meola.

2020/089. Public Open Forum

The resident applying for planning permission at agenda item 2020/090 explained that his business based at St Dunstan's employs five local people and the directors are currently having to commute from near Attleborough on a daily basis. He would like to provide them with accommodation on his land in a mobile home to reduce their need to commute. The mobile home would be sited outside the farmyard and 20m from the house to the south of the workshop. It will not be visible from the road and will be built to a high standard. He asked the Parish Council to support the application in order to support his business.

Cllr. R. Squire asked whether he had considered converting one of his existing outbuildings. He explained that this would take too long and he uses the outbuildings as an archive facility and to store cars and machinery.

Cllr. J. Thomson asked whether it would be temporary or long term. He explained that it would remain in place as long as it was needed for weekly commuting.

A resident asked how this application was different from the applications made for mobile homes at the traveller site. He said it was completely different in that it would be ancillary to the house, it was for one mobile home, it would not be seen and would be of a very high standard of design.

The Clerk read an e-mail from a resident of Staploe:

"I'm writing with a concern about the planning application at St Dunstan's Farm, Upper Staploe, as described in the current Hamlets newsletter.

My understanding is that, over the years, the Parish has repeatedly come up against issues with travellers taking up residence in mobile homes in and around the area. And, as a Parish, we have actively sought to disallow the use of the land for such purpose.

The planning applications page of the Borough website indicates that the application for St Dunstan's Farm is for a 'residential mobile home'. So if the Parish were to agree to a mobile home at St Dunstan's, are we not opening ourselves up to argument from travellers that they should also be allowed the same opportunity?"

A resident of Staploe present at the meeting stated that he was sure that the applicant has good reasons for his application but could not see how the application could be accepted as it would not be consistent with the approach the Parish Council have taken in the past with mobile homes and travellers. He stated:

“In the recent past, the Parish Council and Bedford Borough Council have acted to prevent development in the open countryside by rejecting the applications for the siting of mobile homes on the Bushmead Road site just a short distance east of St. Dunstan’s Farm. Acceptance of this new application would not be consistent with the previous position and it could reopen or encourage further applications on that site east of St. Dunstan’s Farm.”

The open forum closed at 8.05pm

2020/090. Planning

Application number	Type	Description	Location	Deadline	Link
20/02106/COU	Change of use	Change of use of land for the siting of a residential mobile home	St Dunstan Farm Bushmead Road Staploe St Neots PE19 5JF	20/10/2020	20/02106/COU

Cllr. V. Zwetsloot supported the application on the grounds that it would help the applicant’s business, would not be seen from the road and would be well designed. Cllr. R. Squire and Cllr. J. Ibbett were keen to support a local business but were concerned about inconsistency and abstained.

Cllr. E. Meola, Cllr. G. Meola, Cllr. J. Thomson and Cllr. D. Smith were concerned that it was development in open countryside which is contrary to the policies in the Local Plan 2030 and it does not meet any of the exception criteria. They felt that it was important to be consistent with the Council’s previous objections.

It was resolved to object to this application on the basis that it would comprise development in open countryside. There are no settlement policy areas in the parish of Staploe so it is classed as open countryside and St. Dunstons is outside the built form of the three hamlets.

Policy 6.21 of Local Plan 2030 states that “Places with a scattered development form, comprising no reasonably substantial definable core are considered to form part of the countryside. Nevertheless, it is important that overly restrictive policies do not prevent the borough’s rural businesses and smaller communities from thriving. A balance therefore needs to be struck between supporting a thriving rural economy and providing opportunities for communities to achieve local development aspirations, whilst protecting and where appropriate enhancing the natural and historic environment, the character and appearance of existing settlements and the surrounding countryside.

6.22 Policy 7 incorporates sufficient flexibility to support the provision of new homes where they will enhance or maintain the vitality of rural communities and meet identified needs. The policy will prevent isolated homes in the countryside.

Policy 7S refers to:

“reuse of rural buildings in the countryside” – this application does not seek to reuse the rural buildings at St Dunstan’s but seeks to create a new dwelling in a new structure.

“replacement and extension of dwellings in the countryside” – this does not apply

“affordable homes” – this is a second home for directors of the business and therefore it would not be meeting a requirement for an affordable home.

“accommodation for rural workers” – the mobile home would house workers in a business located in the rural area but they would not be working in designated rural occupations and alternative accommodation options are available locally in eg. St. Neots and neighbouring settlements.

The Parish Council have objected to mobile homes sited on the ex-traveller site almost immediately opposite St. Dunstan’s and to other applications for development in the open countryside and it is their view that if they were to approve this development it would set a precedent for future developments in the open countryside on land not designated for development.

2020/091. Finance

- Receipts and Payments. It was resolved to pay £151.67 for printing the newsletter. Proposed by Cllr. J. Thomson and seconded by Cllr. J. Ibbett.

2020/092. Consider whether to permit adult football on the playing field

Cllr. J. Thomson suggested that it was important to go back to basics and decide as a parish what the field and hall are to be used for. Are they to be used by people outside the parish in order to pay for the upkeep, are they to be used by residents for eg. teenage parties and adult sport.

Cllr. D. Smith wanted to know why the decision had been made not to permit adult sport historically. Cllr. R. Squire thought it was because there were already enough teams playing at the field. Cllr. E. Meola thought it was because of bad language.

Cllr. J. Ibbett asked what we wanted to achieve on the playing field and at the hall. Did we want to invite people in to use the facilities and keep revenue going and residents getting the best from them. She felt that it was good that people wanted to use the playing field and village hall. She suggested that the Parish Council should consult the parishioners in a newsletter and in an open forum of some sort eg. socially distanced hire of a hall to get opinions.

Cllr. J. Thomson agreed. She suggested we might want to have an open bar on a Friday evening such as they have at Keysoe. She thought it would be wise to ask Renhold how they handle parties at their hall.

The Clerk suggested that Councillors consider how to hold this discussion about how the facilities are to be used and add it to the agenda for a future meeting.

Cllr. V. Zwetsloot suggested that it would be good to have sport activities on the field as it gave opportunities for residents to join in.

Cllr. R. Squire reminded Councillors that since the Football Club left we are now having to pay over £1000 per year to maintain the field which was previously done by the club at no cost to the parish.

Cllr. E. Meola said that the plans for the hall had already been agreed by the hall committee and did not include showers.

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Cllr. D. Smith explained that no one was suggesting that the village hall plans change but just that the parish make a decision on what we are going to accept for users of the hall and playing field. He felt it was worthwhile doing this together as a parish. He also said he thought users of our facilities would need to accept them as they are ie. containers without showers. He suggested we find out whether it was possible to allow adult football without showers and that there was no rush to make a decision as the club would not be using the field until 2021/22 season.

It was resolved that the decision should be postponed to the November meeting while Cllr. E. Meola finds out the minimum requirements for adult sport. Eg. showers, separate changing room for the referee etc. Proposed by Cllr. J. Ibbett and seconded by Cllr. D. Smith.

The meeting closed at 8.30pm