

Comment on Planning application 1/0602/2020/FUL Hockridges Farm, Woodtown

Alwington Parish Council moved its meeting planned for 8 October to 17 September to allow local residents to make representations in person about this planning application. The minutes of this meeting will reflect that 10 members of the public attended of whom 5 spoke about their concerns and one spoke in support of the application.

Their representations can be summarised as follows:

1. Scale and scope of the application

The design and access statement opens with the comment: "The proposal is modest in size but will provide the accommodation required in order to kick start our clients' new business venture." Everyone expressed concern about what this means and speculated about further barns being demolished and replaced with more holiday cottages. The applicant explained in her statement to the meeting, however, that with hindsight she regretted those words because they have no immediate plans for further cottages. She also clarified that the water treatment plant had been installed by the previous owner in 2015 and was appropriate for the size of the main house.

2. Proposed design

At first sight this planning application has much to commend it - improvement of an existing agricultural building which is in a state of disrepair. The design was, however, questioned because it appears to some that it is a redevelopment, rather than refurbishment of a former milking parlour. Concern was expressed that the external steps should be repaired and retained to maintain the history and character of the building which is within the curtilage of 'Homemead' the neighbouring Grade II listed thatched cottage.

Other concerns were expressed about attractiveness of the south elevation (facing the road) and the use cladding not being consistent with the refurbishment of similar former "barns" in the area.

3. Impact of the application

Woodtown is a small rural hamlet and residents who lived there for a long time lament that it is no longer a quiet place to live any more.

There is no land for development and many consider that if it is intended to develop Hockridges Farm for recreational purposes with holiday cottages that the existing infrastructure is not adequate for more visitors and will cause a further significant deterioration in the local householders' quality of life. Some believe that this is one holiday cottage too many.

Concern was also expressed about the impact of this development on the future nesting of swifts. Hockridges Farm is unique because it is the last known nesting site of these birds in the area.

4. Access and Safety

There is universal concern about the amount of traffic in Woodtown and the degree of difficulty of turning in and out of the farm entrance.

The road through Woodtown hamlet is a narrow unclassified road which has seen a very significant increase in traffic not only from "staycationers" but local traffic using the road to by-pass Bideford to the west from the A39. Additionally there has been a very significant increase in agricultural contractors' traffic through the hamlet.

The road is particularly narrow (not helped by the overgrown bank on 'Homemead's' boundary) and steep to the west of the entrance past the historic hamlet water pump. Drivers attempting to exit from Hockridges Farm are completely out of sight from a car

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45 feet from the entrance (considered to be the braking distance of a car driving at 30mph) as illustrated in this photograph:



Farm Entrance

The problem is exacerbated by car drivers approaching from the west at too high a speed. Many of the tractors are also driven by young and inexperienced operators who are under pressure to complete work as fast as possible and therefore drive fast. Tractors with trailers full of silage would require a significantly longer stopping time and would be unlikely to stay in full control if they had to make an emergency stop. This proposed development is, therefore considered to contribute to increased risk of accidents because the holiday makers using the cottage will be unfamiliar with the difficulties of leaving this property

5. Conclusion

Alwington Parish Council has significant concerns about this application as it currently stands and is unable to support it fully.

Not only would it benefit from further work to improve the quality of the design to retain the character of former milking parlour but to also consider ways to improve access to the farm to mitigate the safety issues.

In coming to this conclusion the the Council noted that a previous application in 1975 for two holiday cottages (1/0297/1975) was not granted because of similar access and safety issues. Since then the highways issues have obviously deteriorated and would, therefore, suggest grounds for not granting approval.

6. Recommendation

Under these circumstances Alwington Parish Council believes there are the strongest grounds for Cllr Pennington and Hicks (Monkeleigh and Putford ward) to call this application in for consideration by the Planning Committee as a matter of urgency.