

Minutes of Tunstall Parish Council Additional Meeting

Held on 23rd April 2014 ~ 7.00pm

Present

Cllr. Andy Durham (Chair and note taker)

Cllr. Lindsay Clubb (Vice Chair)

Cllr. Kevin Ross

Cllr. Geraldine Taylor

Cllr. Oliver Morgan

Cllr. John Hazelton

Cllr. Stephen Saunders

Stephen Bainbridge (Evolution Planning)

John Kemball

Carolyn Grace

Cllr. Ray Herring

5 Members of the Public

1. Apologies for absence

There were no apologies for absence

2. Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest

3. Planning – To discuss the Application C/10/3239 (Bentwaters Airbase):

Councillor Durham opened the meeting and outlined aims and format of meeting. The aims were to gather information to inform a response to the proposals but not to make any immediate decisions or take any immediate action. The format would be a presentation by Councillor Morgan on what he had found out from the documentation regarding some legal and planning points, a reply from Mr Bainbridge, the meeting would then be opened to questions/comments from councillors, then questions from the floor, to either council or the representatives from Bentwaters.

Councillor Morgan's presentation mentioned:

- Figures from plan indicate an increase in flight activity to 960 take off and landings, or 480 flights a year, and the introduction of an annual air show.
 - Change in use of hangar from housing of 1 spitfire to 8 aerobatic /display planes (later classified as 'heritage display planes')
 - The previous turning down of plans in 1999 for a civil airport at the site, due to lack of adequate capacity, and because the site lies in the AONB, which has a 'high status of protection'.
 - Reference was made to a letter from SCDC planning officer Steve Milligan which touches on a lack of an environmental impact survey, and the issue was raised of whether there is permission for flying from Bentwaters, going back to the 1999 decision, and the ruling that the site was inappropriate for use for civil aviation (Oliver, is this the right wording?)
 - 3 questions raised by the letter: why do the display aircraft (and spitfire) need to be based in this location? What will be the impact upon tranquillity and ecology? What measures (conditions?) will prevent/reduce impact on tranquillity?
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- Additional questions: is there permission for flying? If not, is unpermitted flying being treated as the status quo for this application? Is the plan intensifying, not just maintaining, flying activity?

The meeting was closed in order that members of the public could speak – Standing Orders were suspended

Steven Bainbridge then replied, and challenged some of the previously presented information.

- The preferred terminology was not aerobatic planes, but heritage display planes.
- It was incorrect to suggest as some of the paperwork had, that the technical work on tranquillity had not been done
- A timeline of events was offered: June/July 2012 ‘loose ends’ in the application meant it couldn’t go before the planning committee. By September 2012 the committee couldn’t determine the exact ‘direction of travel’ with reference to this application, but ‘voted to approve’ which was read as ‘continuing to negotiate’. Nov 2012 a re-submission, and disagreement over whether the technical work on tranquillity had been done. No developments until July 2013 when SB wrote to SCDC to ask what is happening, nothing had happened in terms of progress in intervening time. Dec 2013 discussions with local authority, amendments re flying discussed and an addendum to be provided to plans. (I would welcome any additional details on all of this, I did get a bit lost during this part – I’ve got something on ‘environmental scoping’ but not enough for a context)
- Some changes to hangar 668/669 and other minor building uses, brought about in part due to changes in laws/rules that had come into force since the original application was put in
- It was best to concentrate on the 480 flights rather than 960 movements, as it was a more likely proposition (that planes would take off and land again rather than coming in from elsewhere or going off elsewhere and not returning)
- It was not a civil airport being proposed this time
- The presence of the spitfire and heritage display planes in fact limits the amount of flying that takes place over the area, rather than increasing it.

Carolyn Grace was then invited to make a contribution. She made the point that the airspace itself is not controlled, and is open FIR , so planes/jets could come from elsewhere to practise in this area, and indeed do. However, the Graces exercise a deal of goodwill in the aerobatic world, and their presence at Bentwaters has meant that they have been able to dissuade other teams from coming and using this space. They have stopped a proposed air-race, removed jets from coming here to practise and stopped gnats coming also. For those opposed to flying from Bentwaters, the situation could be worse without their presence there.

Steven Bainbridge continued:

- The RSPB had not actually objected as yet
 - Challenged the assertion about an enforcement notice, there is no enforcement notice in regard to flying from Bentwaters, the application is about land use, not air.
 - There is currently open air space above Bentwaters, the application will help to put some limits on this (in terms of planes etc. coming here to fly from elsewhere).
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There was some disagreement between Councillor Morgan and SB re the subject of the enforcement notice.

The meeting was re-opened and Standing Orders were invoked

The meeting opened to Councillor's questions.

- Councillor Clubb asked if there were any conditions planned regarding times or days for flying, or if 7 days a week flying would be permitted.
 - There were no plans for conditions regarding flying times.
- Cllr. Clubb stressed that planning permission runs with the land, not with individuals. It is possible the condition could one day apply to someone other than Carolyn Grace and her son. The positive protection they currently provide against outsiders wanting to do aerobatics might not, therefore, always exist in conjunction with the flying condition
- Cllr Ross stressed that he had received no negative feedback from residents
- Councillor Saunders asked how many planes could be in the air at any one time,
 - Carolyn Grace indicated only 3 as there are only 3 qualified pilots at present capable of taking the planes up.
- Councillor Ross queried the role of the RSPB as a consulted party on the application.
- Councillor Durham queried the Business flights aspect, and whether this could increase the number of flights,
 - He was assured the number will remain the same; more business flights will mean fewer flights for the heritage display aircraft.
- Cllr. Durham also queried if Freight planes are part of the plans,
 - SB answered that there is no current infrastructure for coping with this type of operation.

It was agreed that a site visit would be most useful to show councillors what is currently happening and what is being proposed, and both council and Bentwaters park representatives felt this would be a valuable exercise.

A member of the public commented on the tranquillity question, and raised the point that historically (during the time of the USAF), the area wasn't tranquil anyway.

Cllr Herring commented on the economic benefits provided by the site, but also the importance of the quality of life/tranquillity elements that are important to both residents, and those who visit the area, and the fact that this is a reason for these visitors to come. He outlined that enforcement of conditions is not easy, but sometimes necessary. Conditions need careful consideration.

4. Any other business

There was no other business

5. Agenda items for next meeting

There were no agenda items for the next meeting

6. Date of Next Meeting

The date of the next meeting was set for Wednesday 14th May.

Signed:

Date:

Chairman (A Durham)

Judi Hallett

Clerk to Tunstall Parish Council
