

Minutes of the Meeting of the Parish Council of Farningham, held at Shand Hall, High Street, Farningham on Tuesday 2nd May 2023 at 6:30pm.

Present: Cllrs Liz Bourne (Chairman, in part), Philip McGarvey (Sevenoaks District Council), Carol Salmon and Krishna Shanmuganathan.

In attendance: Helen Penney (Clerk)

Cllr Shanmuganathan chaired the meeting until Cllr Bourne arrived.

Members agreed to discuss the agenda in the following order:

1. Chairs welcome, apologies and reasons for absence.

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

2. Declarations of personal, prejudicial and disclosable pecuniary interests on items on the agenda and updates to members' register of interests.

None

3. To consider, and approve if appropriate, which agenda items are sufficiently confidential as to warrant exclusion of members of the press and public under the provisions of The Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960

None

4. A Public Open Session. Members of the public will be welcome to address the Parish Council with any local concerns they have. Please note this item will be limited in time at the discretion of the Chairman.

No members of the public were present

5. Clerk to report on any breaches of General Data Protection Regulations

None

10. Planning – to include consideration of the following planning applications and appeal

10.1 Planning Application No: 23/00942/HOUSE

Site: 18 Eynsford Road Farningham Dartford Kent DA4 0BD

Proposal: Single storey rear extension

Comments by: 4th May 2023

No comment

10.2 Planning Reference: 23/00976/LBCALT

Address: Maplescombe Farm House Maplescombe Lane Farningham Dartford Kent DA4 0JY

Proposal: Replace existing roof tiles with new.

Comments by: 6th May 2023

No comment

10.3 Appeal Reference: 23/00031/RFPLN

Address: Maplescombe Farm Maplescombe Lane Farningham Kent DA4 0JY

Nature: Conversion of 6no. agricultural buildings into 10no. dwellings and the demolition of 3no. additional agricultural buildings, in conjunction with associated parking, amenity area and landscaping.
Comments by: 8th May 2023

Comments

Whilst local residents and Farningham Parish Council do not object to the development of the Farm Yard there are certain specific issues with the proposal:

1. The development needs to be very carefully considered in relation to the landscape within the Kent Downs AONB, and particularly the views from nearby rights of way. In addition, it is an area of considerable ecological importance with a wide variety of wildlife and relatively dark skies for an area so close to London and other built-up areas.
A significant factor in the support is to avoid the disastrous decision recently taken by SDC, based upon selective comments by PINS, at Maplebank Poultry Farm which is only ½ mile further along the valley from this site and has recently been granted permission for change of use to B8
2. The proposal itself contains serious inaccuracies in relation to Accessibility suggesting that, in fact, whoever wrote the case for the conversion has very limited understanding of the site. Whilst their walking distances appear correct to Facilities in West Kingsdown, the timescales to walk to them are farcical.
 - a. The Hever Road Bus stop stated as being a 6 minute walk away, in reality takes around 25 minutes to walk to and according to Ordnance Survey maps would take 31 minutes. Ordnance survey estimates 39 minutes to walk to the library – not the 11 minutes quoted
 - b. In addition to the distance the route involves:
 - i. walking up Botsom Lane which climbs 83m in 0.8km which the vast majority of people would not consider walking up
 - ii. other than the relatively short section of the route on the A20, it is narrow lanes with no streetlighting making it impractical to use as a walking route outside daylight hours and impossible for children, adults with buggies etc

Consequentially this is not a site that can be lived in other than with access to motorised transport

3. Maplescombe Lane is however, because of its rural nature, regularly used by walkers (both simply as a route for recreational walking in its own right and as a link between various public footpaths). It is also a popular cycling route and is used regularly by horse riders. Any increase in traffic adds significant risk to these activities as it is narrow and single track. The recent decision to grant Maplescombe Poultry Farm B8 storage and distribution use makes this situation even more dangerous.
4. The small hamlet of Maplescombe is made up of 28 houses. The addition of 10 additional dwellings is an unacceptable 35% increase.
5. Originally the proposal did not include affordable housing but now does. In view of our comments under 2 above we would suggest that this is impractical as the occupants of social housing would be most likely to need to access facilities and amenities without their own motor vehicles.
6. Currently of the 28 houses in the lane all but 1 has a least 2 cars, with a significant percentage having more. Most have parking available for at least 3-4 vehicles. The parking proposal for this conversion is insufficient. Whilst allowing for 2 vehicles per dwelling there are only 5 visitor spaces which, bearing in mind the location of the site, is insufficient as visitors will travel to the

location by car for the reasons referenced above. There is no possibility of on road parking due to the narrowness of Maplescombe Lane. The consequence of insufficient parking is likely to lead to the 'ecological' areas soon becoming ad hoc parking.

7. In May 2022, the agent for the owners of the site invited the Parish Council to attend a meeting to discuss their objections. Their email of 18th May, before that meeting took place, included the following comments:

'the farm is one of several farms owned by the Billings family, who have consolidated core farming activities to Court Lodge in Horton Kirby. Owing to the consolidation, Maplescombe Farm is very lightly used and has no long-term agricultural future.' and

'As you will appreciate, the 'do nothing' scenario is not commercially realistic, and if residential use is not supported, the fallback position is to turn attention to the commercial permitted development rights that are not impinged by the AONB status of the land. Unfortunately, these tend to be the types of uses that are of a heavier commercial nature, which we have always felt would be far more harmful to residents and traffic conditions.'

Following that meeting we had understood that there might be alternative proposals submitted that would help to meet the proposals of the Parish Council – reduced dwelling numbers, using specific buildings for covered parking and consideration of the owners using some of their agricultural land for footpaths to protect pedestrians from traffic - but none were forthcoming.

Whilst confirming again that local residents are not opposed to a smaller development than proposed on the site, it is worth noting that the owners have recently submitted AGRNOTs for building new barns on currently farmed land in the area, making their suggestion that this – or other commercial development - is the only option questionable. Could the site not be used instead for their continuing agricultural needs?

8. Whilst appreciating that only the application in front of the Inspectorate can be viewed, the suggestion that instead a Commercial development is a fallback position is of real concern. It would seem from the previously mentioned decision in relation the Maplebank Poultry Farm that whilst Planning law and Strategies do not allow housing, it is harder to prevent significant commercial development – despite in reality the greater harm of the latter.
9. If permission were to be granted for this development, we would ask again that:
 - a. The number of units is restricted to an absolute maximum of 8 - ideally 6
 - b. Certain units are used as covered parking to screen vehicles from view and ensure that there is adequate parking on site
 - c. The landowner provides access to farm land to link the site, and Maplescombe to footpaths to Farningham and Eynsford.

11. Highways

11.1 Updated quote for 20mph scheme

Members noted the updated quote from Highways and agreed that Roger Gough's contribution needs to be confirmed before approval. Clerk to chase before being able to approval. **Action: Clerk**

12. Streetlights

12.1 Quote for column 59

Members agreed for column 59 to be replaced. **Action: Clerk**

Cllr Bourne arrived at the meeting

6. To review the effectiveness of the system of Internal Control. Councillors are asked to consider the attached Statement of Internal Control in support of the Annual Governance Statement. The Chair of the meeting and the Clerk to sign.

The Council considered and approved the Statement of Internal Control for the year ending 31 March 2023. The Chair and Clerk signed the Statement on behalf of the Council.

7. To approve the Annual Governance Statement for 2022-23, Section 1 of the AGAR for the year ending 31 March 2023. The Chair of the meeting and the Clerk to sign and date PLUS minute reference.

The Council considered and approved the Annual Governance Statement for 2022-23. The Chair and Clerk signed and dated the Statement on behalf of the Council.

8. To approve the Accounting Statements for 2022-23, Section 2 of the AGAR for the year ending 31 March 2023 and the supporting Bank Reconciliation as at 31 March 2023 and if necessary, the explanation of the significant variations from last year (2021-22) to this year (2022-23). The Chair of the meeting to sign and date PLUS minute reference.

The Council considered and approved the Accounting Statements and supporting documents as provided by the Responsible Financial Officer who had prior to the meeting signed and dated Section 2 of the AGAR for 2022-23. The Chairman signed and dated the Accounting Statement on behalf of the Council

9. Note the proposed dates for the Exercise of Public Rights as selected by the Council's Responsible Finance Officer; Monday 5th June to Friday 14th July 2023

The Council notes the period for the Exercise of Public Rights from Monday 5th June to Friday 14 July 2023.

13. Dog fouling

Members asked the Clerk contact Sevenoaks District Council and request new stickers for the bins throughout Farningham stating that general waste and dog waste can be disposed of in the bins and not household or business waste. **Action: Clerk**

14. Urgent Business that occurs and requires attention before the next meeting may be reported at the Chairman's discretion.

None

The meeting closed at 7:10pm.

Date of next meeting Wednesday 10th May 2023