

**DRAFT Minutes of the meeting of Dodford with Grafton Planning Committee
held on 23 May 2023 at 7.30pm in Dodford Village Hall, Priory Road**

Present: Cllrs Scott Fuller, Rory Lydon (Vice Chairman), Rachel Jennings (Chair), and Jonathan Shapiro

In attendance – Clerk Kay Stone and one member of the public

1. Apologies for absence

Cllrs Lynne Griffin and Scottie Sanderson

2. Declarations of interest

- i. None
- ii. Cllr Jennings for item 7ii

3. To consider planning application consultations:

- i. **23/00444/FUL – Hartley House, Priory Road** – Use of land as a domestic garden in association with the residential occupation of Hartley House, Priory Road.
Dodford with Grafton Parish Council's decision is based on the principle that the property is within the green belt and therefore we do not agree with the change from agricultural land into garden. In this particular case it is worth noting that as it is a Chartist cottage, it has historical and agricultural use.
- ii. **23/00511/FUL – The Dodford Inn, Whinfield Road** – Change of use to a mixed-use venue and Public House.
The Parish Council comments are as follows:

The village of Dodford is unusual in that it has all the attributes of a small, rural community whilst lying in relatively close proximity to urban conurbations such as Birmingham, Worcester, and Bromsgrove. Dodford with Grafton Parish Council are concerned to preserve this character, whilst being aware that the village needs commercially viable businesses to help it to thrive. Suitable enterprises need to be in keeping (both in substance and scale) with the existing community, its rural tranquility and working farms. In responding to this planning application, the Parish Council researched similar applications in many other parts of the country.

The applicants' description of the village demonstrates that they understand its context: 'The Dodford Inn is situated 3 miles west of Bromsgrove centre and is better accessed by foot than by motor vehicle. The village lanes are narrow and heavily tree lined where passing is difficult and surface conditions unfriendly to cars and bikes. Whinfield Road is a cul de sac and the pub is served by its own drive to the middle of its 6 acre curtilage. The village is sparsely occupied by residences and the nearest more densely populated area is over a mile away.'

In principle, the Parish Council would be delighted for people to come to Dodford to get married in beautiful surroundings but feel that the scale and approach suggested by the planning application from the Dodford Inn do not fit this aspiration, which should therefore only be permitted with significant modification. The Parish Council has concerns in a number of areas, all of which are linked to the site's identification by Bromsgrove District Council itself, in January 2016 'as a designated Community Asset within the Village Conservation area'. In particular, the Parish Council would draw the planners' attention to the following issues:

Level of detail

The 'granularity' of the Dodford Inn application is poor, so that it is impossible to quantify fully their intended aims in any of the areas discussed below. In the absence of more detailed information, Parish Councillors have looked at material published by the owners of the Inn, both on the Inn's own website, and on various sites promoting wedding venues. The findings of this work, although not directly quoted in the application itself, do not give the Council reassurance about the intentions of the owners.

Noise

The Parish Council is concerned about the noise level that would inevitably be associated at any wedding venue. The level of noise from a pub/restaurant with up to 60 customers at any one time currently seems to be acceptable to neighbours, but were this noise to include speeches, live music, and music from a dance floor (all of which are mentioned in publicity material (https://www.hitched.co.uk/wedding-venues/the-dodford-inn_310065.htm), things would be very different.

Moreover, if the numbers of guests were to rise to 140, (as cited in various advertising sites including 'Hitched' (as above) and 'Bridebook' <https://bridebook.com/uk/wedding-venues/the-dodford-inn-dodford-worcestershire-csBxrLLWJY>), this would make for a totally unacceptable level of noise pollution. This would affect not only the houses in the immediate vicinity of the Inn, but would also permeate the entire village, given that the Inn 'overlooks a wooded ravine' (to use the applicants' own words) that funnels noise for miles around.

To make matters even worse, the Inn owners advertise that the facilities offered include: 'Fireworks Permitted, Sound System Available, Dancefloor Available, Marquee Permitted'

Apart from the fact that none of these are included in the application, it is obvious that they are all associated with noise production, and so would be unacceptable to the Parish Council, given its role as representing the views of the local community.

It is worth remarking on the impact of fireworks, given the rural nature of the village. Animals of many kinds live locally; cows, sheep, horses, and domestic pets are all highly sensitive to the impact of fireworks, which would make their use at the Inn inadvisable at any time.

Car Parking

The application mentions car parking for 50 vehicles (a number approved in the Inn's last planning application), but the Inn's current marketing (see websites as above), suggests that 'the Inn can accommodate up to 100 daytime guests and 140 for evening receptions'. Apart from the noise levels with that number, 140 guests would suggest 70 or more cars to be parked, as well as transport for the staff (suggested by the application as numbering 15, inferring 15 more cars). To park 85 cars would require a lot more land, as well as causing a lot more noise. The inconvenience caused by delivery lorries also needs to be considered, both in their timings, and the disruption caused by large vehicles on our narrow lanes.

Access by road

As acknowledged by the applicants (see start of this note), Whinfield Road is in a quiet residential area, a single track cul-de-sac road in a village whose lanes are all narrow and heavily tree lined, and where passing is difficult, often impossible. Given that up to 85 cars may be expected to descend on the Inn in a short space of time several times a week (and need to depart again some time later, often late at night), this would result an unacceptable level of traffic congestion, causing immense time delay to local residents across the village, who have no involvement whatsoever with the Inn. It is not clear how such 'grid locks' could or would be managed, and without such clarity, it would be irresponsible to allow the change of use to proceed.

Moreover, in the Statement of Use the applicants anticipate that in 2024 and 2025 they are looking to extend the number of bookings to 75, which means that the ensuing disruption would be happening every few days.

Temporary buildings: marquees and tents

The application does not mention the use of any temporary buildings, but these are being advertised on the websites (see above) as being available. With their potential impact on the numbers of guests and on noise, the Parish Council would suggest that no moveable structures be permitted on site, and that music be restricted to the main building alone.

A further reason for such a ban is the potential impact on wild life, especially on bats. An ecological survey carried out in preparation for the extension a few years ago showed that bats were present, and the applicants at the time were keen to ensure that the lives of these creatures were not affected by human activities. The Parish Council would be reluctant to agree to any development that threatened the bats' wellbeing.

The Dodford Inn as community asset

In their application the owners mention that they 'are determined to maintain the business as a public house and restaurant', but it is not clear how this would be possible were the planning application approved as it stands. 75 events annually implies an event every four days or so, with the days before and afterwards being needed to prepare and to tidy up. Such high, unpredictable levels of activities would be likely to deter local residents from using the Inn.

In summary, whilst welcoming the concept of a village based 'special events' venue, the Parish Council feel that its scale (e.g. noise, and numbers of cars/people) is too large for the village, and that its details need considerable modification before its approval could be considered. Until then, the Council must recommend that the application is refused.

4. To consider planning appeal consultations received - None.

5. To note any planning decisions and appeal decisions received

- i. Woodside Farm – biomass boiler – granted
- ii. Rock Cottages – single storey extension – Appeal dismissed

6. Enforcement/Environmental issues

Bromsgrove District Council (BDC) has confirmed that the solar panels at Sumach are permitted development and do not require planning permission. The Clerk was instructed to ask BDC to explain the difference in the law as the Parish Council understood that solar panels were not allowed on the roadside in a Conservation Area.

7. Any other planning issues

- i. The Parish Council has received a request from the company wishing to install solar panels at Foxwalks Farm to undertake a presentation to the Parish Council at the next meeting which is on 19 June. The Clerk to send an invitation.
- ii. It has been reported that the entrances to Sumach and the car parking area have now been tarmacked and there are concerns about run off water coming down Priory Road with such a large area no longer being permeable. The Clerk to inform BDC.

The meeting closed at 8.33pm

Signed..... Vice Chairman