

Boughton Monchelsea Parish Council

Minutes of the Boughton Monchelsea Parish Council Planning & Licensing Committee meeting held on 17th December 2019 at 7.00pm in the main hall of Boughton Monchelsea village hall

Present: Cllrs D. Smith
R. Edmans
D. Redfearn
A. Whybrow
L. Date
A. Humphryes
B. Brown
J. Gershon
C. Jessel
Clerk
19 members of the public

1. Apologies: Cllr Martin
2. Notification of late items for the agenda : None
3. Declaration of Interests: None
4. Applications considered (plans were available at the meeting):

**19/505742 Land south of Sutton Road, Langley
Erection of a temporary sales unit with associated visitor parking**
No objection / comment

**19/505435 Buttercups Sanctuary for Goats, Wierton Road, Boughton Monchelsea
Retrospective application for the continued use of land as a goat sanctuary and associated operational development, including stable buildings, tea room, sheds and car park**

Cllr Smith set the scene by explaining that :

- the Parish Council are a consultee in the planning process and have no decision making powers
- any comments made by the Parish Council should be based on material planning considerations
- the goat sanctuary has planning permission by default and is immune from enforcement action
- a retrospective application has been made as the sanctuary has moved away from what it was
- a request has been made for the application to be decided at MBC planning committee rather than at officer level

Cllr Smith stated that representatives from either side would now be given the opportunity to speak. The goat sanctuary owner, Mr Bob Hitch, introduced himself and explained that the sanctuary had been approached in April by the Borough Council, to put in a retrospective planning application. He added that the tea room and car park are of interest to MBC. Mr Hitch provided further background information as follows :

- The sanctuary was purchased in 1989, the land having permission for 'commercial, agricultural' use
- The site became a 'sanctuary' in 2003 when the charity was formed
- The last building was erected in 2004 so over 10 years ago and immune from enforcement
- The sanctuary lost its car park when the site next door received planning permission for housing. This had been an informal agreement only. The new car park is shingle, not tarmac
- The sanctuary has always catered for the public via a tea room, previously in a marquee and one of the stables. There is now a wooden shed which has been in place for the last 3 years. This has no foundations and is not a permanent structure. The sanctuary relies on the tea room for funding
- There is no entry charge, admission is by voluntary donation. Although the suggested donation is £3 per person this is rarely achieved. As an example, 17 people were in the sanctuary recently with just £1.50 in the donation bucket
- There are 150 goats on site. This number has been static for the last 15 years. The sanctuary cannot and will not expand further in terms of the number of goats on site
- There are 10 staff and 40 volunteers at the sanctuary. A paid manager will take over from Mr Hitch in the new year
- Many groups visit / use the sanctuary – youth groups, schools, adult groups, Duke of Edinburgh volunteers, corporate days out and university researchers
- Some staff members live close to the site in investment properties the charity has purchased. This allows them to be available 24/7 for the goats

Cllr Gershon queried whether MBC had asked for a business case / viability assessment to be submitted with the application. Mr Hitch advised that they had not. Cllr Gershon expressed surprise that the application did not address the hours of opening of the sanctuary to the public and suggested that there needs to be a balance between the needs of the charity and the quality of life of local residents.

Mr Hitch stated that the current issues stem from the car park move and noted that he has erected notices around the site asking for visitors to respect the neighbours. He added that picnicking in the car park has been stopped. Cllr Jessel asked whether the charity has looked into any alternative sites for car parking, further away from neighbouring properties.

A local resident stated that the sanctuary accounts show an income of approximately £500,000 for last year. Mr Hitch stated that this income was from legacies and the charity has invested in property for staff to live in so they are close by to look after the goats and run the sanctuary. The resident stated that he has lived opposite the sanctuary for the last 12 years and that, at first, it was open to the public only 1 day per month. Over the last 2 or 3 years this had been extended to daily opening from April to October and weekends only in winter. He added that he had not been consulted on the changes to the opening hours and advised that volunteers arrive on site at around 8am with visitors arriving from 10.30am for opening at 11. He stated that there was now constant traffic and screaming and shouting that was destroying his family's quality of life, particularly during the summer months. He noted that there is also a foul smell but this does not affect him too much due to the prevailing wind. He mentioned that the sanctuary is showing on google maps as his property so visitors often enter his driveway looking for it.

Cllr Smith expressed his wish for the parties to work together to come up with a solution. Possible suggestions were as follows :

- Erection of fencing
- Driveway maintenance to reduce noise from cars hitting potholes
- Moving dung heap away from neighbouring properties
- Entry fee / car park charge rather than donation. Although this might reduce visitor numbers somewhat it would probably significantly increase revenue
- Restrict hours so the sanctuary is not open to the public every day

Mr Hitch stated that the thinking was that by opening every day, daily footfall would lessen. He added that charging an entry fee would require planning permission

Cllr Gershon agreed with Cllr Smith's sentiments regarding compromise. He expressed concern that moving into corporate teambuilding events was a significant change of use and the Parish Council may wish to raise the above points as comments to MBC.

Members expressed their support for the future of the sanctuary and agreed that, in principle the Parish Council has no objection to the application but would be asking MBC to impose suitable conditions, balancing the impact on close neighbours with the needs of the charity.

It was agreed that a site visit would take place on Saturday morning at 10am. Cllr Smith and other members would attend as well as Mr Hitch and Mr Tubb.

Post meeting notes :

Site visit changed to Sunday morning at 10am (22nd Dec)

Several Parish Councillors attended the site visit along with sanctuary staff and the adjacent resident. Following this visit, it was agreed that the Parish Council should comment on the application as follows :

The Parish Council wish to support the retrospective application however we would like to see the following measures introduced to help towards moderating, as far as practically possible, any disturbance to the occupants of the nearby Wierton Lodge. Please note that we would like the application to be reported to MBC planning committee for decision.

Creation of a screen by fencing off a corner of the car park and planting with coniferous trees or, if possible, a more sustainable quick growing alternative given our commitment as a parish to biodiversity improvements.

Installation of an additional sign at the entrance to the sanctuary explaining that goats may be stressed by noise and asking visitors to be considerate and quiet throughout their visit.

5. Any other Business:
None
6. Date of Next Meeting: To be determined according to need.

Meeting closed at 8.10pm