

ALTON PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of meeting at the Coronation Hall, 7.30 pm, September 7, 2017

Present: Ben Owen (Chair), Robert Carpenter Turner, Steve Hepworth, Alex Oliver, Charles Reiss (Clerk). Apologies: Peter Emery, Polly Carson, Mike Golden, Debby Lester. In attendance: Cllr Paul Oatway.

087/17 Minutes: The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed and signed by the Chairman.

Matters arising not covered by the agenda - deferred

088/17 Planning Application 17/07355/FUL, Sheep Unit, West Stowell Farm: Members considered and refined a draft detailing the Parish Council's objections to the application. It was then proposed Ben Owen, seconded Alex Oliver: that the document as amended be submitted to Wiltshire Council. Agreed unanimously. (Text attached as an annex to the minutes.) Members thanked Cllr Oatway for his help.

Matters arising not covered by the agenda

089/17 Broadband: Steve Hepworth reported a conversation with a senior BT executive who confirmed that the entire parish is scheduled for ultra-high-speed broadband. He had asked for further detail on implementation.

Any other business: none.

There being no further business, the meeting ended at 7:46 PM.

Annex to minutes: Planning Application 17/07355/FUL – PC submission

This proposal is unanimously opposed by Alton Parish Council for the following reasons:

Core policy 48 when considering the conversion and re-use of rural buildings states:-
'Proposals to convert and re-use rural buildings for employment, tourism, cultural and community uses will be supported.'

Alton Parish Council note that in this planning application none of the above uses are considered. This is because the current owners have decided to take the existing buildings out of commercial agricultural use despite the associated sheep unit being of award winning design and the barn still being capable of agricultural use. We would question that sheep/lamb production was no longer a viable part of a mixed farming enterprise.

The applicants are hoping that Wiltshire Council accept the argument in Core policy 48 which further states conversion will be supported if the following criteria are satisfied:-

i. The building(s) is/are structurally sound and capable of conversion without major rebuilding, and with only necessary extension or modification which preserves the character of the original building. **Alton Parish Council are of the opinion that the submitted plans substantially change the appearance of the barn with the insertion of large areas of glass with aluminium framing, that are totally out of character with the existing design.**

ii. The use would not detract from the character or appearance of the landscape or settlement..... **Alton Parish Council are unanimous that the change of use to a large 5 bedroom residential property would seriously detract from what is an uninhabited landscape that would inevitably cause light pollution in an otherwise unlit area which goes against protection of dark skies within the AONB. This location is overlooked by the Pewsey Downs escarpment including Knapp Hill, Golden ball Hill, Draycott Hill, the Tan Hill Way and the Pewsey Downs National Nature Reserve. It is also visible from the C38 Lockeridge to Alton road where many stop to take in the outstanding views across the Pewsey Vale. It is also clearly visible from the C8 Alton to Pewsey road when heading East.**

iii. The building can be served by adequate access and infrastructure.

iv. The site has reasonable access to local services.

Alton Parish Council note that the only services such as schools, shops are a car journey away on a single track road with passing places or along designated quiet roads. The location is not sustainable.

v. The conversion or re-use of a heritage asset would lead to its viable long term safeguarding. **Alton Parish Council would like to point out that if the applicant was requesting planning approval for the demolition of the sheep unit and careful deconstruction and removal of the "none designated heritage barn" to allow for its reconstruction with an associated change of use sited next to the existing estate buildings it would consider this more sympathetically.**

Core policy 48 additionally states:-

Where there is clear evidence that the above uses are not practical propositions, residential development may be appropriate where it meets the above criteria.

In isolated locations, the re-use of redundant or disused buildings for residential purposes may be permitted where justified by special circumstances, in line with national policy. **Alton Parish Council has not seen any evidence of special circumstances. All we have is a statement saying that nothing else is viable.**

We have not been furnished with any supporting evidence and would seriously question any economic arguments to say that the current use was not viable. In addition in their own planning analysis the architects hint at the possibility of continued agricultural use. The design and sustainability of the proposals fall well short of any outstanding sustainable off grid solution which would merit in our opinion qualification for special consideration.

Alton PC would like to draw attention to Core policy 51 Landscape, where it states that '*Development should protect, conserve and where possible enhance landscape character and must not have a harmful impact....*' We consider that the plans would do exactly the opposite. The change in character and use of the building would detract from important views and visual amenity. It would do nothing to enhance or preserve the tranquillity of the location. The proposal cannot mitigate against intrusion from light pollution from a domestic building which has internal lighting even if the Local Authority imposed conditions on external lighting.

The Parish Council believes the proposal also breaches core policies 1 and 2. The former states: *Development at large and small villages will be limited to that needed to help meet the housing needs of settlements and to improve employment opportunities, services and facilities.*

The Housing needs survey, carried out for Alton Parish Council in 2016 does not identify a need for such a property within the parish. The proposal is at the extreme Eastern end of the Parish 1.78 Km as the crow flies from any other property boundary within our Parish. The Parish would gain little from this development but would lose an area of uninhabited rural landscape within the AONB.

We note that Wiltshire has in recent weeks refused an extremely similar application, 17/04169/FUL, nearby at Wilcot.

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