

# HADLOW PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the virtual Zoom meeting of Planning & Environment Committee duly convened and held on  
Tuesday 26 January 2021 at 7.30pm

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**Present:** Cllrs M Harvey (Chairperson), E Bright, N Collins, D Carey, J Massy, R Morley, J Newman, S Richardson.

**Also in attendance:** M Stepkowski (Parish Clerk – Minute Taker),

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**3534 To receive apologies, reasons, and approval of absences**

None.

**3535 To receive declarations of interests**

Cllr Carey declared an interest in application TM/20/00057 and turned off his camera, muted conversation and therefore did not contribute to the discussion or decision.

With regards to applications involving Hadlow College, Cllr Carey confirmed he was not associated with the new management and would change his Declaration of Pecuniary Interests accordingly.

**3536 To receive an update on progress of resolutions from the last meeting 24 November not on the current agenda.**

No updates.

**3537 New applications, amended applications and plans for comment (List ‘B’s)**

- **TM/20/02991/MIN** - Request for approval of details pursuant to condition 29 (Landscaping, Restoration & Aftercare) of planning permission TW/19/1343 (KCC Ref:KCC/TW/19/1343/R29). Stonecastle Farm Quarry, Hartlake Road, Golden Green, Tonbridge, Kent.
- **TM/21/00022/MIN** - Details of Ecological Mitigation Strategy (Condition 1 & Widening of Haul Road Mitigation Strategy (Condition 3) pursuant to planning permission TM/00/1599/R26C1 (KCC ref: TM/00/1599/R26C1A). Stonecastle Farm Quarry, Hartlake Road, Golden Green, Tonbridge, Kent.  
<https://publicaccess2.tmbc.gov.uk/online-applications/PLAN/21/00022/MIN>;

**Committee considered and responded to 20/02991/MIN and 21/00022/Min. HPC response applies to both applications.**

“Condition 1. No works can be carried out within phases 2D, 4 & 5 or within the 15-metre buffer adjacent to hedgerows and woodland within phases 1, 2A, 2B and 2C until further surveys and mitigation strategies for these areas have been submitted to and approved in writing by the County Planning Authority.”  
Comment from Hadlow Parish Council:

## **HPC Response:**

### **Introduction:**

1. Hadlow Parish Council is pleased to see an ecological mitigation strategy (EMS) for these mineral extraction plans (Areas 2, 4 and 5) and commends the planning and overall intentions of the proposals.
2. However, we do feel that the EMS could be of greater use with longer-term planning associated with an over-arching masterplan clearly setting out the aims of the strategy and more detailed management planning for the future. This may well exist, but we are unaware of it. There is clearly great biodiversity potential for the area if it were to be positively planned for. With the twin threats of a Climate Crisis coupled with a Biodiversity Crisis upon us, there is a significant trend towards changing land-use to supplying ecosystem services and using the land appropriately for biodiversity, managing climate change and to the benefit of the community. While financial support for agricultural landowners is still being developed under the ELMS system, it would be useful to have some guidance as to the intentions of the landowner once restoration is formally completed.
3. While not directly related to achieving a biodiversity gain, there are linked opportunities for improving countryside access to the area. Recent experience has shown how much need the population has for countryside access. Green Space is already recognised as being below national norms in nearby settlements such as Hadlow, and only limited Green Space is being supplied within the large-scale residential developments planned to the south and east in Capel and Paddock Wood. We are aware of a previous proposal to consider an East-West footpath in the area and we believe that there may be many opportunities for improving public access to the benefit of the community if that would be compatible with the landowners' intentions for future use and management of the land. The intention would be to improve the community's access to the natural environment and biodiversity.
4. In order to establish what biodiversity gain is to be achieved, it is important to recognise the level and importance of biodiversity that is already present. While we appreciate the recognition of those species previously known as European Protected Species (EPS) and the clear intentions to protect them, we think that the Preliminary Ecological Assessment has perhaps not paid enough attention to the other wildlife present on the site in order to minimise damage to the biodiversity currently present. We particularly concentrate on those plant species Nationally Listed as of Principal Importance, which have apparently not been surveyed on site despite being known to be either on site or close by from the KMBRC records that have been listed in this application. This Principal Importance list is largely based on the list of species previously covered by the UK Biodiversity Action Plans. On the specifics of the currently proposed EMS, we therefore have some comments to make specifically on the likely loss of rarer plant species present in the area and on site, the apparent lack of recognition of this likely loss and the current lack of any plan to mitigate this loss.

The two most obvious plant species likely to be lost or otherwise impacted are an arable weed, the Shepherds Needle, and a member of the ditch flora, the True Fox Sedge.

5. We also note that there has been no Breeding Birds Survey to inform the EMS, which we would normally expect to see as an appropriate baseline in a development scheme of this size and impact. There are bird species of Principal Importance such as the European Turtle Dove and Nightingale known to be present on and around the site, and there is no obvious questioning in the EMS that we can see to determine if there is likely to be any negative impact on these species, or to plan to support these species in the habitat design and future maintenance. We believe there may also be some inevitable impact on some bird species present on site during the site operations, and if there is loss of habitat in the longer term. On the positive side, we think that many of the bird species associated with water habitats will not be greatly adversely affected and are most likely to benefit from the proposed changes, although we believe that the water bodies created should not be surrounded by tall trees to the benefit of these species. We would however also like to mention other bird species Listed as of Principal Importance that are possibly at risk of negative impact. This could include species such as Grey Partridge and Skylark possible in the area. Losses in species such as these could however be at least partly mitigated by the increase in habitats such as reedbeds that are suitable for other species, if appropriately designed and managed.
6. The mosaic of habitats on site and suggested in the EMS is currently supporting a range of different bird species, 142 species having been recorded on/associated with the site by the Kent Ornithological Society. We appreciate the current planning for restoration and mitigation, and It is hoped that this diversity of habitat and thus the diversity of bird species can be maintained over the longer term. We think that this requires continued habitat management, which in turn would need resourcing. The extension of reed-bed habitat is to be particularly welcomed, but we are concerned that this may soon be converted to wet woodland if not correctly designed and managed. We believe that the water bodies and reedbeds would be more appropriate for waterfowl if they are not surrounded and enclosed by tall trees. The water bodies themselves would greatly benefit from having a diversity of depth and a more complex shore and island structure. The RSPB have the ability to provide detailed advice and we would hope they have already been consulted on what appears to be a promising start to the habitat restoration planning.
7. We would also like to emphasise that dewatering and any other operations associated with the quarrying should be prevented from damaging the water quality of the Hammer Dyke and Alder Stream and as much of the local ditch system as possible, as already suggested by the Environment Agency –

“In response to the Environment Agency’s comments about potential silting of surface waters, the applicant has advised that if the request to change to wet working is approved the extracted mineral would be stockpiled wet and surrounded by drainage ditches and retaining bunds” and “Silt or silty water from quarrying activities must not be allowed to enter any watercourse.

If discharge of clean water from quarrying activities to a watercourse is proposed, a permit may be required, and the Environment Agency should be consulted before works commence”. The presence of True Fox Sedge across the area is perhaps an indicator of the value of the ditch wildlife, which has not otherwise been assessed. We believe that the ditch and drain habitats across the site could be an important component of the biodiversity of the site in the future if there is an appropriate management plan for them, in the same way as the larger water bodies, reed-beds and other habitats on site require management to provide the biodiversity they will be capable of supporting.

8. Finally, we note the presence of Invasive Non-Native Species on site and are particularly concerned about the presence of aquatic invasives such as New Zealand Pigmywort, *Crassula helmsii*, thought very likely to be in at least one of the ponds to be dug up and the material then distributed across the site. We believe it would be an appropriate function of an EMS in these circumstances to survey the water bodies on site to see where this particularly damaging invasive, and incidentally any others of particular interest, is already established and which areas are currently free from it, and to take appropriate action to prevent the distribution of this extremely invasive plant into new areas, such as the new reed beds and lakes to be created.

#### **Notes on botanical diversity requiring protection or mitigation – Shepherds’ Needle and True Fox Sedge.**

1. We note the presence on site within the planned Phase 4 of a significant population of plants of the Shepherds Needle *Scandix pecten-veneris*. The data collated from the KMBRC search indicates a map reference that includes land within the site, and we can definitely confirm that the location of the major population is along the margins of a field in Phase 4 that is planned to be exploited - and then restored to carr woodland rather than back to arable use. Shepherds’ Needle is an endangered/critically endangered plant in the UK and a Biodiversity Action Plan and county-rare plant in Kent.
2. 'Mitigation' in respect of an annual plant that is dependent upon arable cultivation is far from straightforward. If the applicant remains owner of arable land then we imagine that it would be possible to collect seed and disperse along the margins of this or adjacent fields of similar soil type and arable use (there should then be a regime of non-herbicide margins, and although the species does best with winter cereal crops, those margins could receive occasional light cultivation avoiding October/November when the plant germinates). 'Re-introductions', however, are not generally recommended as ideal solutions and particularly where they might confuse with existing populations.

Any such exercise should be documented with the county rare plant register, which we are informed could be arranged through Geoffrey Kitchener, the Kent Botanical Recorder. Further advice on the conservation of the plant is available from a number of sources including the Kent Wildlife Trust, [https://www.kentwildlifetrust.org.uk/sites/default/files/2018-06/KWT%20Land%20Mgt%20Advice\\_Sheet%208%20-%20Arable%20plants.pdf](https://www.kentwildlifetrust.org.uk/sites/default/files/2018-06/KWT%20Land%20Mgt%20Advice_Sheet%208%20-%20Arable%20plants.pdf)

3. Present in the ditches around and across the site is the True Fox Sedge, *Carex vulpina*. This is a species also classified nationally as vulnerable to the risk of extinction, listed on the Kent rare plant register and which has recently been adopted as one of the three flagship species for the Kent Biodiversity Strategy; there is a definite need to encourage the right sort of habitat for this species. The potential importance of these ditches rather depends on their management. A careful sequence of ditch clearing could perhaps be appropriate. If botanical rarities such as the Shepherds Needle are unfortunately to be negatively impacted or even destroyed, that loss might be partly mitigated by appropriate and ongoing management techniques being employed in the management of the ditch habitat and thereby the encouragement of a diversity of ditch plants and animals including the True Fox Sedge and others. Further specialist advice on this plant is available through the County Botanical Recorder.
4. In and around the ditches, gravel pits and other water features a number of other plants can be found. There are other sedges, such as the unusual Bladder Sedge, *Carex vesicaria*, the Slender Tufted-sedge, *Carex acuta*, Spiked Sedge, *Carex spicata*, Cyperus Sedge, *Carex pseudocyperus* and Glaucous Sedge, *Carex flacca*. Other flowering plants include Tufted Forget-me-not, *Myosotis laxa*, Marsh Bedstraw, Galium palustre, Dyer's Greenweed, *Genista tinctoria*, Grass Vetchling, *Lathyrus nissolia*, Alsike Clover, *Trifolium hybridum*, Smooth Tare, *Vicia tetrasperma*, Hairy Tare, *Vicia hirta* and Tufted Vetch, *Vicia cracca*. In the water bodies themselves, Pondweeds include the Horned Pondweed, *Zannicellia palustris subsp. Palustris*, Curled Pondweed, *Potamogeton crispus* and Hairlike Pondweed *Potamogeton trichoides*. Other water plants include Marsh Yellow-cress, *Rorippa palustris* and Purple Loose-strife, *Lythrum salicaria*.

### Notes on Bird Species

1. Birds associated with the aquatic habitats. Kent Ornithological Society records of species recorded at Whetsted Gravel Pits have been very extensive, including a variety of water fowl, birds associated with reed-beds, scrub and woodland. However, the designs of the water features to date have perhaps been rather featureless and not as imaginative as might have been. Natural water bodies have areas that differ in depth providing opportunities for different species to feed on different species of fish, shellfish and waterweed while their edges have bays and spits, vital for territories and shelter. These greatly enhance the environment and attractiveness to a range of species and can fairly easily be designed into restoration schemes, but it is far more difficult to retrofit them.

The bare islands mentioned in the current plan provide some particularly good habitat enhancement but experience, for example at Bough Beech reservoir shows that they only retain any attractiveness to terns only as long as they remain effectively unvegetated, which can require management.

2. We understand that there are plans to convert some of the open water areas into reed-bed habitat. We would applaud this intention. Reed-bed habitat of any significant size is quite rare, and areas bordering the lower reaches of the Lower Medway such as near Holborough and Wouldham may be impacted by the anticipated sea-level rise. However, we believe that reed-beds created at the Stonebridge Farm site could need careful design and future management to remain valuable in terms of biodiversity gain into the future. There are a variety of ways of designing reed and fen habitats for maximum habitat value.
3. With respect to the birds of Principal Importance related to scrub habitat that we are concerned could be at some risk of loss, we focus on the European Turtle Dove and also relate this to other birds at risk such as the Nightingale.
4. The European Turtle Dove. European Turtle doves are vulnerable to global extinction (IUCN Red List of Endangered Species). They have suffered an almost complete 94% UK population decline between 1995 and 2018. The one-year decline in 2017/18 was a catastrophic 46%. Their range is increasingly concentrated into an ever-shrinking patch of East Anglia and the South-East of England. With the presence of Turtle Doves acknowledged it is a concern that whether, and on which parts of the site itself, they might currently be breeding is uncertain because there has been no formal breeding bird survey. Purring birds have certainly been heard on site (Phase 4) in 2019 by this respondent, and again by nearby residents up until 2020.
5. It would seem that there are considerable opportunities for supporting this species at little cost by understanding the habitat needs of Turtle Doves and then catering for these in the habitat restoration plans for the whole site and specifically in this particular EMS. One factor could be the choice of tree species in the EMS for this specific stage of the restoration. By using typical scrub species such as hawthorn and blackthorn, the resulting dense scrub together with sufficient seed sources and nearby ponds and other water features could perhaps make a substantial contribution to European Turtle Dove conservation in Kent. We believe that the Medway Valley is recognised as an area of particular interest for Turtle Dove conservation and that further information can be obtained from the RSPB and from Operation Turtle Dove.
6. The Nightingale is another rare bird in the UK that is associated with dense scrub near water features, for example at Leybourne Country Park in Tonbridge and Malling further down the Medway Valley. Like the Turtle Dove, it is classified in the UK as Red under the Birds of Conservation Concern 4: The Red List for Birds (2015). With a long history of occupation of this site by Nightingales and as an example over a dozen singing males reported on several occasions in April to May 2020 by a regular reliable observer (Kent Ornithological Society records) there is likely to be a significant number of breeding pairs on site.

Again, we think that a clear focus on specifically encouraging extensive areas of managed scrub habitat near to water bodies is likely to support the current breeding status of this species on site. To quote the British Trust for Ornithology, “To maintain Nightingales long-term, conservationists need to manage current Nightingale hot spots to maintain the right mixture of ages of suitable habitat, using a mixture of coppice/scrub clearance and [where appropriate] deer enclosures’, and to find new ways to attract birds to new sites.” We therefore believe that the current EMS, while greatly welcomed, could be improved by a better understanding on this site of current habitat use by existing bird (and plant) species and a more holistic approach to habitat planning across the site as a whole.

*(Cllr Massy apologised for lateness and was welcomed to the meeting)*

- **TM/21/00002/FL** - Erection of a timber single storey granny annexe for ancillary use to the main dwelling. Hartlake Farmhouse, Hartlake Road, Golden Green, Tonbridge, Kent, TN11 0BL.
- **TM/21/00003/LDP** - Lawful Development Certificate Proposed: stationing of a mobile home within the residential curtilage of a dwelling house. Hartlake Farmhouse, Hartlake Road, Golden Green, Tonbridge, Kent, TN11 0BL.

**Response to 21/00002/FL & 21/00003/LDP:**

**Hadlow Parish Council is concerned about both of the above planning applications on the basis that the property is within the Green Belt. Notwithstanding any decision TMBC may make, however, Hadlow Parish Council believes the applications should at the very least be mutually exclusive so that both are not granted approval.**

Members requested the Clerk notify Planning Department that the above application drawings were pale and therefore hard to read, and that if the Borough were to continue with online viewing of applications only rather than the previous method of sending the applications in the post then online quality needed to be improved.

- **TM/21/00052/TNCA** - Lime T1 to re-pollard crown back to previous pollard points ; Yew T2 to prune to reduce lateral crown spread on West side only by 0.5-1m, prune to trim the remaining crown by no more than 0.5m all over; and Golden Irish Yew T3 to prune to trim entire crown by no more than 0.5m all over. Park House 7 North Frith Park, Hadlow, Tonbridge, Kent, TN11 9QW.  
**HPC Agreed.**
- **TM/21/00057/FL** - Removal of single storey side building and garage to main building and construction of new two storey side extension replacing single storey with rear single storey sunroof. 1 Appletons, Hadlow, Tonbridge, Kent, TN11 0DT.  
**HPC Agreed.**
- **TM/20/02730/FL** - Single storey rear extension and alterations and conversion of each dwelling house to shared accommodation for students to provide a total of 19 bedrooms with shared kitchen, lounge, and bathroom facilities. Pine Trees and

Sedgebrooks, Hadlow College, Tonbridge Road, Hadlow, Tonbridge, Kent, TN11 0AU.

**HPC Agreed.**

- **TM/20/02733/FL** - Single storey rear extension and conversion of dwelling house to shared accommodation for students to provide nine bedrooms with shared kitchen, lounge, and bathroom facilities. Faulkners Farmhouse, Ashes Lane, Hadlow, Tonbridge, Kent, TN110AN.

**HPC does not object to this application in principle, however we agree with the neighbour consultee's comments about the need for appropriate and sympathetic planting and landscaping being provided and also believe that suitable amenity land dedicated to the property for the use of students should be provided.**

**3538 Planning applications: results (List D's), out of area/comment & planning enforcements**

Noted.

**3539 TMBC & KCC matters:**

Environment Briefing January 2021 noted.

**3540 Non-planning issues:**

- a) **Trees** – Cllr Carey as the Voluntary Tree Warden continued to walk and liaise with Dene Park Forestry Ranger concerning trees close to public paths.

**Access Trail** – there was a tree along the woodland path that was considered in need of some cutting back although not seen currently as a public risk. Cllr Carey offered to walk the path and assess the situation

- b) **Footpaths** – The recent erection of fencing behind the Cricket Club pavilion had caused concern to some members of the public who were of the opinion this was the joining route between MT122 & MT123. Public Rights of Way had confirmed that the fence did not affect either path and that the definitive map identified MT123 access to be along the main drive to the cricket field on the left-hand side and that the route around the field had been re-routed many years ago.

**Council Facilities** – Concerns raised by the owners of Walnut Tree Cottage about the erection of storage facilities within the Council Staff and Doctors parking area was acknowledge and a response to be sent by the Clerk confirming that approval for all structures had been received by TMBC Planning department.

**Williams Field Carpark Lights** – Clerk continued to read through Council Minutes to establish when these were installed and whether they and the power costs were Council or Village Hall Management responsibility.

**COVID Business Grants** – Clerk confirmed one grant had been received and due to both the Hy-Arts and Old School Hall being yet again closed additional grants were possible.

Document Scanning – Members approved a proposal to scan old Parish Council Minutes which would be catalogued by Minute date and saved on USB's and possibly on the Cloud. It was noted that Minutes are open to the public therefore storage on the Cloud produced minimal security risk. The proposal for 4 storage boxes of documents was estimated at £500 and within Clerks budget to action without taking to full Council.

BT Contract – Existing contract to end in three months and Cllr Morley to assist the Clerk in negotiating future contract.

Xmas Lights Grant – TMBC Match funding application completed and returned. Xmas lights have been inspected and repaired and due back for storage this week.

Safety Checks – NKM have just completed Fire Alarm safety inspections with new batteries and other minor works required at both Old School Hall and Medical Centre. Clerk confirmed repairs requested and they will be completed as part of the next 6-month regular check. Spy Alarms due to do intruder alarm 6 monthly service at Old School Hall and Medical Centre. Both companies are working under COVID secure measures.

Staff – The Warden continued to work Monday, Wednesday, Friday during January ensuring all safety checks completed, periodically sweeping and litter picking the Village Square and School Lane in addition to Council owned facilities. He would continue with decorating the Old School Hall bathrooms. The Clerk would continue to work in the Office with the Admin Assistant working on policy reviews from home but anticipated to return on restricted hours to the office during the coming weeks. The cleaner has been cancelled until further notice at both halls. Both halls remained closed to users.

**There being no further business the meeting closed at 20.22**

**Date of next meeting: Tuesday 23 February 2021 at 7.30pm location tba depending on COVID-19 Government guidelines**

**Signed**

**Date**