

CHELFORD PARISH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE EXTRAORDINARY PARISH COUNCIL MEETING HELD

THURSDAY 14TH APRIL, 2016 at 7:30 p.m.

at ASTLE COURT COMMUNITY CENTRE, ELMSTEAD ROAD, CHELFORD.

PRESENT - Councillors: D. Wilson (Chairman), J. Leach (Vice Chairman), B. Brindley, K. Chaudhuri,
A. Boon, S. Hampson.

Members of Public (3).

Cheshire East Borough Councillor G. Walton.

Dr. E. M. Maddock - Clerk & Responsible Financial Officer.

1. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE** - Councillor E. Michell - Unwell.

Decision a) To receive and approve the above apology for absence.

2. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST** - None.

3. **PUBLIC FORUM** -

i) A resident expressed support for the proposed wakeboarding facility at the Mere Farm Quarry site. It was reported that wakeboarding is a growing sport with cable operated facilities making participation more accessible due to lower costs. Cable operated facilities also offer a quieter alternative to those using motorised boats to tow participants. It was considered that the facility would be good for the area and offer a recreational facility and amenities for local residents.

A second resident expressed concern for the proposed wakeboarding facility at the Mere Farm Quarry site. Whilst the benefits of the proposed employment opportunities, recreational amenity and social opportunities were acknowledged it was noted that the site lies within the Green Belt and that the proposed development may have a negative impact upon the openness of the area. Other points raised included: concern regarding the size of the proposed building, flood lighting, car parking, impact upon traffic, potential noise, sewerage disposal arrangements and future sustainability of the proposed facility.

The third resident present did not have any further comments to add to the concerns already raised.

4. **PLANNING APPLICATION: 16/1353M** -

Delivery of a watersports and outdoor activity centre on the North and South Lakes of the former Mere Farm Quarry, including new vehicular access, car parking and multi use building - Former Mere Farm Quarry, Chelford Road/Alderley Road, Nether Alderley.

Members considered, at length, the detail of the application and discussed the likely impact of the proposed development on the Parish. It was noted that the local response to the application had been mixed.

8:44p.m. - One member of the public left the meeting. (During the above discussion)

8:46p.m. - Two members of the public left the meeting. (During the above discussion)

32/16 **Resolved** a) That an objection be raised on the grounds of concerns relating to:

i) Impact upon traffic.

ii) The visual impact of the proposed building due to its size.

iii) Sewerage / drainage provisions.

iv) Impact upon local economy.

v) Potential noise and light pollution.

vi) Proposed opening hours.

vii) Impact upon wildlife.

viii) Potential nuisance.

ix) Long term sustainability of the proposed facility.

x) Impact upon the Green Belt.

b) That the response include suggested conditions to reduce the impact of the above concerns should the application be approved by Cheshire East Council.

c) That the representations for submission to Cheshire East Council be prepared by Councillor D. Wilson and circulated to Members for approval prior to forwarding by the Clerk.


Proposed Councillor D. Wilson

Seconded Councillor A. Boon

All in favour

The meeting was declared closed by the Chairman at 9:20p.m.

Signed:



Approval Date - 12th May, 2016

[Note: Copy of submitted representations attached to Minutes at Appendix A]

CHELFORD PARISH COUNCIL

APPENDIX A

16/1353M - Delivery of watersports and outdoor activity centre on the North and South Lakes of the former Mere Farm Quarry, including new vehicular access, car parking and multi use building - Former Mere Farm Quarry, Chelford Road/Alderley Road, Nether Alderley, Cheshire.

Introductory Comments

Cheshire East Councillors and Officers will be well aware that Chelford Parish and its Council are not inward looking and that they understand the importance of sustaining its village in the future. This is why Chelford residents and councillors have given their strong support to two proposed building developments in the village, something many other parishes would have not considered doing. Consequently, these comments should be placed in the context of a parish which forward looking, but one which takes pride in preserving its natural surrounds and rural identity.

In determining its position, the Council, to the best of its ability, had given detailed consideration of the likely potential costs and benefits of this proposed development as they apply to the Chelford parish and its residents. In doing so, it has taken into account the views of residents and examined the information presented in the submission. It has been a difficult submission for councillors to assess because information has not always allowed clear conclusions to be reached. Councillors therefore felt it important in their analysis of the plans, to point out relevant planning information that they felt was omitted and planning information that lacked clarity/accuracy.

The Parish Council recognises that whilst the development may generate some benefits to a small number of younger aged Chelford residents, the majority of the residents will receive little or no benefit from this development. Councillors reject any claims that facilities for physical activity/active lifestyle are not available in Chelford and surrounding area and particularly since an expensive, modern MUGA was installed in the parish two years ago. Whilst the Planning Statement makes heroic assumptions about long term benefits of this proposal, these are not likely to be enjoyed by the majority of people in Chelford and are not supported by any convincing evidence.

Whilst councillors note supporting statements, many of which originate from outside the parish and a number outside Cheshire East, the majority of such support is, in their view, not evidence of a genuine demand led development. In spite of the Planning Statement claims, that this is a much needed leisure opportunity in an area with limited leisure facilities, councillors strongly contend that this area is blessed with some of the best national natural environment, parks and water landmarks which the population in Cheshire East and beyond enjoy frequently and use to maintain an active lifestyle.

Responses covering a wide geographical area are taken in isolation of many other factors and particularly those which will affect this parish. Not surprisingly support comes from some wakeboarding enthusiasts and no doubt they will stand to benefit, but their self interest does not lie in the benefits and costs of the facilities for our residents. Neither do statements of support from organisations, which merely reflect their corporate objectives and targets and take little account of the overall impact of the development on the Chelford community.

It is important to point out that residents regularly use councillors to air their views rather than submit individual comments. Most residents who live close by to this site oppose any plans to turn the existing site into some kind of water park and they have communicated their opposition to the Council. As such, their views are represented in these comments but positive comments from some residents have also been considered.

The Parish Council is charged with considering a range of key planning issues and assessing how these might impact on its parish. The Parish Council is also responsible for representing the views of residents. Having taken all of these aspects into account, Council has determined that there are factors which mitigate the predicted benefits and as such, lead it to the conclusion that on balance the potential costs outweigh the benefits. Therefore, based on this conclusion, Chelford Parish Council feels that it cannot support the proposed development.

General Comments on the Submission

Whilst several reports were used to support the submission, councillors were concerned about some evidence and its analysis. Consequently, councillors were not always confident in the accuracy of information being presented and the level of rigour in the reporting process. Councillors did not always feel comfortable with the depth and detail of information offered and this made it difficult to reach conclusions with certainty.

The Planning Statement, in its assertions, presented what seemed to councillors as an over optimistic view of the benefits of this proposed development.

CHELFORD PARISH COUNCIL

Transport

Councillors were surprised that the report did not appear to acknowledge current and potential future traffic movements around Chelford. In particular, the assessment of traffic flow from the development, failed to appreciate how this might impact on the parish given additional traffic from the proposed development on the Stobart site or the potential development on the market site. The report also appeared to ignore the current flows of traffic on the road network. The main road running through Chelford and the Alderley Chelford road, are already extremely busy. Also, councillors do not accept that the loss of quarry traffic reduces the impact of the traffic flow of this development. In 2013, two way movements from the quarry numbered 22 (many of these travelled away from the village (14/1944W)) compared to the 377 two way journeys predicted in the report. The report also fails to note the volume of traffic generated by a large car boot sale on Sundays in summer.

The analysis of traffic flows is based on a single comparator in the form of a water park in Cornwall. There was no attempt to assess similarities of this comparator with the proposed development in terms of local population, environment, road network, etc. By applying a TRICS methodology to the data from the comparator, it is claimed that the number of daily two-way trips would be 377 and daily arrivals 190. However, the consultants seem to accept that a figure of 100 arrivals/departures provided by the applicant may mean that its own analysis is an overestimation and it thus treats its own analysis as a worst case scenario. The figure of 100 provided by the applicant was not supported with any hard evidence and was simply extrapolated from other such centres. Consequently, councillors questioned the accuracy and rigour of the analysis and wondered why consultants were prepared to accept the applicants somewhat speculative statistic in preference to their own analysis which seemed to become a worst case scenario.

Accepting their own analysis as a worse case scenario, consultants determine that there will be a vehicle movement every 1.2 minutes and this is described as 'negligible'. Councillors were somewhat surprised by this description of vehicle movement given that there was no attempt to place this movement in the context of other traffic using the road. The analysis appeared to assume that the only traffic using the road network would be generated by the development.

Councillors are also puzzled that in the scoping note on page 5, the explanation of methodology quotes as follows:

Using on the above TRICS trip rates, the resulting estimated trip generation for the proposed development has been derived by applying above trip rates to the proposed quantum of 75 parking spaces proposed at the development site.

The TRICS analysis indicates that, at the busiest periods the proposed development could be estimated to generate 39 two-way vehicle trips in the busiest arrivals period (the "AM Peak") and 37 two-way vehicle trips in the busiest departures peak period (the "PM Peak").

It should be noted that, based on experience of operating similar sites elsewhere in the UK, the applicant has indicated that the development would not be expected to generate up to approximately 100 arrivals/departures per day during the busiest times of year. This is somewhat lower than the 142 arrivals indicated by the TRICS analysis, suggesting that the TRICS data may represent a degree of overestimation.

..even if a worst-case assumption were made that the above trip generation volumes occurred during a weekday during the typical AM and PM peak hours, the two-way trip volumes calculated would be equivalent to one vehicle movement every 1.5 minutes.

These figures appear to be at odds with those quoted in the main body of the report i.e. 100 parking spaces, 190 arrivals, 51 and 49 two-way trips. We note also that the vehicle movement time is now 1.5 minutes instead of 1.2. It is also stated that the development ' would not' be expected to generate up to 100 arrivals/departures, having previously stated it would. Councillors were left somewhat confused.

Trying to reach a conclusion about the size of car park required was somewhat challenging given the confused assumptions. However, based on the assessment of parking required, the size appears somewhat excessive, unless of course the applicant is proposing to use the facility in ways not explicitly stated and which will generate increased traffic.

The assessment that coaches will reduce the number of cars using the facility is in our view, of little consequence, although councillors were interested in why coaches might be used. Schools would certainly have no impact on car reduction.

Whilst the report considers accessibility using public transport, cycle and walking, councillors take the view that most visitors will use their cars e.g. the assumed peak day of Sunday where trains are one every two hours is unlikely to encourage train use. More importantly, there is no clearly defined crossing point for pedestrians on a dangerous road. The proposals offer no real attempt to influence mode of travel other than a weak reference to three buses and heroic assumptions about walking and use of public transport. Indeed from information provided in the submission, the applicant expects at peak, about 300 people a day and given that it is suggested that 100 cars will arrive, it is then assumed that the ratio of people to cars will be 3:1. The apparent conclusion from this is that nobody will use any other form of travel.

CHELFORD PARISH COUNCIL

During peak times (i.e. summer, bank holidays, weekends), the facility is expected to draw approximately 300 visitors per day, in 100 cars. (p.6 Ecology Report)

Councillors note that a safety audit report identified a number of dangers associated with the development access point and the nature and type of road. This audit confirms the concerns of councillors that access from the road will present dangers for pedestrians and vehicles. The road has varying speed limits and visibility can be problematic, particularly at night with no road lights. Residents who live on that road have complained about the speed of traffic on the road, particularly as it accelerates from under the bridge onto the straight section where the access point is proposed. Councillors note that some of the potential hazards identified in the audit along with the suggested measures do not appear to be accepted. Councillors take the view that accident statistics take no account of the increased risks associated with this development, because such statistics do not provide an accurate risk assessment associated with an access point, which currently does not exist.

Councillors understand from the public consultation, that there may be a number of competition days run by the facility. Information from those familiar with such days is that they may generate heavier traffic and higher levels of noise. There is no information provided on how many competition days may be organised; how often these will occur; what form they take; what level of attendance would be expected and how these will impact on traffic flows. Such information would have been helpful.

The Parish Council has therefore determined that whilst it was difficult reach any confident conclusions about the overall magnitude of traffic impact due to difficulties in interpreting the report, it was clear that the development would generate additional traffic in the parish. This is unwelcome given the existing proposals for housing development in the area which this and the previous Parish Council have supported. Respective Parish Councils have already raised concerns about the ability of the road infrastructure in and around Chelford to cope with additional traffic in the future.

Sewerage

It is stated on the application form, that the development will connect to the main sewer for the purposes of waste disposal. According to information from residents there is no main sewer, given that they have to use septic tanks. Also United Utilities have been unable to confirm the existence of a main sewer. Clearly this needs further investigation.

Landscape and Visual

The Parish Council understands that green belt land may be allocated for the purpose sport and /or recreational purposes. In doing so, councillors considered the proposal from the point of view what is deemed to be essential or exceptional for the locality, the building scale and its impact on the openness of the land under consideration.

Councillors contend that the activities proposed are neither essential to the area, represent special circumstances or indeed are demand led by the local population. There are considerable opportunities in the area for people to undertake physical activity and include existing water facilities, numerous walking routes, sports clubs and parks/estates. This proposed facility has not arisen out of any strong drive by residents to see a water park developed on the site of the quarry; rather, its origins appear to lie in a business opportunity with supporting demand from wakeboarding enthusiasts. More crucially, it has been a desire by residents to see the quarry restored to its former natural state, which could then be enjoyed for its wildlife, woodland and walking routes.

Councillors disagree that the building, whose overall dimensions are not entirely clear (no clear information seems to be given on length), but with an overall footprint of 850sqm and a car park for 100 cars, can be described as small scale or indeed agricultural in appearance. This building and cars will not be shielded from view and will dominate part of the landscape. Councillors do not accept that existing vegetation and additional planting will mitigate the impact of this development sufficiently. It is therefore in the view of councillors, an inappropriate development.

The area of land under consideration already provides for access by the local community to enjoy its benefits and take active exercise. Indeed, the restoration programme takes into account the potential recreational and health benefits of access to the land, which will be afforded to the community as a result of re-instatement.

Therefore councillors see little justification for adding a relatively large building and car park with additional structures, on the grounds that this will encourage people to be more active or meet their needs. The opportunities to do that are already there and in many other local areas, without any further change. Additionally, councillors do not accept that the development will not detract from the openness and visual landscape character. When the re-instatement programme is complete and the land returns to its former status, this will be an area for people to enjoy the visual benefits and take active exercise without the need to build on it. This landscape is part of the character of Chelford and it is what attracts families into the area.

In conclusion, this proposed development is not, in the view of the Council, an appropriate use of green belt because it is not needs driven and it will have a negative impact on the openness and visual aspects of the landscape. This is not an area that

CHELFORD PARISH COUNCIL

needs to attract tourism, given the attractive rural environment which already serves that purpose and nor does it need additional developments to encourage physical activity. The area is already very popular with walkers, cyclists and runners.

As previously mentioned, Chelford has supported two future key developments which will reshape the village and its community. Councillors understand and accept that such developments will impact on traffic movement and the road network. The last thing it needs is a development that will bring more social costs and relatively few benefits.

Estimates for participation in waterskiing and wakeboarding in 2013 were 0.7% of the population aged 16+. The proposed facility is not going to provide sporting opportunities on the scale implied in the submission and will largely benefit those whose interest lies in the activity proposed. Therefore councillors take the view that use of Green Belt is not appropriate to meet the needs of relatively few, many of whom do not reside in Chelford or indeed Cheshire East.

Ecology

Councillors note that the timing of the field survey (January) which was done for the report, was not undertaken at the optimum time to assess habitats. Councillors also noted that the land assessment was based on its current status and therefore failed take into account in any meaningful way, how the land would mature and develop as a result of re-instatement and how this would benefit the local ecology. Councillors strongly disagree with the assertion in the Planning Statement that the lakes hold no ecology or amenity value or that the site as a whole has no ecological value. This was not the view of the quarry operators in constructing the restoration programme. It is also difficult to understand how the Planning Statement can claim that such a development could enhance the ecological value of the site.

The assessment that the lakes and surrounding area have little or no ecological value is certainly at odds with the assessments of the Conservation Officer cited in 14/1944W. The restoration strategy and how that will shape the future landscape and wildlife habitat does not seem to have had any real part to play in the ecology assessment.

Whilst considerable time was spent analysing the impact of the construction phase, little attention was given to the impact on wildlife and the land once the development becomes operational. In the planning submission, there were a number of references to the Airport and its concerns for bird strikes. Such references appeared to be offered as part of the rationale for accepting this development. Councillors point out that the planning proposal submitted by Hansons (14/1944W) had already accounted for this concern in its restoration proposals.

..planning conditions were recommended to secure alterations to restoration scheme to ensure there was no increase in the level of bird activity in the vicinity of the airport. (14/1944W p.9)

Councillors wish to draw attention to the following statements taken from document 14/1944W submitted by Hansons, the quarry operators and later agreed by Cheshire East Planning:

... restoration principles have been established through historical permissions for the land to revert back to a mixture of agriculture, woodland, nature conservation habitat and a series of lakes with an element of public access through the existing public rights of way network. (p.16)

..to ensure that the increased ecological habitat now established on the site is protected; (p.16)

Concern has been raised by local birdwatchers and active members of the Cheshire and Wirral Ornithological society over the potential impacts of increased public access on the bird population attracted to the site. In particular they identify that the site provides habitat for a good variety of waterfowl species including UK BAP and a Schedule I listed species. They highlight that many other restored quarries have wide public access which limits their value for wild birds and there are few sites where access is restricted for wildlife protection. They also point to the Cheshire and Wirral Bird Report for 2013 which identifies that this quarry is now the second most important site in the county for Pochard.

Clearly a delicate balance needs to be achieved between adequate public access for the local community and the protection of sensitive wildlife habitats. Whilst the public rights of way are now fully reinstated and in use, the site manages to provide a successful habitat for an increasing range of birds, indicating that a correct balance has potentially been achieved. (p.17)

There is concern that the provision of further public access around the lake could lead to increased disturbance to these habitats, which would be to the detriment of their long term sustainability and ultimately conflict with the original aims of the restoration schemes previously approved. The Nature Conservation Officer advises that Mere Farm quarry in its current form as a partially restored/partially active quarry is very important for birds in the Cheshire context. As the activities on site gradually cease and the restoration progresses, the ornithological interest of the site will inevitably change with some bird species possibly being lost and some new species becoming established. The officer advises that many of the important birds, particularly the larger species associated with more open habitats are very sensitive to disturbance and in general, the higher the level of disturbance, the more detrimental this would be to nesting/wintering birds. (p.17)

CHELFORD PARISH COUNCIL

.. it is not considered appropriate at this advanced stage in the site's restoration to require further public access given the nature conservation value of the restored site. Furthermore, it is noted that one of the landowners has indicated in previous liaison meetings that they would be unwilling to agree to any further public access provision. (p.17)

Taking these statements into account, councillors have serious concerns about the impact of this proposed development on the local ecology.

Economic Impact and Sustainability

It is stated that 30 jobs will be created based on assessment from a similar site. Councillors would have liked some clear evidence to support this assertion in terms of a breakdown of job types and whether such jobs would be full time, part time, permanent or temporary. There is evidence to suggest that many of these jobs will be temporary and seasonal and probably filled by those in education. As such, we question the weight given to job creation in the application.

In terms of the positive impact on the local economy of Chelford, little evidence is offered to demonstrate such impact and the Planning Statement presents an over optimistic view of economic benefits to the area. Given the nature of the retail provision in Chelford, councillors take the view that benefits to the local economy will be limited. On the assumed peak day of Sunday most retail outlets will receive no benefit at all. We note that in the Transport report it mentions the Nat West Bank in its assessment of local facilities. We wish to point out that this bank no longer exists.

Parish Councillors remain sceptical of the notion that this is a long term, sustainable enterprise. Extrapolating figures from an existing facility from another part of the country would not, in our view, provide reliable indicators of business success. The main activities proposed, are not high participation activities and whilst they might meet the needs of a relatively small group of enthusiasts for wakeboarding and open water swimming, they will not serve the needs of much of the Chelford population.

There is therefore strong concern that additional income generating activities will be sought, which could impact negatively on the community. Councillors would like to have seen the business model being presented or at least estimates of the business potential of this proposal. From information provided, it would seem that the use of this facility may vary considerably across the year and clearly the operators are unsure of the extent of demand by suggesting operational plans will need to be reviewed to determine opening hours.

The Planning Statement quotes:

'In the winter, when temperatures are colder and days are shorter, activity will be much less and will be heavily influenced by daylight and usage. Generally, 3-5 days of trading would be expected per week in the winter, but this a fairly fluid matter dependent on demand.'

This does not give councillors confidence for long term sustainability. Based on information from other sites, councillors wonder if this development will be used to promote commercial activities not mentioned in the submission, which will generate unwelcome noise, more traffic and other nuisance elements to residents.

Opening Hours

Councillors were unable to determine exactly what these will be and on what days. Several of the reports quote start times ranging from possible 6.00am, 8.00am and 9.00am. Closing time is quoted as 10.00pm or dusk. Days of use are also less than certain—it is suggested 7 in summer, 5 in autumn and spring and three in winter but as mentioned above these will be subject to review.

Any changes in opening hours and days will presumably impact on traffic flows but no analysis was done to demonstrate this impact. From the point of view of residents, uncertainty about days and hours of operation is not acceptable.

Nuisance Mitigation/Control

Councillors felt that some clear statement of how owners would mitigate nuisance and ensure compliance should have accompanied documentation. There is little indication of what controls will be introduced to ensure that noise and light pollution will be controlled, although we note there are to be no floodlights. Little attention is paid to what impact the development will have on general noise once it becomes operational. Whilst it is accepted that the machinery may have a low noise impact, it is difficult to assess other aspects of possible noise from people, music, PA broadcasts, motor launches, given the lack of information. There is no indication of how the land will be maintained and protected from wear and tear. It is difficult to determine from the plans what access the public will be given and how this will be controlled to avoid a negative

CHELFORD PARISH COUNCIL

impact on wildlife and plants. It is not clear how picnicking/litter will be controlled. There is no explanation of how the owners intend to control the standards of water hygiene for the lakes.

Although not necessarily a planning consideration, councillors and residents did note, that at the public consultation, information about other similar facilities, indicated additional revenue generating activities such e.g. parties, corporate events. It has been confirmed that these are to be part of the business plan for the new development. This has given rise to serious concerns by some residents, about how this development might look to raise revenue in the future and what it may morph into. Quite simply, residents do not want a form of 'entertainments' park developing in the area which will be out of keeping with the environment, create social costs and bring them little or no benefit. Residents are not convinced by reassurances from the developers.

Conclusion

The Parish Council fully understands the importance of tourism and visitors in Cheshire East. Cheshire East has some of the best scenery, landscape and facilities in the country and it is these aspects which bring visitors in to the area, to enjoy and be active. The argument that this development will somehow allow more people to experience the local countryside of Cheshire East is a spurious one. Similarly, the argument that this is some sort of brownfield site is simply not true.

On balance, councillors believe that the Lakes proposal is not appropriate for our local environment and will do much to detract from our rural setting. It is felt that the development will do little to enhance the amenity of our area and in fact may have a negative effect on the desire of people to move into the area. The Council has previously demonstrated its support for bringing new families into the parish by welcoming two housing developments. These will be significant for the village and will reshape the local environment. However, the Parish Council believes that Chelford does not need another development of the type proposed, to satisfy, in the main, the interests of non-residents.

Planning Consent

Whilst the Parish Council cannot support these plans, should consent be granted, councillors request that the LPA lays down strict conditions for the operation of this development. To this end, councillors would wish to see as part of consent:

1. The range of activities permissible clearly stated
2. Opening hours/day clearly laid down with a strict curfew imposed across the year
3. Strict controls imposed on the use of the building
4. The type of motorised equipment permitted clearly stated and where relevant, number specified e.g. motor launches
5. Restriction on the number of competition days allowed per year (if indeed they are to be held)
6. No licence to sell alcohol
7. The scale of buildings and car park reduced