

2. Planning Issue

At the request of JN, TC clarified the location of the proposed development at EFP, and that this involved touring caravans as a further application would be required for static caravans, which PB and RG pointed out would raise issue re restrictions of duration of occupancy.

TC read out in full an email sent to the Parish Council by Paula and Brian (the text of which is annexed herewith at Appendix A), and it was generally agreed that this set out a fair summary of the issues arising from the application.

PC made reference to Planning Policy DM17, which refers to extensions of existing sites being acceptable where they are small in scale, whereas the proposed increase from 5 to 70 pitches was of a wholly different magnitude, effectively doubling the size of the site, and would potentially be directed at a different type of customer than at present.

PF raised the issue of proximity to, and potentially greater use of, the river, and consequent nuisance to residents whose properties border the river, as well as the potential for adverse environmental impacts generally.

JN reiterated concerns regarding the scale of the proposed development far beyond the existing boundary of EFP, and the visual impact as well as problems arising from the significant increase in the number of people.

PC referred to the original consent for EFP relating to the agricultural museum and model farm park, and that the application involved a new shop and entrance that did not enhance the purpose for which consent was granted nor provide an additional reason to visit the site for cultural or educational purposes. PC stated that in his view it was now a pre-school attraction rather than a Farm Park and that the application detracted from the listed buildings on site and continued the process away from educational purposes, as evidenced by the removal of machinery and historical / educational artifacts over time.

TC referred to an issue raised with Ben Woolnough as to whether the application involved an extension of the farm park or created a separate entity altogether, and referred to emails regarding this issue. TC also raised the fact that EFP incorporated listed building, as referred to in the original consent, and the need to consider whether adjacent development was appropriate in that context, as well as potentially in an Area of Special Interest generally – which PC stated was confirmed in the Landscape Proposals.

PB raised the issue of the involvement of English Heritage and concerns regarding 'sprawl', with the change of curtilage and loss of agricultural land that would arise from the application.

PB and JM agreed that their greatest concern was that this application could be the prelude for even greater expansion and development in the future, and that the loss of the sites' agricultural status would prevent or frustrate future objections. RG reiterated this 'thin end of the wedge' concern, and the fact that additional pitches,

including ones for static caravans, could be added in the future once any caravan park was established.

TC clarified that the existing 5 pitches were permitted as of right, and MF referred to an application by EFP approximately 6-years ago which related to the area of EFP where the turkey sheds are located.

JM raised concerns that a 70 pitch site would potentially involve some 280 people at any given time, which was disproportionate given that the total population of Easton was around 320. ML referred to the potential benefit to local traders in Wickham Market and Easton.

DH raised the issue of movement and traffic volume arising from a site with up to 70 touring caravans, and his experience of larger sites attracting larger families having a greater turnover. There was a general concern that this would lead to pressure on EFP to offer additional attractions and enticements, and therefore lead to additional development as well as greater use of existing amenities such as the river.

PC referred to the application indicating that two full and two part time jobs would be created, and queried the true value and accuracy of this given that the site would be closed between November and March.

DH also raised the issue regarding demands on the already poor wi-fi signal, and the use of lighting which would have an adverse impact on the areas' dark skies.

JN reiterated concerns regarding further development by comparison with Jimmy's Farm, and there was general comment from residents that this process was moving the Farm Park away from its stated purpose and involved a process of 'dumbing down'.

RG queried whether a benefit may derive from the shop at EFP being open to local residents, which TC stated was not currently the case, and PF stated that this would provide little compensation in any event.

DH returned to the issue of traffic flow and the necessity that access to and egress from the site was not routed through Letheringham, suggesting that this could be achieved by EFP providing good advice to customers at the point of booking.

PC referred to the extensive use of agricultural vehicles on local roads during the summer months and the difficulties that would arise from caravans using the same roads, particularly at pinch-points such as Sanctuary Bridge. PC also raised the issue regarding visibility and the felling of Poplars grown as a crop, and the fact that any new hedgerows would take many years to provide any real barrier, and even then not during all relevant periods of operation.

TC proposed an informal indication from residents present as to whether they reject or agree with the current application, or alternatively oppose but would agree with a scaled down or otherwise amended proposal.

PC raised concerns about lack of notification and any opportunity to raise issues with Fiona Siddell of EFP directly.

ML stated that he was not concerned about the application, that the development would take time to build up and that there were potential positive spin-offs for people living in the local area. He referred to the potential impact of other small campsites in the area, but that no complaint appeared to have been raised by them. TC referred to a previous application by Mike Young for extension from 5 pitches being refused, possibly due to traffic concerns.

JM stated that she would agree with some development but within the existing boundaries of EFP, with scaled-down numbers, and commented that it was naïve to simply say no.

PF stated that she believed the site of the development was misconceived and would have an adverse visual impact from the village generally and the Church in particular, and PB reiterated concerns about the change of use from agricultural to commercial land, the doubling of the size of the commercial area involved at EFP and the danger of further developments as a result resulting in a 'theme park'. TC commented that this would require a further application and that it was unfair to assume that there was an existing plan for further expansion if the current application was allowed, but there was a potential for static caravans to be allowed in the future although a further application would be needed.

JM raised an issue as to whether the original permission for EFP involved a 'buffer' zone. On consideration of the papers it was concluded that this referred to the area to the west of the entrance.

DH expressed concern that the proposed amenity block appeared insufficient for the number of pitches, and that there was a real prospect of further development to provide additional amenities. By reference to the plans, MB confirmed that the application involved three male toilet cubicles, one trough-style urinal and 4 shower male cubicles, and five female toilet-cubicles and four female shower cubicles. DH commented that this was very small and that there would inevitably be pressure to provide additional amenities.

DA queried whether a tent-only site would address many of the concerns raised.

RG stated that it was his view that this application was the 'thin end of the wedge' but that the appropriate course was to compromise and get out of it what we can. DH concurred with this view, reiterating his concerns that the site was convertible for further development, that the amenities suggested were insufficient and that the location of the development was not appropriate.

PB concurred with the 'thin end of the wedge' comment, and stated that she would reject and oppose the application on the basis of 'sprawl' and the curtilage issue, and the fact that agricultural land shouldn't be converted to commercial use, which amounted to a 'land-grab' and risked further development resulting in a 'theme-park'. JM concurred and both PB and JM agreed that they would only agree to any application if it was scaled down and restricted to the existing boundary of EFP.

PC objected to the application completely, referring to his previous comments regarding Policy DM17 and the move away from an agricultural museum and model

farm park, and stated that previous attempts at compromise over applications have resulted in concerns being ignored and the residents being 'stitched-up'.

PF confirmed that she would reject and oppose the application.

TC commented that it was for individuals as well as the Parish Council to make their views known to the Planning Department, and referred to a meeting of the Easton Parish Council on the 8th September 2015 to consider this application.

The public forum closed at 9.14 pm and the Parish Council Planning Meeting began.

2015.48 Apologies

None

2015.49 Declaration of Interests

None declared for items on this agenda.

2015.50 Dispensations

None

2015.51 Approval of Minutes of Meeting on 27.07.2015

Approved and signed.

2015.52 Matters of Report

Inquest into the death of Dominic Davies on the B1078 in August 2014

TC attended the inquest in Lowestoft on the 25th August 2015 and stated that David Chenery of Suffolk County Council had attended with a document that was handed to the Coroner, Dr. Peter Dean, addressing issues raised by the Parish Council and others, and undertaking that the SCC would review designs from consultants regarding new signs and road markings, and amending the prevailing speed limit at the Park Road / B1078 junction to 30mph, while commissioning a study on the B1078 generally between Coddenham and Wickham Market.

TC commented that the coroner appeared happy with this, and made reference to the Police Report which concluded that the signage at the relevant part of the B1078 was inadequate – while also indicating that the accident was not caused by excessive speed.

A verdict of Accidental death was returned.

TC will write to the Portfolio Holder regarding the commitments made by David Chenery on behalf of Suffolk County Council.

2015.53 Planning Application: DC/15/3165/FUL

MB stated that he had listened and considered to requests by residents for the application to be rejected outright, but believed that the objections would themselves be rejected if that course of action was pursued.

MB stated that there were important issues raised regarding lighting at night and the impact of this, the increase in traffic on roads around the village, the felling of trees that might otherwise provide a visual barrier to the south of the site, the inadequate provision of facilities, the fact that tents were situated at the closest point to neighbouring residents, the issue of scale (agreeing that 70 pitches was simply to many) and, most importantly, the need for clarification as to what conditions would be placed on the new area – for example in terms of the number of events, broadcasting etc.

TC commented that he expected conditions application to EFP currently should apply to any new development if permitted.

MB suggested that any expansion should be to the North rather than to the west of the site as currently proposed which, while being more visible from the road, would increase the distance from the village and the river.

MF's view was that the application was too 'sprawly', doubling the size of EFP and would effectively double the local population while providing insufficient facilities, although ultimately he believed that a compromise solution was the best option.

TC raised the issue that the application refers to a connection with main drainage, stating that the site is already on the main drain, but recalls that a previous application for development of the chalets at EFP suggested otherwise and made reference to the use of a pump. TC queried whether any assessment had been made as to whether the main drain had sufficient capacity to cope with the additional numbers envisaged by the current application.

JB objected to the application on principle, and agreed with MF's comment that EFP was moving away from its founding principal and at risk of becoming the Easton caravan Park rather than the Easton Farm Park.

TC suggested rejecting the current application on the basis of the issues raised – including lighting, roads, tree felling and facilities – but that a re-designed plan within the existing boundary of EFP could be acceptable and would ameliorate many of the concerns raised. However, there was a danger that such a position could undermine any objection in principle based on the proximity to the model farm, listed buildings, special landscape area etc.

MB commented that there did not appear to have been any assessment or consideration regarding the historical context of the site or the local area generally, and there was general consent that the Planner dealing with listed buildings should be contacted and invited to comment, as well as other relevant organisations such as English Heritage.

A vote was conducted for councillors to (i) agree to the application in its current form, (ii) to reject the application outright and/or (iii) to oppose the existing application but to consider alternative plans that properly addressed the concerns raised [the 'No but' option].

JB: 'No' (option (ii))
MB: 'No but' (option (iii))
MF: 'No but' (option (iii))
TC: 'No but' (option (iii))

No votes for option (i), one vote for option (ii) and three votes for option (iii).
Option (iii) by a majority.

DA to draft a response to Ben Woolnough outlining the response of the Parish Council

All agree that a site visit to EFP is not required at this stage.

The meeting closed at 9.48

Signed..... Date.....

Next Meeting: Monday 28th September 2015 at 7.45 pm in the Village hall

Appendices follow:

- A Text of Email received from Pauline and Brian Latimer on 30.08.15
- B Text of response sent to Ben Woolnough on behalf of LPC

[Handwritten signature and date 28/9/2015]

APPENDIX A: Text of email received from Paula and Brian Latimer 30.08.15

Dear Terry / Dave

Apologies but we're away at the moment and won't be able to make Tuesday's meeting. However, we're hoping it might be possible to feed our views on the planning application at Easton Farm Park into the meeting.

Our concerns at this stage would be around:

1. visual impact - we could see vans parked at the Maverick Festival in the summer - the existing tree line did not hide this - and suspect that the caravan site would be highly visible throughout the year for those of us higher up the valley
2. noise - the valley acts as a natural amphitheatre - for example we hear music events at Easton Grange very clearly and individual voices at the Farm Park - which isn't a problem during the day but may have a significant impact at night with families partying, BBQ-ing outdoors, dogs barking, children playing, car alarms etc.
3. traffic - we also have concerns about the prospect of caravans, camper vans and trailers traveling along the single track lanes around Letheringham, especially where there are blind corners and on excessively long stretches where no passing places are available - we rely on these lanes to get to neighbouring villages for business etc. When faced with a towed vehicle, the onus is on car users to take the risk of reversing, in some cases hundreds of meters and around blind bends

We'd also be very interested in finding out how the facility would be managed, including whether there would be a quiet policy after a certain times, and how any rules would be enforced e.g. 24 hour site warden. We're also wondering if there are other rules around length of hire and target market - e.g. will the site be used by people working at the power station and arable workers, which may mean a lot of early morning noise in the valley. Additionally we'd be interested in finding out if there would be static caravans on the site (or could it be converted to this without further consultation in the future).

The valley is very scenic at the moment and current commercial use is sympathetic to the landscape, we believe this development would alter the character of the valley considerably from what we can tell at the moment.

We'd be grateful if you could feed these views into the meeting and possibly offer us some feedback after it.

Kind regards

Brian and Paula Latimer

APPENDIX B: Text of letter sent to SCDC by email and post on 10.09.15

Ben Woolnough
Planning Officer
Suffolk Coastal District Council

10th September 2015

Re: Application No: DC/15/3165/FUL

Site: Easton Farm Park

Proposal: Change of land use from 5 unit caravan site to 70 unit caravan site with ancillary development of shop, offices and erection of a site facilities building

Dear Ben

I write with regard to the Planning Application submitted by Easton Farm Park, which was considered by the Letheringham Parish Council (hereinafter 'The Parish Council') and residents at a meeting held on Tuesday the 1st September 2015.

In short, the Council voted to oppose the application in its current form for the reasons set out below, but would reconsider any amended application which adequately addressed these concerns.

In reaching its decision, the Parish Council recognised the commercial realities faced by Easton Farm Park ('EFP') and the need to identify and promote additional sources of income to ensure the viability of the business generally. However, the proposal for extending the camping facilities from the existing five pitches to one involving seventy pitches in the location proposed was considered unacceptable and in clear breach of relevant Strategic and Development Management Policies for the following reasons:

1. Scale of the Development and Visual Impact
 - 1.1 The Council considered that the scale of the proposed development was wholly disproportionate to the existing position, and that the extension from the permitted five placements to one involving seventy placements breached the terms and spirit of Development Management Policy DM17; as well as Policies AP13 (Special landscape areas) and AP4 (Preserving the areas surrounding historic parks and gardens)
 - 1.2 DM17 requires that any new site is 'of a scale appropriate to the site and its setting', while extensions 'do not have a materially adverse effect on the landscape' and 'are small in scale relative to the existing site'. The Parish Council considers that the extension from five to seventy placements renders this application unacceptable on the basis of the Council's published policy, involving a wholly disproportionate increase in size. In particular, the proposed site of seventy placements not only effectively doubles the size of the EFP development generally, but is likely to have between 200 and 280 people 'resident' at any one time, compared to a total existing population in Easton of around 320 people – effectively almost doubling the local population;
 - 1.3 Moreover, the location and size of the proposed development would have a significant and adverse impact on the visual landscape within an Area of Special Interest. The proposal would not provide adequate screening, and the suggestion that the visual impact can be sufficiently ameliorated by planting ignores the significant periods when growth would provide little if any actual relief, as well as the periodic felling of tress to the south of the site that would provide some screening from the village when fully grown;
 - 1.4 This is of particular importance to local residents who rent out accommodation to holiday makers, who are invariably attracted by the quiet and rural nature of the village and its environs. The proposed site would be clearly visible from important local landmarks including the Church, and the scale of the development would irrevocably change the nature of the area and have a significantly adverse effect of such local businesses;

[Handwritten signature]
Date: 28/9/2015

- 1.5 Contrary to Policy DM17, the parish council considers that any extension will not 'facilitate visual improvements where necessary in the form of layout and landscaping' and is therefore unacceptable.
- 1.6 Easton Village is a designated conservation area and the adjacent model farm (EFP) lies in the Deben valley SLA .Many of the Victorian "model" farm buildings are listed grade 2 and it is important that the setting of these building within the Deben Valley SLA are not diminished and are retained for their own sake as well as the tourist pull factor they create.

2. Impact on Road Network

- 2.1 The road network around EFP consists largely of single track roads, often with long stretches without passing points as well as blind corners and sharp bends. The Parish Council considers that the road network in the relevant area is wholly unsuitable for the significant number of cars towing caravans that must inevitably be attracted to the new or extended site if it is to be commercially viable;
- 2.2 In a site comprising seventy pitches, there will be an enormous increase in local traffic, exacerbated by the relatively short stays associated with touring caravan sites. On any given day, there is likely to be twenty or more cars and caravans leaving with a similar number arriving, travelling in opposing directions on roads that are wholly incapable of safely accommodating them;
- 2.3 Further, this road network is used extensively by large farm vehicles, and there will be an inevitable and significant adverse impact on the flow of traffic and highway safety generally, again in breach of Policy DM17.

3. Availability of Services

- 3.1 The application indicates that the site is already connected to the main drain, although this should be clarified and confirmed as the Parish Council is aware of previous applications by EFP that have suggested the contrary;
- 3.2 Even if there is an existing connection to the main sewer, it is not apparent that any or any adequate assessment has been conducted as to whether this could cope with the additional volume of material inevitably generated by the number of people that would use the extended site;
- 3.3 The proposed amenities on site, comprising four cubicles and a trough-style urinal for males and five cubicles for females, with four showers for each, appear to be wholly inadequate for the number of people involved. In addition, the location of the amenities at the eastern side of the proposed site would require a lengthy walk from many of the pitches. These factors cause concerns that some if not many of those using the site would have recourse to the adjacent woodland and neighbouring meadows, creating both a health hazard to others on site as well as to local residents and wildlife, as well as a risk of pollution in the nearby river;
- 3.4 In addition, Letheringham and the area around EFP already suffers from very poor broadband speeds, and residents with rental properties report on regular complaints from visitors regarding this issue. The large increase in numbers at an enlarged EFP would have a significant and negative impact on this, to the detriment of local residents and, perhaps more significantly, local businesses reliant on access to the internet.

4. Impact on Listed Buildings and the Role of EFP

- 4.1 The Parish Council is concerned that the application does not appear to involve any assessment regarding the impact on the listed buildings within the Farm Park, and considers that this, as well as a review by English Heritage, should be commissioned and considered before any decision is made regarding the current application;
- 4.2 In addition to concerns regarding 'sprawl' and both the change of use from agricultural to commercial as well as the extension of the curtilage of EFP generally, the Parish Council considers that the current application moves EFP further away from the purpose for which it was initially established, and notes

that the proposed new buildings have nothing to do with the educational and cultural purposes that the site is supposed to promote;

- 4.3 Far from being an Agricultural Museum and Model Farm Park, the site has progressively removed and diminished the educational and cultural facets of its original operation. The application would serve to enhance this process, effectively making it the Easton Caravan Park and undermining the very purpose for which it was originally set up;
- 4.4 Moreover, the adverse cultural, environmental and other impacts of the proposed development are not offset adequately or at all by the creation of local employment or other benefits. The application suggests that two full and two part-time jobs will be created, but even if this is correct, these would only apply to the period during which the site is operational (ie from March to the end of October) and would have only a relatively marginal potential which is likely to be offset by the adverse impact on other local business, and in particular those who rent out accommodation for the reasons given previously;

5. Conditions and Other Factors

- 5.1 The Parish Council is concerned about and requests clarification regarding the issue of conditions that might be attached to any permitted development, both in terms of whether conditions applicable to the existing Farm Park will be replicated (eg. Regarding limitations on broadcasts etc) and the extent of further conditions regarding factors including, but not limited to, use, duration of stay, the prevention of amplified music, quiet periods and enforcement / supervision;
- 5.2 There is particular concern among residents that any permitted change of use will be an initial step to further and more extreme development of the site in due course, and the Parish Council requests clarification as to the conditions that might be imposed and/or undertaking that EFP would agree to make to assuage such concerns;
- 5.3 Given that the attraction of the local area arises from its quiet and rural nature, there appears to be a real danger that the suggested development will adversely impact on the very reason that people may wish to visit and stay in this part of Suffolk. Not only will that impact on the quality of life of residents, but it is likely to lead to pressure for additional development and activities at EFP designed to attract campers, resulting in a self-perpetuating chain of development and expansion far beyond the existing and already unsatisfactory plans;

6. Alternative Proposals

- 6.1 While the Parish Council strongly objects to the application submitted, it is acknowledged that an alternative, more modest development, particularly one that is accommodated within the existing curtilage of EFP, could potentially address a majority of the concerns raised while meeting the commercial needs of EFP.

I trust that this is satisfactory and look forward to hearing from you in response to the matters raised above, as well as in relation to the matters requiring clarification and investigation set out herein as well as in earlier email correspondence.

Yours sincerely

David Allan
Clerk to Letheringham Parish Council