

## HUNTON PARISH COUNCIL

### MINUTES OF THE PLANNING COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 12<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER 2023 AT 6:30PM AT HUNTON VILLAGE HALL

**PRESENT:** Cllr M Summersgill in the Chair, Cllrs J Fuller, I Simmons, A Trought (until Item 5.4) and J Goddard (entered during Item 5.1), and Mrs S Goodwin, Clerk.

**IN ATTENDANCE:** Twelve members of the public were in attendance. One left during and two left after the Open Session.

#### **OPEN SESSION:**

A member of the public referred to posts the Chairman has made on the Hunton Facebook page, which he considers to be inaccurate, as they create the impression that he and other farmers are doing something untoward in their working practices. Cllr Trought advised that any issues should be notified to her as the Facebook administrator, or to Cllr Summergill, outside of the meeting.

The applicant for the Linton Growing Land application (Item 5.3) was asked to give an overview of the application:

The application is made by Linton Growing, a business which grows plants such as raspberries and strawberries for other businesses. It is partly driven by Brexit as propagation is moving from Europe to the UK. The strategy of Driscoll's, who breed plants, is to move the propagation to the UK. Linton Growing have a licence to propagate plants for Driscoll's. It reduces food miles. The purpose of the polytunnels is to cover and protect the raspberry and strawberry plants.

Members of the public and parish councillors asked a number of questions and made comments:

- *In the landscape assessment it states that there are already polytunnels in Hunton. Where are they?* Westerhill Farm, Mill Lane, Cheveney, Lughorse Lane, Amsbury Farm.
- *Does it mean that if there are polytunnels already there that it is fine to add more?* No, an application must be made.
- *When did you realise you needed polytunnels on site?* The licence was granted at the end of the winter. The infrastructure was researched.
- *Were the polytunnels not part of your original business plan?* No, as the licence was not granted at that point. The licence came about due to changes within Driscoll's and driven by Brexit; UK plants should be grown by UK growers.
- *In relation to the size of the site, the proposed area for the polytunnels is quite small. Are there plans to extend them over the whole site?* In the medium term no more polytunnels will be needed.
- *Are you going to lease to other companies?* No, Linton Growing has the licence.
- *What is the estimated increase in traffic if the polytunnels are approved?* Very limited.
- *Why have KCC Highways raised concerns; it is unusual for them to get involved in planning applications?* They perhaps do not understand the situation.
- *Will there be more tractors on Redwall Lane and East Street?* The tunnels produce plants, not fruit. There will not be a dramatic increase.
- *There is often a lot of mud on the road from the vehicles on the site; if it rains it is very dangerous. The first 40m will be concreted to allow vehicles to be cleaned before they access the highway.*
- *When Berry Gardens obtained permission to build there was a huge increase in trucks from Europe. They use their GPS, travel down Hunton Hill and get stuck. In their application they stated that trucks would be instructed to use Linton Hill but they do not. There is no policing once permission is granted. The Berry Gardens site is a packhouse for Clock House Farm which grows high quality fruit for UK customers in the best way possible. If the population wants home-grown, nutritious food there needs to be farming in the countryside.*
- *If the plants are small, why are the polytunnels so high?* The strawberry plants create runners which grow tips. The height is based on the number of tips.
- *Are you planning to plant trees near the polytunnels?* There is a planting scheme.
- *The trees are all on the eastern boundary, none on the western side.* There is hedging on the western boundary.
- *Can you use green polytunnels?* No, as it affects the performance of the plants.

- *The area has become waterlogged.* Part of the scheme will include attenuation ponds to retain water from the polytunnels.
- *Are the portacabins residential or for workers during the day?* They are permanent, for seasonal use. They stay on site in the winter. They are mobile homes, not portacabins.
- *With the intensive growing, specialist staff will be required. Are you planning to use the mobile homes all year round?* No, there is a period when they are empty.
- *Paragraph 2.9 of the Supporting Planning Statement states: 'Following on from this production of propagated young soft fruit plants, the mother plants are then used in the polytunnels and used for the production of soft fruit in order to provide a different growth production cycle to provide a soft fruit crop across a longer season'. Will fruit be harvested from the polytunnels?* Some fruit is picked to check that the mother plant is true to the original genetics. The fruit will not be wasted but the purpose of the polytunnels is to produce tips.
- *Is heating required?* No, but if it was, it would not be a noticeable part of the infrastructure.

A member of the public asked Members if they are aware of the new single storey construction in the garden associated with Riverside House on West Street. There is no planning application on the MBC website. Cllr Summersgill advised that it will be included on the agenda for the next Parish Council meeting on 18<sup>th</sup> September.

Another member of the public added that Little Clock House on George Street is in breach of planning conditions and a further caravan has been moved on to the site. Cllr Summersgill advised that the Parish Council has requested enforcement action from MBC but they have done nothing. It will also be added to the agenda for the next Parish Council meeting.

Cllr Simmons explained the role of the Parish Council with regard to planning applications. The Parish Council makes recommendations but the decision to permit or refuse is made by MBC. Individuals are encouraged to make representations to MBC too.

## 1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received and accepted from Cllr D Heaton. County/Borough Cllr S Webb had also sent his apologies.

## 2. FILMING AND RECORDING

No members of the public wished to film, record or photograph the meeting.

## 3. COUNCILLOR DECLARATIONS

### 3.1 Declaration of Interests

Cllr Goddard declared that his brother in law is the applicant for the planning application in Item 5.1.

### 3.2 Dispensations

There were no requests for dispensations.

## 4. MINUTES OF THE PLANNING COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 7<sup>TH</sup> AUGUST 2023

The minutes of the meeting had been previously distributed and were agreed to be an accurate record. Cllr Summersgill signed off the official copy of the minutes.

## 5. PLANNING APPLICATIONS

The following planning applications were considered, and recommendations made:

### 5.1 Grove Barn, Grove Lane - 23/503448/FULL

Change of use of agricultural land to residential garden, erection of a single storey side extension. Creation of an improved vehicular access and removal of existing fence panels and erection of posts and rail fences. *Cllr Goddard left the meeting for this item.*

Parish Council recommendation: No objection, but with the following comments:

- The access to the site, Grove Lane, frequently floods.
- There could be contamination risk from previous agricultural use of the barn and possibly residuals in the soil from chemicals used to douse the fire which destroyed the original barn.

There was a previous application to change agricultural land to residential which MBC refused, although that was for a larger extension. The proposed extension does not overpower the existing building.  
*Cllr Goddard returned to the meeting.*

**5.2 The Old Post Office, Hunton Hill - 23/503735/LBC**

Listed Building Consent for insertion of replacement slim line double glazed windows.  
Parish Council recommendation: No objection.

**5.3 Linton Growing Land At Burford Farm, Redwall Lane, Linton - 23/503752/FULL**

Erection of polytunnels with year round coverage. Concreting of the existing access track over a 40 m section and the construction of 2 no. concrete bin pads with partial grain walls, with associated landscaping, drainage infrastructure and engineering operations.

Parish Council recommendation: Refuse. If the Case Officer is minded to approve the application, the Parish Council would like it to be considered by the MBC Planning Committee. The reasons for the objection are:

- The lack of data on increased traffic, especially the number of heavy vehicle movements through Hunton Parish to other growing sites, or transport for all year round site personnel, etc.
- Visual impact of the polytunnels from public footpaths and other viewpoints, especially George Street, Redwall Lane and East Street, particularly as the proposal is for the polytunnels to remain covered all year round.
- Siting of a drainage facility (attenuation pond) in a functioning flood plain (Flood Zone 3b). When the pond is flooded it will not hold the surface water.
- The site is within a Natural England Strategic Opportunity Area for Great Crested Newts, which is not mentioned in the documentation, nor does the documentation refer to Biodiversity Net Gain (applicable since the Environment Act 2021) or assess the local/adjacent ecology of woodland and riverine environments in sufficient detail.
- The footpath KM129 is often flooded in the winter and sometimes impassable. The flooding will worsen with the erection of the polytunnels, causing direct faster run-off arriving at a French drain alongside the footpath.
- The polytunnels will be used to produce soft fruit for market, as well as provide a nursery for plants (Supporting Planning Statement - 2.9). This will result in a further increase in traffic.
- The proposed landscaping is insufficient as the land slopes upwards so the polytunnels will not be hidden by hedging, when viewed from the South. The proposed hedging will also take 10 years to grow.
- The application does not meet the 'rotational requirement' for polytunnels stated in Maidstone Borough Local Plan Policy DM36.2(ii).

Cllr Summersgill will provide additional comments as Flood Warden. Linton and Marden parish councils have both sent in comments about the year-round use of the polytunnels.

**5.4 Hopview Cottage, Hilltop - 23/503900/FULL**

Regularisation of land to residential garden. Demolition of a garage and outbuilding and erection of an annexe.

Parish Council recommendation: Approve, providing the building remains as one residential unit.

**6. REPORTED PLANNING DECISIONS**

The following planning decisions have been made by Maidstone Borough Council since the last Planning Committee meeting.

**6.1 Sunrise Oast, 3 Cheveney Oast, Salters Cross, Vicarage Road, Yalding - 23/502286/FULL**

Construction of patio on the eastern edge of the property.

Parish Council recommendation: No objection.

Maidstone Borough Council decision: Permitted.

**6.2 Cold Stores Adjacent To Gennings Clock Tower - 23/502583/PNQCLA**

Prior notification for the change of use of Agricultural unit known as Cold store 3 conversion into 3no. dwellinghouses and associated operation development. For its prior approval to: - Transport and Highways impacts of the development. - Noise impacts of the development. - Contamination risks on the site. - Flooding risks on the site. - Whether the location or siting of the building makes it otherwise impractical or undesirable for the use of the building to change from agricultural use to C3 (dwellinghouses) - Design and

external appearance impacts on the building. - Provision of adequate natural light in all habitable rooms of the dwellinghouses.

Parish Council recommendation: No objection to development of the site for residential purposes.

However, the site should require planning permission rather than prior notification, given that the building in its present state would require extensive modification, such as: the addition of fenestration; changes to the current structure of the building if it is not sound enough; and for amenities. In addition:

- There is Japanese Knotweed on the site which would need to be properly treated to eradicate it;
- There is asbestos on the site which would need to be removed;
- Contaminants such as oil, hydrocarbons and chemicals associated with cold store usage would need to be removed.

Maidstone Borough Council decision: Refused.

**6.3 Land Adjacent To Scotts House, West Street - 23/503009/FULL**

Erection of 18 no. ground mounted solar PV panels on land adjacent to Scotts House.

Parish Council recommendation: No objection.

Maidstone Borough Council decision: Permitted.

**7. SIGNAGE FOR SHARP WEST STREET BEND**

Members **Approved** the £1,188.15 cost for KCC Highways to implement the signage for the bend. The Clerk will inform KCC Highways.

**8. VISUAL TREE INSPECTION**

Members **Approved** the £445 cost for Silva Arboriculture Ltd to carry out a Visual Tree Inspection. Cllr Summersgill will inform Silva Arboriculture.

**There being no further planning matters to be discussed, the meeting closed at 8:35pm.**