

Pitcombe Parish Council

Minutes of a Pitcombe Parish Council meeting held on Tuesday 9th March 2021 via Zoom.

Present: Councillors Waller (Chair), Currie, Donahue, Donald and Groom.

Also present: District Councillor Robin Bastable

Locum Clerk: Zöe Godden

There were 14 members of the public present at the start of the meeting.

The meeting started at 19:31.

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and explained that members of the public would be allowed to speak for up to three minutes each. The Chair asked members of the public to try not to repeat points already made.

19:33 – The Chair allowed a public open session

Eight members of the public spoke to voice their opposition to planning application 21/00238/OUT for five dwellings at Pitcombe Farm. The objections raised were as follows:

- The development would result in an additional 18 cars using the surrounding single lane tracks and historic bridge. The lanes were used regularly by walkers and did not have any passing places, so the additional traffic make walking dangerous. To minimise the impact on surrounding roads, no more than three dwellings should be built on the site.

19:35 – Another member of the public joined the meeting

- Despite comments in the application documents to the contrary, the site had flooded several times since the 1980s. During periods of wet weather, occupiers of the properties adjacent to the site have to park their cars on the other side of the viaduct for to prevent them becoming stranded by flood water. The increase in instances of extreme rainfall and the addition of more vehicles to the area will exacerbate this situation.
- Despite comments in the application, neither residents nor the Parish Council had been consulted by the applicant. Two residents reported that they had had a conversation with the applicant but felt that this did not constitute formal consultation.
- The application referred to facilities in Bruton as reasons for allowing the development to take place. However, Pitcombe is a rural settlement in its own right and decisions on development should be taken with this in mind.
- The application refers to a regular bus service but there are only three busses per day.
- The application refers to a nursery but this is a privately run business.
- The application refers to the village hall in Hadspen but to reach it would require a car journey.
- The seriousness of the flood risk to the site and the wider village area has not been accounted for in the application documentation. The 2008 flood was not mentioned. The flood risk assessment submitted with the application contradicts the detailed Salinger report of 2008.
- In 2014, flood waters submerges the historic bridge and the access to the site. Vehicles driving through floods push water into properties adjacent to the site. This happens much more regularly since there are a greater number of extreme weather incidents.

19:42 – Councillor Fysh joined the meeting.

- The size of the dwellings and their density are inappropriate for the site.
- The application claims that the development of five dwellings represents a 2.5% increase

across the parish. However, there are only 20 dwellings in the village of Pitcombe itself, so the development would represent a 25% increase for Pitcombe village.

- It was noted that, while the application claimed that the development would reduce the impact of the agricultural activities of Pitcombe Farm on nearby residential areas, there would be no decrease in the number of agricultural vehicle movements or mud on the road because the new farm site would be accessed via Lancombe Lane, adjacent to the site.
- The site was not sustainable because access to services and facilities would only be possible by car.
- Visibility lines were poor, especially at the viaduct, and the increase in vehicle movements that would result from the development would make roads dangerous for drivers, walkers, runners, cyclists and horse riders.
- The increase in vehicle movements would be damaging to residents' enjoyment of the area.
- This application does not address the issues highlighted by County Highways in relation to a previous application on the site for eight dwellings, namely that the proposed vehicular access to Pitcombe Hill and pedestrian access to Lancombe Lane to do not incorporate the necessary visibility splays which are essential in the interests of highway safety; the approach roads from the A359 to the application site by reason of their restricted width and poor alignment are considered unsuitable to serve as a means of access for the level of traffic likely to be generated by the proposed development; the proposal does not incorporate adequate turning facilities to enable a service vehicle to enter and leave the highway in forward gear, which is essential to highway safety; the proposed development would be likely to encourage the parking of vehicles on the public highway, which would interrupt the free flow of traffic and thereby add to the hazards of highway users at this point; the proposed development is likely to generate an increase in pedestrian traffic on a highway lacking adequate footways with consequent additional hazards to all users of the highway.
- There is no legislation to justify approval of the development.
- SSDC is now able to demonstrate a five-year housing land supply, contrary to the claim in the application.
- The reduction to permeable ground in this area, which is prone to serious flooding, is not acceptable and will result in more serious flood events in the future.

19:51 – The Chair brought the public open session to a close.

1. **Apologies:** Apologies had been received from County Councillor Anna Groskop and PCSO Tim Russell.
2. **Declarations of Interest:** There were no declarations of interest.

19:52 – One member of the public left the meeting.

3. **To approve the minutes of the Parish Council meeting held on 9th February 2021.**

RESOLVED: It was proposed and unanimously agreed to approve the minutes as presented.

4. To receive reports from

- i **County Councillor Anna Groskop** had sent her apologies and provided a written report, which had been circulated to members.
- ii **District Councillor Robin Bastable** reported that the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government had started the unitary process. 10 weeks of discussions would follow, during which parish councils would be asked for their views. The Chair said that SSDC made decisions on planning application, not the Parish Council and noted that the attendance of the District Councillor was valued.
- iii **PCSO Tim Russell** had sent his apologies and submitted a written report, which had been circulated to members.

5. To review Planning Applications, Road Closures, Foot Path Diversions.

i Outcomes of applications considered at previous meetings: **None**

ii. To consider the following new planning applications:

	Application number	Proposal	Location
a)	20/03495/S73	Application to vary condition 9 (approved plans) of approval 19/00315/HOU	The Old School Church Lane Pitcombe Bruton
The Chair explained that this application was to seek permission for amendments to an application already granted permission.			
RESOLVED: It was proposed and unanimously agreed that the Parish Council has no comments in respect of this application.			
b)	20/03702/LBC	Alterations to the original school house building, including infilling west facing door and removal of internal raised floor and mezzanine. Minor amendments to the approved extension under approval 19/00316/LBC, including adjustment to window composition and link window elevation. (Revised application)	The Old School Church Lane Pitcombe Bruton
RESOLVED: It was proposed and unanimously agreed that the Parish Council has no comments in respect of this application.			
c)	20/03583/COU	Application for Change of Use from a former boarding house (C2) to 4 no. market dwellings.	Walwin House Sunny Hill Pitcombe Bruton
Councillor Currie reported that the dwellings were no longer needed by the school and the revenue received from their sale would be used for much needed improvements at other school premises.			
RESOLVED: It was proposed and unanimously agreed that the Parish Council supported approval of this application.			
d)	20/03675/S73A	Erection of a museum building to partially cover and preserve archaeological remains, construction of replica Roman Villa (for museum use) and associated landscape works (without complying with condition 02 of planning permission 18/02384/FUL and conditions 01 and 02 of planning permission 20/01156/S73A to enable amendments to the proposed buildings, landscape and internal site road layout and submission of relevant archaeological information	Land West Of Cattle Hill Welham Castle Cary Somerset
RESOLVED: It was proposed and unanimously agreed that the Parish Council has no comments in respect of this application.			

e)	21/00238/OUT	Outline application including access, layout and scale for the demolition of agricultural buildings and the erection of 5 No. two storey dwellings with associated car parking, alterations to existing access onto Pitcombe Hill, stop up vehicular access onto Lancombe Lane.	Pitcombe Farm Pitcombe Hill Pitcombe Bruton
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The Chair reminded members that, in February 2020, the Parish Council had recommended refusal of an application on the same site for eight dwellings and asked councillors to consider if the reduction to the number of dwellings in the new application represented any material changes. All councillors agreed that the new application did not address any of the issues raised by the first application. A development of five dwellings would still negatively impact on flood risk in the area. Inadequate access to the site and concerns over parking remained. Five dwellings equated to a 25% increase in the number of dwellings in the village of Pitcombe. The scale and volume of the proposal was inappropriate for the site. As stated in SSDC Local Plan policy SS2, there was no requirement for additional housing in Pitcombe and the application did not satisfy the criteria for development in a rural settlement such as Pitcombe. The issue of flooding at the site had not been considered seriously by the application and it was noted that, during times of heavy rain, the only access road to the site was often underwater and impassable. The proposal to construct a large tarmaced parking area, along with the building of the dwellings themselves, would worsen the flood risk due to increased surface water run-off.

Although the number of houses in this application had been reduced, the dwellings themselves were larger. There would be no reduction in agricultural vehicle movements, despite claims to the contrary in the application, as access to the farm at the top of Pitcombe Hill would still be required by the farmer. The additional vehicle movements resulting from the development, added to the current agricultural vehicle movements, would cause congestion and dangerous driving conditions. Other inaccuracies in the application were noted, namely that there had been no consultation with residents or the Parish Council, the increase in the number of dwellings in the village of Pitcombe as a result of this development would be 25%, not 2.5% and that the application claimed that the site did not flood when, in fact, the flood report associated with the application confirmed that the flood line crosses the access road of the site. The development would result in increased light pollution and represented an increase in the visual urbanisation in this unlit, rural settlement. The proposed vehicle access to the site was opposite two existing properties, which would cause problems for new and existing residents trying to exit their driveways.

District Councillor Bastable confirmed that Area East Committee meetings were restarting at SSDC, so this application should be brought before District Councillors rather than being decided by officers. Members of the public were able to attend AE meetings and would be allowed three minutes to speak. The Chair said that any member of the public wishing to attend an AE meeting could contact the Clerk for details.

RESOLVED: It was proposed and unanimously agreed that the Parish Council objects strongly to this application and recommends that it be refused by SSDC. The Parish Council wishes to reiterate its objections to the previous application on this site because the reasons for these objections have not been addressed with this new application. For clarity, the previous objections were as follows:

- The proposal is not commensurate with the scale of the existing settlement;
- the weight of public opinion is in opposition to the proposal;
- the risk of flooding would increase on the site;
- the flood risk specified in the proposal should be re-examined for accuracy;
- the increase in traffic movements would cause a significant negative impact on the surrounding highway network in terms of the density of traffic and road safety;
- the site is not sustainable in terms of its distance from amenities and the lack of pavements and street lighting, which would result in a danger to pedestrians;
- the nearby bridge is not robust enough to cope with the increase in traffic movements.
- It was further agreed that the Council wished this application to be brought before the Area East Committee rather than being decided by planning officers.

In addition, the Parish Council wishes to point out that Pitcombe is covered by SSDC Local Plan policy SS2, meaning that there is a presumption against development as Pitcombe is a Rural Settlement and the application does not satisfy the criteria for development in such settlements. The many references in the application to the Rural Centre of Bruton are irrelevant and misleading: Pitcombe is in a separate parish and any planning decisions must recognise its status as a Rural Settlement.

The application states that SSDC is not able to demonstrate a five-year housing land supply but this is no longer true. SSDC's "Guidance Note for Applicants - Policy SS2: Rural Settlements – Residential Development" (<https://www.southsomerset.gov.uk/media/3891/policy-ss2-guidance-note-final-applicants.pdf>) states that because SSDC can now "...demonstrate a housing land supply equivalent to 6 years, it is considered that full weight can again be attributed to Policy SS2."

The Parish Council notes that the information in the flood report submitted with the application contradicts assertions elsewhere in the application. It is the case that the flood line crosses the access to the site and that the consolidation of the parking area and the construction of the dwellings themselves would increase rainwater run-off in this already flood-prone area, leading to more frequent and more severe floods in the future. In the opinion of the Parish Council the application does not acknowledge the flood risk to the site and the surrounding area, nor the impact this would have on current and future residents in terms of access to their dwellings during times of flood, nor the seriousness of flood damage that would be caused to existing and new dwellings.

The Parish Council further notes that the serious concerns raised by County Highways (following a site visit in relation to the previous planning application for the site) have not been addressed. Highways recommended that the proposal be refused as it was contrary to Section 9 of the NPPF and Policy TA5 of the SSDC Local Plan (2006-2028) in respect of five specific issues which remain relevant to this new application, viz.:

- the proposed vehicular access to Pitcombe Hill and pedestrian access to Lancombe Lane do not incorporate the necessary visibility splays which are essential in the interests of highway safety;
- the approach roads from the A359 to the application site by reason of their restricted width and poor alignment are considered unsuitable to serve as a means of access for the level of traffic likely to be generated by the proposed development;
- the proposal does not incorporate adequate turning facilities to enable a service vehicle to enter and leave the highway in forward gear, which is essential to highway safety;
- the proposed development would be likely to encourage the parking of vehicles on the public highway, interrupting the free flow of traffic and thereby adding to the hazards of highway users at this point;
- the proposed development is likely to generate an increase in pedestrian traffic on a highway which lacks adequate footways, exposing all highway users to additional hazards.

The Parish Council believes that there would be no reduction in agricultural vehicle movements because the only access to the farm at the top of Pitcombe Hill is by passing the site. This point is also noted in the County Highways report referenced above.

The application states that the development would increase the number of dwellings in the parish by 2.5% but the Parish Council regards this statement as disingenuous. Pitcombe Village itself comprises just 20 dwellings so the five proposed new dwellings would represent an increase in size of 25%.

Village residents have expressed strong opposition to the application on the grounds that it is contrary to the provisions of the NPPF, the five dwellings and eighteen parking spaces are disproportionately large for such a small village, the access and flooding problems are ignored, and statements in the Design, Planning and Access Statement are misleading.

Finally, the development would cause unacceptable light pollution in this unlit rural settlement.

- iii. Temporary Road Closures: **None**

20:33 – All but three members of the public left the meeting.

6. Reports from Portfolio holders not covered elsewhere on the agenda

Councillor Donald reported that the surface of Nettlecombe Hill had been improved, making it much safer for walkers.

The Chair reported that the Knapp Hollow footpath was closed due to a dispute between the landowner and Somerset County Council.

7. Finance

- i. To review the Budget vs Spend sheet.

Noted.

- ii. To approve the cash book and bank reconciliation for February 2021.

Councillor Currie had checked the bank reconciliation before the meeting and found it to be accurate.

RESOLVED: It was proposed and unanimously agreed to approve the cashbook and bank reconciliations as presented. The reconciliations would be signed by the Chair at a later date.

20:35 – Two members of the public left the meeting.

- iii. To approve payments the following payments and agree two Councillors to sign cheques:

Hoblake Services	Locum Clerk work & expenses to 4th March 2021	£200.37
Gleam	Annual membership	£15.00
Mr N Hartnell	Replacement Perspex for notice board	£25.00

The Chair reported that Mr Harnell was his neighbour and had offered to repair the vandalised notice board at Old Station Lane.

RESOLVED: It was proposed and unanimously agreed to approve the payments as presented. Cheques would be signed at a later date by Councillors Groom and Waller.

Action Cllrs Groom and Waller

8. Council Matters

- i. To note that the councillor vacancy can be filled by co-option.

Noted

- ii. To hear an update on vandalism to the notice board at Old Station Lane.

The Chair reported that the notice board had been vandalised and had been repaired, with the use of Perspex rather than glass.

9. Exclusion of Press and Public

To consider exemption of press and public for the remainder of meeting under Public Bodies Admissions To Meetings Act 1960, Section 1 (2) on the grounds that discussion of the following business is likely to disclose confidential information relating to the engagement of a Parish Clerk.

20:47 - District Councillor Robin Bastable and the last member of the public left the meeting.

RESOLVED: It was proposed and unanimously agreed to exclude the press and public for the remainder of the meeting.

10. Recruitment

To agree that the standard contract of employment for the new Clerk be signed by the Chairman.

RESOLVED: It was proposed and unanimously agreed that the contract of employment was approved and could be signed by the Chair, once the correct start date had been entered.

11. Items for report and for the next agenda

Please note this item can only be used for statements of information and requests for items to be included on the agenda at the next meeting.

Items for the next agenda:

- Update on the embankment application (20/02856/FUL).
- The Clerk was instructed to report that the shepherds hut on land rear of Mill Lane Cottage had not been removed and to report back to the next meeting.

Action Parish Clerk

12. Date of the next Parish Council meeting: 13th April 2021 at 7.30pm

The meeting ended 20:53.

Zöe Godden

Zöe Godden
Locum Parish Clerk

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