



Cowden Parish Council

MINUTES OF THE PLANNING COMMITTEE MEETING OF COWDEN PARISH COUNCIL HELD ON 13 SEPTEMBER 2018 AT COWDEN MEMORIAL HALL

PRESENT: Councillors: Andrew Saunders, Lorraine Millgate, Stephen Boakes, Valerie Bishop, Glyn Henley and Celia Berry.

Also present: Caroline Bizios (Parish Clerk) and two members of the public.

Public Questions:

Mr Knudson, a member of the public, addressed the meeting regarding the proposed development of a garage on the site of his property Kentwater House, Hartfield Road. Mr Knudson explained that a previous application for a garage development had previously been approved but had now expired and that he was submitting a new planning application. He explained that he was currently in the pre-application process with Sevenoaks District Council and, being aware that the Parish Council are consulted on planning applications, wished to attend the meeting as a courtesy to seek the Parish Council's views.

Councillor Saunders thanked Mr Knudson for attending the meeting and coming to share his thoughts with Members. However, Councillor Saunders advised that whilst this was most welcome, the Parish Council was unable to comment on pre-application information. This was because Members would need to declare an interest, on the basis that the application had been previously discussed with the applicant, at the Planning Committee meeting at which the full planning application was to be considered.

The Clerk will advise Mr Knudson of the date at which the full planning application is to be considered by Members.

MINUTES:

1. Apologies for Absence:

There were no apologies for absence.

2. Declarations of Interest:

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Minutes of Previous Planning Committee Meeting:

Resolved: The Minutes of the Planning Committee meeting held on 30 August 2018 were approved as an accurate record of the meeting.

4. Planning Applications Received:

(i) SE/18/02650/FUL – Land South of Waystrode Cottages, Spode Lane, Cowden

Erection of a 40m x 20m all weather turnout/exercise and riding arena.

Member raised several concerns in respect of this application and resolved not to support the application. The reasoning behind this resolution is set out as Annex 1 to the Minutes which will be provided to Sevenoaks District Council as the Parish Council's response.

Resolved: Members resolved not to support the application.

(ii) SE/18/02698/WTCA – Rose Cottage, High Street, Cowden

Reduce the crown of one apple tree by approximately 20-25%

Members raised no objections to the proposal.

Resolved: Members resolved to support the application.

5. Correspondence Received:

Nothing to report.

6. Planning Decisions Received:

Nothing to report

Meeting closed at 8.05pm

Chairman..... Date.....

ANNEX 1

Planning Application SE/18/02650/FUL is for an 800 m² (20 m x 40 m) sand school within a 2.25 hectare meadow which is designated as a Local Wildlife site (Current SDC publication dated February 2015), listed as a 'Site of Nature and Conservation Interest' by the Kent Trust for Nature Conservation, borders a Kent Wildlife Roadside Nature reserve, within the AONB and bordering Cowden Conservation Area. This significant meadow has also been subject of previous planning application SE/17/00815/FUL granted by SDC. A recent application for a sand school was withdrawn prior to earthworks commencing which resulted in SDC serving an enforcement notice only after works were instructed to cease through a site visit by SDC but continued for approximately a further week. Previous applications have been supported with a Site Management Plan, and was cited as a condition as part of SE/17/00815/FUL being granted.

The Management Plan has been constructed around a grazing regime reliant on rotational grazing through segregation of the now reduced meadow. Through consultation it is noted that good horse (or pony) management practices recommend just under a hectare of intensely managed land per horse per year and estimate that in a year a horse will graze through 11 hectares of pasture.

The previous applications granted through SDC, the implementation of a hardstanding (referenced in supporting documents as Parking Area), clearance works around ponds and planting out of soft fruit trees is estimated to have reduced the size of the original meadow land by approximately 11%. In addition to this several healthy mature trees have been removed from the 'southern field'. The removal of these trees has never formed part of the management plan.

Previous applications granted by SDC have resulted in works being undertaken at unsociable times. The Parish Council is aware that numerous persons in the village have raised this both locally and with Sevenoaks District Council complaints team directly.

This current application SE/18/02650/FUL, if granted, would further reduce the meadow by 5% resulting in an estimated net reduction of this meadow of 16% through continual development.

The applicants supporting letter asserts justification for the sand school based on the meadow being 'water logged' during the winter months impacting the ability to undertake rotational grazing in accordance with the supporting management plan, an aspect not realised until post use of the meadow during the winter, and the local bridle paths becoming 'seriously poached putting horses at risk from injury'. The surrounding area benefits from numerous interconnected bridle paths providing equestrian use all year round. Some bridle paths do become overly muddy, as expected for some very localised areas of the surrounding landscape, but in an area that has a very healthy and high equestrian use all year round this is and has not been a problem.

A 'Botanical Survey' is also provided in support of the application, conducted on July 19th 2018 which is post the completion of all works associated with previous granted planning applications. As such it's not known what, if any, impact these works had on this meadow. The survey lists various species of flora and fauna present, notes that only 'field 1' is heavily grazed. The survey completes with a 'Discussion' which is reliant on a 'discussion' with a third party but does not state with whom, the relevance or level of subject matter expertise the third party has. The survey 'Discussion' is also reliant of supporting artefacts that are 'understood' to apply.

Section 12 of the Application for planning permission has been answered as 'No' for all three questions (a,b,c). Based on the designations currently applied to this meadow as detailed herein this is considered to be incorrectly completed and the responses as provided with the application are incorrect.

The 'Cumulative Development', as defined within the Planning Policies, of this 'meadow' has raised numerous concerns locally, in particular the gradual transformation of the 'meadow' into a developed landscape. This application if granted, further progresses that concern. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) refers to the cumulative impact of development and its not having a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt through volume, scale or bulk. It is the opinion of Cowden Parish Council that this planning application SE/18/02650/FUL, in the context of the Parish, this meadow and its immediately surrounding area, will adversely affect the openness of the Green Belt through the estimated net reduction of 16% in meadowland that results from this development and that already undertaken and will detract from the original character of the area. Whilst appropriate equestrian development is recognised within the Planning Policies, Cowden Parish Council considers that the application does not maintain the environmental quality set out by the policy, nor sits appropriately within the landscape of Cowden.

The relevance of the justification provided around bridle paths in winter and meadow damage in winter to the application is not considered to provide a holistic picture nor has explored the alternatives. The Council's assessment is based on significant local knowledge of the surrounding area.

There are contradictions within the various supporting information provided with this application, as assessed and commented on herein. The Management Plan provided with this application is a modified 'schematic' of the previous Management Plan. Given the facts that are provided within this application, irrespective of whether this application is granted or not by SDC, the Management Plan, as has already been demonstrated in its previous iteration, is inadequate in detail to demonstrate the effective ongoing management of the meadow. As such Cowden Parish Council considers that, irrespective of this application being approved or not by SDC, further deterioration of the meadow, which is cited in numerous wildlife documents as detailed herein, will result from the Management Plan as proposed. This will further harm the character and benefits of the meadow. SDC should ensure that an appropriately documented Management Plan is put in place to ensure that the meadow is recovered to its original status or, as a minimum, maintained in such a way that no further deterioration to its environmental status occurs.

In summary, as a result of the information provided and the assessment undertaken by Cowden Parish Council, members do not support this application for the reasons cited herein and as detailed within Planning Policy. In particular the loss of openness in the Green Belt, the 'Cumulative Impact', the effect on the character of the surrounding area and a management plan that is considered to be neither sufficient nor 'environmentally friendly or constrained' to maintain and/or recover the meadow to its previous state without disruption including undertaking any works at unsociable working times.