

Response from Clopton Parish Council to Planning Application DC/20/1817/FUL Birds Hill Cottage Birds Hill Clopton Suffolk IP13 6SE.

This response has been prepared following the Clopton Parish Council Planning meeting held virtually via zoom at 7-30 pm on 11th June 2020.

This was attended by all parish councillors. James Bailey of James Bailey Planning attended the meeting to present the application and to answer questions from those present. The Parish Council had also received a number of written submissions from local residents regarding this application, prior to the meeting.

General Statement from Clopton Parish Council:

Clopton is traditionally an agricultural village. The residents of Clopton are mindful of the fact that living in an agricultural region, it is to be expected that activities related to the agricultural industry will take place in the vicinity of their homes. However, this is in the understanding that many of the disruptive activities are seasonal. In many cases agricultural access and movement is via the fields and tracks established for that purpose and causing a minimum of difficulty and danger to neighbouring properties.

The establishment of a boat construction business and metal fabrication business in the middle of a Suffolk village is an entirely different proposition and the Parish Council is opposed to the granting of this application. Our particular objections are presented below:

The suggestion of Farm diversification under Core Strategy Policy DM14

The application suggests that this is an element of farm diversification under Core Strategy Policy DM14. Clopton Parish Council would question the validity of this statement as it is understood, that Birds Hill Farm effectively no longer farms independently. Following the sale of approximately 175 acres the remaining land, approximately 80 acres, is farmed by a contract farmer.

Mr Oliver Rofix is not resident at the family farm. The two or possibly three jobs that would be created over three years would not contribute significantly to the farm business as required by Strategy DM14. For these reasons we believe that the elements of this application under core Strategy DM14 are superfluous and should be discounted.

Employment opportunities with the village and surrounding area.

Clopton Village hosts two industrial areas. Uplandside, a small group of industrial units within the heart of the village and accessed via an unclassified rural road bounded by residential properties. Secondly the significant industrial site on the Clopton Commercial Park. Planning has recently been granted there for additional storage and industrial units increasing the capacity and employment opportunities significantly.

Clopton Parish Council Supported an earlier planning application for Clopton Commercial Park, Ref. No: DC/19/1973/OUT, that had the potential for the creation of up to 135 employment opportunities. The Parish Council supported this application despite it being against the current local plan because we believed that the diverse range of employment opportunities being proposed

within that application, reflected the type of development that was required to support a thriving local economy and could significantly benefit the wider area.

The Parish Council would strongly argue that the Commercial Park is the appropriate location for industrial employment of the type proposed under this application.

Type of Business

We note that the applicant makes much of the fact that this application is for a small boat restoration business which is one of only two in the country licenced to utilise the Flexiteek product. We are concerned that should the demand for the Flexiteek process increase, that the business would inevitably expand resulting in further increase in traffic, noise, other disturbances, as well as unstoppable pressure for storage to be permitted on the existing hard standing outside the building.

The application also specifies that the business can be split between the boat restoration business and the engineering business. Clopton Parish Council sees the potential for the application as proposed, to additionally permit the operation of a significant engineering business from the site. The following is an extract from the Website of Bolenda engineering:

Bolenda Engineering Ltd fabricate & machine bespoke solutions, prototype, small batch production, repair & modify components in ferrous, non ferrous, plastic and composite materials.

The company is proud to have established one of the largest machine & stock capacity workshops in East Anglia that offers a one-stop, responsive and versatile engineering service.

The engineering business could additionally generate pressure to utilise the outside space for fabrication or storage and require additional deliveries of materials to and from the site increasing disturbance to the surrounding area.

Access to the site:

The proposed site is situated on Birds Hill which is a narrow single track byway marked as unsuitable for heavy goods vehicles.

To reach Birds Hill Cottage from the South side is the B1079, the junction onto this busy main road has reduced sight lines due to the layout of the road which encompasses an S bend with a blind corner and the additional junctions with both the B1078 and market hill. It is hazardous to join especially with a large load.

To reach Birds Hill Cottage from the East side are two rural unclassified roads, Manor Road and Snipe Farm Road both these roads are populated with residences. For this route from the east, it is necessary to negotiate a narrow and very sharp right-hand bend.

We understand from Mr James Bailey, that boats will predominately be delivered and collected by their owners using trailers. It is inevitable that there will be occasions of owners getting lost and driving through the village towing an unwieldy trailer around unsuitable corners. Additionally, we are concerned about delivery and collection of boats at weekends and holidays, adding to the disruption to residents. Residents on these rural roads would suffer from any increase in traffic.

Operating Hours:

The applicant is seeking permission to operate the industrial unit seven days a week including bank holidays. If it is necessary to operate over these hours in order to maintain the business, this business is more appropriate to location on a specialised industrial site. It is a far cry from the disturbance that could be expected from a working seasonal agricultural business and inevitably this will result in significant disruption to local residents.

General disturbance to the local and wider community:

The applicant requires the use of a dust extraction unit, the operation of this unit for many hours may well create noise disturbance. There is also the possibility of further disturbance from within the building by the emanation of fumes created by the application of adhesives, or other such processes.

It is also inevitable, given the nature of the existing storage building with no climate control, that during hot days, as we are increasingly experiencing, the business will need to be operated with the doors open in order to maintain an acceptable working environment. This will exacerbate the probability of any disturbances to local residents.

The additional use as an engineering business, being proposed within this application, will equally generate such disturbances and potentially more so.

Some years ago, the owner of Birds Hill farm made representation to Clopton parish council for help regarding light pollution being cast across the valley and impinging on his own property, from the College buildings in the neighbouring village of Otley. It is therefore highly likely that any disturbance created from the proposed activities will carry equally and reach properties a considerable distance from the site.

For these reasons we believe that if granted, this application will result in unacceptable disturbance to local residents.

General Principle:

The Parish Council is concerned that if granted, this application would set a precedent for other redundant and unused farm sites within the village to also obtain permission for industrial activities, effectively scatter bombing the village with intrusive and inappropriate industrial disturbance within the area.

We strongly believe that the default position should be not to support this application without overwhelming evidence that this proposal will benefit the wider community. There is little evidence of such benefit.

Whilst on first sight this particular application may appear to tick the appropriate boxes for approval, Farm diversification and local employment, it is clear that in reality this application delivers none of these and this is not an appropriate development for this location. We therefore strongly request that this application be refused.

In Summary

Clopton Parish Council unanimously object to this application.

The application suggests that this is an element of farm diversification under Core Strategy Policy DM14. Clopton Parish Council do not believe this a valid statement as outlined above.

The Parish Council are willing to encourage a diverse variety of employment opportunities within Clopton Commercial Park. They do not however advocate the erosion of the rural village with multiple industrial areas.

The relocation of one or two jobs to the site will not deliver a significant or appropriate employment benefit to the area.

This application represents a potential disruption to local residents from vehicle movements, noise, light and possible particulate disturbance. The working hours proposed are wholly unacceptable for the community.

Given the nature of the approval being sought, there is also the potential for the business to also be developed towards a more significant industrial direction which is clearly not appropriate for the location. The Village of Clopton already hosts two industrial areas within its boundaries.

Should it be decided that the application must be permitted, Clopton Parish Council requests that given the location, the following conditions be applied:

That there be absolute clarity that the building be used only for a boat restoration business actively managed by Oliver Rofix personally, and not just in name, and that this approval will cease should the property change ownership;

The hours of operation be restricted to no more than 8-00 am to 6-00 pm weekdays, and 8-00 am to 12-00 pm Saturdays with no operation on Sundays or bank holidays;

That there be a restriction on the business changing direction away from boat restoration and that any engineering activities be solely for the purpose for boat restoration;

That the business activities are at all times contained within the building with no storage permitted outside the building;

That there be no scope for further expansion on the site;

That there be a restriction to any non-minor external alterations of the existing building;

That there be a restriction on the use of heavy goods vehicles given that Birds Hill is a byway unsuitable for HGVs;

That's there is clarification on the dust extraction facilities to be utilised and noise that will be emitted from the business.