

## WHISSENDINE PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes Parish Council Meeting: **Wednesday 13 December 2023**  
**7.15 pm**, held at 16c Sherrard Close, Whissendine.

**Present.**

**Mr Will Farr (Chairman)**

**Mrs L Arnold, Mrs C Moss, and Mrs Wilkins**

**In attendance**

**Dr S Lammin (Parish Clerk)**

10 members of the public (9 Ashwell Rd, 1 Sherrard Cl.).

Meeting started 19.15hrs

- 13801** To take any questions or comments from the public: A resident (DW) wished to make representation regarding application 2023/1270/HDG. 'Development site' actually a two-thirds of an acre agricultural field. Location drawing submitted in accurate. Hedgerow is ancient, aerial photos from 1960's. listed species within hedge. Hedgerow forms significant historic village boundary. Land level east of hedge significantly higher than Ashwell Rd., hedge on bank and water drains through hedge roots onto the road. Roots prevent landslide onto road. The proposed opening is within 60m of a right angle bend; opening would be a hazard, etc. (paraphrased)  
Other members of the public spoke to support the comments offered.
- 13802** Apologies for absence: Ms. Buckley (work commitments), Mr Thomas (prior appointment), Mr Greenlay (away), Dr East and Mr Collins. It was AGREED their apologies be accepted.
- 13803** Declaration of any pecuniary interest in any matter on the agenda: Mrs Wilkins declared and interest in planning application 2023/1270 as a near neighbour.
- 13804** To approve minutes of the meeting held on 4 December 2023. Proposed by Mrs Moss and seconded by Mrs Arnold the minutes were AGREED and signed by the Chairman.

Mrs Wilkins left the meeting

- 13805** To consider planning application 2023/1270/HDG: Removal of 10 meters of hedgerow to allow access for agricultural activities. Development site at Ashwell Road, Whissendine. This was discussed and it was AGREED that the following comments be offered to RCC:  
"The Parish Council is concerned that there should be no new gap formed within this ancient hedge, which is also the easternmost boundary to the village of Whissendine; and has been for several centuries. This hedgerow is also an important ecosystem serving a number of vulnerable species within the village.  
The matters of concern are:  
1. Discrepancy in the mapping with the application: The boundary on the map supplied as a location drawing does not correspond to the land registry documents. The location drawing includes land owned by an adjacent landowner.  
2. The hedge is an ancient hedge and forms the eastern boundary to Ashwell Road and to the village as a whole: The first edition of the map, including Whissendine, which was surveyed in 1811 clearly shows that the Ashwell Road leading from Whissendine has not changed its course, and the boundary has been fixed in its current position for centuries.  
Farming in Whissendine was on the open field system until the mid-1700s and the Glebe terrier of 1703, indicates that by then a five field system was an operation, one of those fields listed at this time was Eastfield. It is likely that this was associated with Wake Manor and this hedge formed to the western boundary of the Eastfield. This arrangement pre-dates inclosure in Whissendine, which was between 1760 and 1892. After inclosure the land east of this hedgerow was known as Town End Close (Smith, P: Whissendine a Rutland Village, 1999).

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The age of the trees within this hedgerow supports the assertion of significant age of this hedge; one oak has been assessed as older than 200 years (estimated by size) [Access to other specimens has been hampered by the depth and thickness of the hedge in places and the presence of a high retaining wall along the roadside of the bank on which the hedge is rooted, but there are other mature trees of significant height/trunk girth.]

3. This hedge forms an absolute boundary for the village: This hedge is clearly shown on the old map, which shows the field names around the village (P, Smith 1999; pp42-43). This boundary has also been included in every Rutland local plan as a boundary to the development envelope. The boundary is also included as a development envelope boundary in the Whissendine Neighbourhood Plan (WNP). Figure 12 of the WNP states this boundary acts as a green lane boundary between the village houses and the countryside.

4. This hedge is rooted on a bank: The fields to the east of Ashwell Road are significantly higher than the road surface. The height of the bank varies along the 400m length of this hedge but across the application site it is between c1.25m and 1.35m high (the lowest point is the footpath access, where the bank has been eroded for a narrow portion but is still more than 110cm above the road surface). The field grades up a slope farther east of the hedge-line as the land has a domed profile, with the road having been cut through over time. The height above the road is significant because the land east of the hedge is wet with significant sub-soil water retention. It is the roots of the hedge that stabilises the bank (further south of this site along the hedgerow, the bank is supported with a retaining wall). The root system within the bank is pervious so that the drainage from the field through the bank is constant throughout the year, with a steady stream of water flowing downhill at the eastern side of the carriageway.

5 The hedge provides a significant habitat: The long term presence of the hedge in a largely undisturbed state has created an very valuable species rich habitat for bats (Natterer's, Soprano Pipistrelle and Common Pipistrelle), owls (Tawny Owl and Little Owl), crow, jackdaws, etc, and their prey. The hedge hosts a variety of small mammals and amphibians as well as providing winter shelter and forage to larger mammals such as; roe deer and muntjac. The hedge also provides food for birds of prey: red kite and buzzard being frequently seen in the vicinity. It also promotes the breeding and congregation of a plethora of insect species.

The role of this hedgerow, as a continuous corridor, is particularly important for the bat colonies in the village. The larger ivy-covered trees provide roosts for pipistrelles but the hedge as a whole is the main feeding ground for all the bat species. St Andrew's Church is just north west of this hedgerow and is home to a summer maternity roost of Natterer's bat. These have been monitored since 1997. It is the sixth largest Natterer's roost in the East Midlands and the 23rd largest being monitored nationally. Natterer's bats in the UK are of international importance. Natterer's will forage up to 3km from their roost and emerge to feed 40 mins after sunset, this hedge has been observed to be their main feeding ground. These bats move along the hedge as a corridor from the Church to the copse immediately south of the application site to the wooded area north of Loodal Farm yard. The continuity of this corridor, without excessive breaks is essential for this colony to thrive.

6, significant diversity within the hedge: As the hedge is long established it hosts a wide variety of plants. The trees recently identified along the length of the hedge have been listed, identification has been complicated because this application has been submitted in mid-December and the trees are deciduous also the hedge is elevated along its length in a bank above the road, and it is very dense in sections so that access to individual specimens is hampered), The hedge includes: English Oak, Hawthorne, Field Maple, Blackthorn, Blackberry, Ash, Hornbeam, Dog Rose, Elder and Rowan.

7. The hedge provides a continuous corridor: The hedgerow runs continuously south from Highfield Farm buildings to the edge of the vegetable patch at 42 Ashwell Road. That is a run of approximately 400m with only 3 breaks: a gap of c1m for a pedestrian gate (formerly a stile until 2023) in the frontage of this application site; a gap c4m immediately adjacent to this application site which was for a track (with a standard metal agricultural gate set back behind the hedge-line, which gave access to this application site through the southern boundary of the site until 2023) and the final gap is the c10m gap to accommodate the gated access into Loodal Farm yard. The hedge links the hedges around Highfield farm to the copse just south of the application site and the woodland just north of Loodal Farm yard.

8. Access for agricultural use? The request to remove 10m of hedge seems excessive. The entire frontage of the site is only c40m and the public footpath is part way across the frontage. The previous access to the site still exists and is only a normal gate-width, the hedge loss is c4m. The site itself is only two-thirds of an acre and is a grazing pasture. The amount of subsoil water makes it unlikely that it could support large machines. The plants are affected by the growing conditions so that the sward is tussocky and coarse and would be unsuitable for haylage/silage. The field, now divorced from surrounding pasture, would only support 4-6 sheep. In this context the agricultural need for a 10m access is questionable.

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The application describes the site as a 'development site; such a description may serve to mislead. This small subdivision of a larger field is grazing pasture. This has been grazing pasture for the last 70 years at least and there is no extant permission for any material change of use. The site is outside the development envelope on both the draft Rutland Local Plan and the Whissendine Neighbourhood Plan.

9. Road safety issue: This frontage is east of the road as it exits a blind (right-angle) bend. The requested hedge loss would be 60 m from the blind bend on a road that is very narrow, and is effectively single track. The current road arrangement causes large vehicles, including the bus, to have to back and fill in this area in order to negotiate other traffic. It is the Parish Council's view that an additional opening into the highway at this point would create a hazard to road traffic and pedestrians. "

It was **AGREED** the Clerk should submit the comments to RCC without undue delay.

It was **AGREED** that Mrs Moss, as Tree Champion, should contact RCC's Tree Officer regarding this application.

Meeting closed 20.07hrs.