

BEDFIELD PARISH COUNCIL

BEDFIELD VILLAGE PARISH MEETING

Village Meeting to Discuss Planning Application SCC/007/19MS relating to a retrospective planning application for a concrete crushing plant at Poplar Farm, Worlingworth, Bedfield IP13 7LR

Minutes of a Village Meeting held on the 27th February 2020 which commenced at 1900 in the Bedfield Sports Pavilion.

The meeting was attended by 55 Bedfield members of the public, which included five Bedfield Parish Councillors, plus four individuals from outside of the village.

Keith Frost (KF) as Bedfield Parish Council Chairman
Geoff Robinson (GR) as Bedfield Parish Clerk

VM02/20 – 01 Welcome

Keith Frost (KF) as Bedfield Parish Council Chairman opened the meeting by welcoming everyone who was present and explained that the purpose of the meeting was to allow discussion and receive the view of villagers on Suffolk County Council planning application SCC/0075/19MS. This relates to a retrospective planning application for a concrete crushing plant at Poplar Farm, Bedfield Road, Worlingworth IP13 7LR, on behalf of Mr Paul Landsdowne.

VM02/20 – 02 Format of Meeting

KF further explained that parish meeting assembly had been convened at the request of at least six Bedfield Parishioners. He then explained the conduct protocol and procedural route that the meeting would follow, emphasizing that only Bedfield residents on the current electoral role would be eligible to speak and that a vote on a resolution would be taken at the end. The meeting would immediately then be followed by an Extra-ordinary meeting of Bedfield Parish Council to consider the outcome of this meeting.

VM02/20 – 03 Letter from JMJ Planning

KF commenced the meeting by explaining that a letter had been received only hours earlier from Jane Stewart of the applicant's agents, JMJ Planning, with a request that it be read out at the meeting. In addition, GR had tried to clarify a few of the points raised by Jane Stewart. He read the letter in full, which attempted to correct "a lot of misconceptions about the site and the proposals" and laid out facts and figures regarding the amounts involved, number of vehicles, the operating hours and the frequency of crushing. After a brief debate and from other documents as well, it was established that the figure "since 2016 it has processed about 20,000 tonnes" stated in the letter referred to the total figure since 2016 and not the annual amount.

VM02/20 – 04 Opening Presentations and Comments.

Three residents made presentations to the meeting which detailed their objections to the application and the risks involved should it be approved. These were widely applauded by the others present. KF then invited those present to state their views on what had been said, the content of the application, associated documents and any other matters deemed relevant.

VO02/20 – 05 Salient Points of the Meeting

Without exception, many concerns were raised by the villagers present and covered a wide cross-section of the application, statements made by the applicant (or his agents) and the subsequent effect on village life should the application be approved. These can be summarised below, together with the appropriate salient points, in alphabetical order, viz:

(a) Compliance Related Issues

- It was raised that even if the application was granted, how would any of the conditions be monitored and enforced, especially since the applicants current and previous track record on this seemed to be poor. Indicative of this was the fact that had been operating concrete crushing without any planning consent since at least 2016.
- Doubts were raised that any documentary controls would fail unless frequently checked and in today's environment, by which government authorities and how often?
- As the site had been operating without planning approval since at least 2016, no one had been given the chance to comment on the activity when it commenced or has since then, until now. If they had been allowed to comment, it was almost certain that the serious concern now being discussed would have been raised and fully investigated.
- Demands were made by some villagers for the immediate cessation of the crushing activity.
- It was, however, pointed out in mitigation that the applicant had immediately applied for planning permission to regularise the situation.
- It was claimed that although current planning permission for the site in respect of other activities stipulated that there should be no working on Sundays and Bank Holidays, this had occurred on occasions.

(b) Environment Related Issues

- It was stated that the current unlawful operation and the proposed application would bring no positive benefits to the village, whilst at the same time causing ongoing disruption.
- Suggestions were made that as a mobile crusher is being deployed in would be far more environmentally friendly to deploy the crusher at the source of the concrete.
- Several villages stated that whilst they welcomed some residential expansion of the village to keep it vibrant, an industrial site such as this one has completely the opposite effect.

(c) Health Related Issues

- One close neighbour expressed the concern that her family's respiratory problems had only occurred since crushing began in 2016. Three of her family now suffered. Dust particles are extremely dangerous and there are serious concerns that the alleged damping down procedures are not always being applied or are simply ineffective. In addition, the concrete is often transported in lorries without sheeting. As their home is situated only 280 Metres from the site, cars and property are often coated in dust. Other villagers also expressed the view that they had suffered respiratory problems in the last few years.
- It was stated that silicone dust was one of the biggest health risks in the building trade and must be viewed as the most significant issue with this application.
- Although dust related issues had been raised, the Environment Agency in response to the application had raised no issues. However, concern was expressed as to what tests they had done and how frequent they would be done in the future, every two years being suggested as being the norm and inadequate.

(d) Legal Related issues

- Several questions were raised as to how the site had managed to operate as it had without planning permission for so long without any concerns being raised. Business in other locations were generally well regulated for compliance, with the appropriate measures being quickly taken when required.
- As the site is actually in the Parish of Worlingworth, it was felt that Worlingworth Parish Council should take overall responsibility for monitoring its operation on a day to day basis.
- In addition, it was also asked as to why the site had been allowed to operate “illegally” for so long without any official intervention. Overall it was thought that it was because no one realised that appropriate planning consent had not been given and this included the Environmental Agency who had issued the operating permit.

(e) Miscellaneous Related Concerns

- Out of in excess of the 100+ submissions to the SCC planning Portal, the vast majority objected to the proposal, with 34 from Bedfield residents. Approximately 30 had recorded no objections.

(f) Noise Related Issues

- The noise generated when the crusher was operating was raised and it was stated that it was not ideal for it operate in the vicinity of several houses and in the countryside in general.

(g) Scale of the Operation Related Issues

- One resident has lived very near the site for over 25 years and was extremely concerned at the scale of the application. This appeared to show that the throughput of the site was to increase six-fold to a total of 25,000 tonnes per year, or even 74,999 as shown on the application form. The latter figure, if implemented, would be an eighteen-fold increase on current levels. Accordingly, the amount of addition noise, dust and extra traffic that this would create would be intolerable.
- Some villagers felt that if the application had been to maintain the current stats quo of the operation, although not ideal, it could be managed. The operation of the site had not been raised at any previous Bedfield Parish Council meeting.
- Either of the two increases discussed above would have a huge impact on Bedfield village life.

(h) Transport Related Issues

- The only entrance to the site is on Bedfield Road, Worlingworth. This is a single track badly maintained “unclassified” road, running from Bedfield to Worlingworth. It is barely wide enough for two cars to pass, let alone 20 tonne HGVs. It also has narrow verges, and poor visibility due to the bends and hedgerows, This is completely in contradiction to the claim made in paragraph 6.17 of the Planning Statement. The lane is also frequently used as a “rat-run”.
- The proposed access road is in extremely poor condition, with potholes being continually reported to SCC, repaired, but then reappearing.
- The SCC highways response to the application states that it should be refused in the first instance until at least improvements are submitted and implemented.
- Bedfield Road, Worlingworth and Tannington Road, Bedfield (the same road in effect, depending on which parish it is in) is frequently used by residents of both villages for cycling, walking and horse riding. It completes a popular circular walk through both villages. It is also used by small children at the Bedfield end walking to school or school buses. This is a very dangerous exercise even now, due to the volume of traffic, including both cars, tractors and commercial vehicles. A six-fold increase in HGVs would make an existing dangerous situation very much worse.

- Whilst it was accepted that living in the country meant the necessity for large agricultural vehicles to use the lanes, a lot of it was seasonal, such as during the sugar beet harvesting season. However, this application would increase the use of a totally unsafe and unsuitable lane at least six-fold over the whole year.
- On the wider roads in the village, speeding by all traffic was an ongoing concern which an increase in HGVs would make worse.

VM02/20 – 06 Summary and Closure

KF thanked everyone for their contributions and it was emphasised that individuals still need to make direct representations to the SCC Planning Portal to increase their chances of influencing the decision. He assured everyone that their views would be carefully considered in the extra-ordinary Bedfield Parish Council meeting that was to follow. A show of hands amongst the Bedfield residents at the meeting was taken and counted as 48 to object to the application, 6 in support of it and one abstention.

The meeting was closed at 2020.

Signed:.....
Bedfield Parish Council Chairman