

HOUGHTON AND WYTON PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the **Parish Council Meeting** held on Wednesday 31 May 2023, 2:00pm.

Present: Cllr P Boothman - Chair
Cllr N Elborn
Cllr D Keane
Cllr Baxendale
Cllr B Gilmour

There were over twenty members of the public present.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were apologies for absence from Cllrs Goodger, Guinea, Hunter and Skinner.

2. DECLARATIONS

Cllr Keane declared a personal interest in item 4 as he lives near the site.

3. PUBLIC COMMENT

Many members of the public expressed their concerns. Some had already submitted objections via the HDC website. Many pointed out that they could not access the full information on the website initially (this was due to the link not being set up correctly on the HDC website) although this was rectified when HDC were informed of the problem. Many had been unable to submit a response as their comments were rejected on multiple occasions. They were advised to telephone or email the licensing department with their comments.

4. APPLICATION FOR A PREMISES LICENCE, HOUGHTON MILL NATIONAL TRUST

The public attendees were advised to respond to the application individually. Advice was given on the criteria for assessing the application and accepting valid objections. The Parish Council expressed its disappointment that the staff at this site had not contacted the Parish Council or residents about this application, which did not appear to be specific to this site or its surroundings.

RESOLVED: The Parish Council recommend refusal of this licence application for the following reasons:

With reference to the HDC Statement of Licensing Policy, 7 Jan 2021.

Given only a binary choice of either approving or accepting and Houghton & Wyton Parish Council recommends REFUSAL of this application on the following grounds:

1. Prevention of Crime and Disorder Increasing traffic and emergency vehicle access: The only access to the site is Mill Street which experiences issues with illegally parked cars which cannot access the Mill carpark at times when it is overcapacity. This has resulted in the road becoming 'single track' when visitors abandon their cars in the road and has created concerns about the ability for emergency vehicles to access the site and larger motorhomes/caravans accessing/leaving the site. The access and egress points to the site will be difficult to police as there are several points that cannot be shut as they are Public Rights of Way. The application lacks details as to how this situation will be assessed and addressed with more events taking place at the Mill following permission to sell alcohol.

2. Public safety The form the river takes by splitting and forming islands, together with its man-made channels and structures from its industrial past, make the site interesting and attractive to visitors, but also add danger. Illegal and highly dangerous swimming/anti social behaviour in and around the area of the Mill and Houghton Lock can already be a major problem during the summer, mainly concentrated into the day/early evening up until the site is effectively cleared of visitors and the car park gates closed. Long licensing hours may extend this use and increase the risks in the evenings or night. The National Trust have roped off the Mill Pond area, known locally as 'the beach', to discourage people from frequenting the area but have very limited success or control. At busy weekends, large groups have been known gather at the Mill site and Houghton Lock and have been known to effectively 'take-over' areas. The police are regularly called to attend. The Environment Agency also employ marshals to try to prevent lots of people playing in and around the lock area (situated behind the Mill and therefore away from the campsite area), This behaviour continues to prove difficult to control but we fear may be exacerbated and extend longer into the evenings if alcohol were available and more readily accessible on site. Sadly the Mill has experienced fatalities as well as injuries from such activities within living memory of residents, as has the stretch of river immediately upstream of it. There are times we consider the site is already over capacity in

terms of parking, people and activities involving the water. Once again we fear that holding events with alcohol available will potentially add to this issue and extend the problem, for longer periods of the day when events take place. Increasing traffic and emergency vehicle access: The only access to the site is Mill Street which experiences issues with illegally parked cars which cannot access the Mill carpark at times when it is overcapacity. This has resulted in the road becoming 'single track' when visitors abandon their cars in the road and has created concerns about the ability for emergency vehicles to access the site and larger motorhomes/caravans leaving the site. Mill Street is a busy, narrow, unclassified road, it is heavily used by pedestrians and cyclists of all ages. The movement of extra cars here will be a safety hazard. The application lacks details as to how this situation will be assessed and addressed with more events taking place at the Mill following permission to sell alcohol.

3. The prevention of public nuisance Increased noise and disturbance to residents. We believe a licence for consumption of alcohol both on and off the premises, having the potential to be utilised throughout most of every day from 09:00 until 23:30 will increase visitor activity both on and around the site resulting in unwarranted noise and greater levels of disturbance to residents. We feel this is particularly true of the off the premises part of this application but not exclusive to it. The Development Plan covering the parish includes the Houghton & Wyton Neighbourhood Plan 2018 which at its heart promotes small, low impact, 'quiet' tourism. Houghton Mill and campsite is a small site which for National Trust sites is unusually positioned immediately adjacent to residential areas of the village, particularly Mill Street and Thicket Road. The campsite is marketed as quiet, peaceful and very family friendly. Visitors overnighing at the campsite are arguably residents for the length of their stay, and will also be negatively impacted by this. There is already evidence of people residing at the campsite complaining about the occasional house party and noise emanating from neighbouring residential properties at night, and so it is likely that they would see any disturbance from on the site itself at night as a nuisance and negative to the quality and enjoyment of their stay. Increasing traffic and emergency vehicle access: The only access to the site is Mill Street which experiences issues with illegally parked cars which can't access the Mill carpark at times when it is overcapacity. This has resulted in the road becoming 'single track' when visitors abandon their cars in the road and has created concerns about the ability for emergency vehicles to access the site and larger motorhomes/caravans leaving the site. Mill Street is a busy, narrow, unclassified road, it is heavily used by pedestrians and cyclists of all ages. People will also park in other areas of the village, often for long periods of time and in an unsafe manner. All these aspects will create a nuisance to the general public, but most importantly to the residents of Mill Street and surrounding areas. The application lacks details as to how this situation will be assessed and addressed with more events taking place at the Mill following permission to sell alcohol.

4. The Protection of Children from harm As a large, open area well used by and publicly accessible to families and young people, it will be difficult to police to supply of alcohol to minors or prevent their exposure to the potential undesirable behaviour or language of adults under the influence of alcohol. Alcohol may be purchased on site and taken off site to be consumed by young people who frequently gather near the lock or along the river.

5. Other Issues

A small site which does not warrant an off premises alcohol licence: The space available for outdoor events is limited mainly to an area between the river bank and the boundary to the campsite. However, this area is no more than a 1-2 minute walk to and from the tea room/Mill itself, hence we question the need/justification for an off, as well as an on premises licence. The Tea room also houses the toilet, water/washing, catering, food preparation, cooking, chilling, and serving facilities for any event the site may hold.

Excessive Supply of Alcohol hours: We consider the supply of alcohol start and end times from 09:00 to 23:30, seven days per week, are excessive for the activities of such a site and may be better handled by alternative licencing arrangements (see below). Partly for the reasons the given earlier and security of the site at night, the car park itself is only open from 08:30 until 16:00. The application lacks details of how people will safely access, park and leave at the site when events are being held.

Contradictions and unanswered questions: The application states 'No' to plays and yet suggests the licence will support family friendly events like a theatre production. We have no information regarding the frequency that events will take place or the numbers of people that the licence will cater for. We feel a clearer understanding of the National Trusts objectives and how it will use and control the licence is required as well as a proper consultation with village.

Alternative licencing arrangements: Alternatives exist for obtaining temporary events licences which we believe would fulfil the requirements of film and theatre evenings as specified in the application without granting a permanent off premises licence.

Please note it has been reported to us that people trying to respond to this application via the on-line form have had great difficulty with their comments being rejected when attempting to send. It was also impossible to view

the full application online until 17 May, when we pointed out the problem to officers. In an email response to District Cllr David Keane, Sarah Mardon, Licensing Officer said "Licensing does have a new public register system, this has only be operational for a few weeks. It appears there are still a number of links from different licensing webpages that have not been updated to a link for the new system. I had not realised this was an issue. I have today requested these links are updated as a matter of urgency."

We believe that if only we were able to discuss and understand with more clarity what the specific needs of the National Trust are for this site, we would be able to find an acceptable and workable solution for the Trust, visitors and the residents of Houghton & Wyton. However, without this understanding, and faced with this extremely wide ranging application, little time to respond or the ability to amend, our concerns are such that we must recommend refusal.

Proposed: Cllr Baxendale; Seconded: Cllr Boothman. All in favour

5. ITEMS TO BE CONSIDERED AT FUTURE MEETINGS, DELEGATED ACTION OR INFORMATION ONLY

The Parish Council chair took this opportunity to remind everyone that the outline planning application for development of the field between Houghton Grange and The How was available for consultation and the Parish Council would hold a meeting on 21 June to discuss this and make a recommendation to HDC as the Planning Authority.

10. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next scheduled meeting of the Parish Council is **Wednesday 7 June 2023**, 7pm in the St Mary's Centre.

Signed:..... Date: