

AYSGARTH & DISTRICT PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Meeting of the Parish Council held on 23rd January 2023 At Aysgarth Institute at 7.30pm

Present: Parish Cllrs: John Dinsdale (Chair), Linda Cooper, Rob Cromey-Hawke, Chris Parker, Robert Walker, Sandra Wilman, Peter Windle, David Wood

In Attendance: Mrs F Cartwright - Parish Council Clerk
Mrs P Pointon - Website Administrator/Press Release

Members of the public: 3 Representatives of The Aysgarth Falls Hotel

The Chairman welcomed the representatives of the Aysgarth Falls Hotel to the meeting. It was explained that members of the public are welcome to attend Parish Council meetings and may speak at the discretion of the Chairman. Once the initial formalities of the meeting had been carried out the representatives could summarise their proposed planning application to the Parish Council under agenda item # 4. The meeting will be recorded.

- 1. Consideration of Apologies for Absence** - Apologies were given and accepted from Parish Councillors Jones and Sayer
- 2. Minutes of Parish Council meeting held on** - The minutes of Meeting held on 12th January 2023 were approved as a true and correct record
- 3. Declaration of interest** - Cllr Cooper declared an interest in Item # 4 Planning.
- 4. Planning - To consider the following Planning Application:**

New

R/51/25L - Full planning permission for 15 holiday lodges and facilities, alongside refurbishment of and extension to existing hotel at Aysgarth Falls Hotel, Aysgarth, DL8 3SR (close date 03.02.23)

Cameron Brook of the Brook Group read out the following statement to the Meeting:

“The planning application followed a significant pre-application process with the YDNPA which was received positively and through this initial liaison with the authority and in bringing together a high-quality professional team we have taken care to design the project with sensitivity to the surrounding area and have made every effort to minimise any potential negative impacts. The application proposes the development of 15 hotel lodges as a mix of 2 accessible lodges, 3 family lodges and 10 standard lodges containing a single sleeping area, on the land to the rear of the hotel. The application also proposes an extension to the rear of the existing hotel to provide an enlarged kitchen, a bar and a new catering space sufficient for an additional 30 covers. The scheme aims to secure the future of the Hotel and safeguard existing jobs at the venue. The seasonally resilient lodges will aim to capitalise upon growing trends within the tourism sector, particularly the move towards experience and wellness driven tourism. The proposed lodges will extend the businesses offering into the offseason, enhancing the viability of the business which is often constrained by its reliance upon the short summer season. Together, the enhanced accommodation offering, and restaurant extension will increase trade with existing local suppliers whilst growing this network to include other local businesses. The proposal is expected to generate 17 jobs at a range of skill levels whilst also expanding the range of highquality tourism accommodation and hospitality within the Yorkshire Dales. The proposal is also supported by a suite of enhancement measures providing a net gain in biodiversity and the habitat creation associated with the proposals will see a sustainable mix of native planting site wide, with further tree planting throughout. The compact and prefabricated nature of the lodges will further ensure minimal ground disturbance to the rear land of the Hotel, whilst the lighting scheme has also been sensitively designed to minimise upward light spill to protect the Yorkshire Dales’ dark skies initiative. Similar schemes already exist in the

two closest national parks and, in accordance with Policy E2, it is suggested that the Yorkshire Dales expand its accommodation options by implementing a similar program if it is to continue to attract a diverse range of tourists.

*We are thankful for the Parish Council's continued support of the business, and we are happy to answer any questions that the Council may have". **"*For clarity purposes, when referencing the continued support of the business, the speaker was referring to Parish Council members and attendees continued support of the business through the use of the establishment. This was not referring to the support of the planning application"**.*

Cllr Windle commented that YDNPA are very interested in caravan sites and tents, would the Aysgarth Falls Hotel consider amending the plans to reduce the number of Lodges by the roadside of Church Lane and north side of the footpath. Cameron Brook said that he can't speak on behalf of the board but suggestions would be fed back to the Board.

Cllr Windle asked whether there was an intention to rent the lodges with bed and breakfast. The Operations Manager said not necessarily but some breakfast deals, hampers, cheese & wine packages from the Deli are planned. The key is to extend the seasonality. They feel that it won't set a precedent.

Cllr Windle said the Footpath currently goes through an open field from one style to another and asked if that would remain the same. Cameron Brook said it would stay the same, just some screening to give some privacy to guests in the Lodges. Walkers will have access to the hotel from the footpath.

Cllr Windle asked if there is a cut off point for time for the lighting as there are concerns re light pollution. There are 3 houses opposite on the other side of Church Lane which would be directly affected. Cameron Brook said they understand how important lighting is. They will be using low level, zero percent, specialised lighting. There is no cut off time planned at the moment. They will take the concerns back to the Board.

Cllr Walker enquired about the extending out into the terrace. The Operations Manager said the idea is to provide an alternative casual dining environment. E.g. Pizzas, burgers, etc.

Cllr Windle enquired as to whether they would continue with Adults Only. The Operations Manager said that it would not be Adults Only exclusively. A number of lodges will have a sofa bed for children. The Lodges will be an extension of the hotel accommodation. There will not be catering facilities in the Lodges, essentially a hotel room in a field.

Cllr Windle raised concerns about waste disposal. The new sewerage plant down at The Falls is full. Cllr Cromey-Hawke said that in their report it mentions generating 150 litres per person per day but if you look at Yorkshire Water website that equates to only one ten-minute shower. A bath would be circa 400 litres. Given the lodges have both a bath and a shower and likely to be multi occupancy (3-4 people per lodge), the Parish Council feel that the estimate is extremely low and not representative. The planned 15 lodges is very different to the current shower block. Yorkshire Water is a consultee for the planning application and the Hotel need to provide realistic numbers to Yorkshire Water. Cameron Brook said that he would ask the Planning Consultant to look into this. The Operations Manager confirmed that there would not be any Jacuzzis or Hot Tubs.

Cllr Cromey-Hawke commented that trading hours are currently 8am - 9pm (for food) 11pm for Bar. Is there going to be any change to these hours. The Operations Manager said that they will not be looking to extend that except for one offs like special hours for New Year's Eve. Food service hours will not be extended massively after 9pm as people don't generally want to eat late.

Cllr Windle enquired re the current Premises Licence. The representatives were not sure of the current arrangements.

Cllr Cromey-Hawke said that the Plans list the rooms as 2 x Function Rooms and 1 x Event Space not restaurants. The Aysgarth Falls Hotel were not aware of this and considered the rooms to be restaurants. They will look into this and clarify.

The Operations Manager said they would host shoot parties for example, but it would not be a late night environment. Weddings may be something they do e.g. 30 people but these would be a 'Day time' lead event.

Mrs Pointon asked to address the meeting. She introduced herself as not a councillor. She is the Website Administrator/Press Release for the Parish Council and a local resident.

She commented that the extension for the function room or whatever the Hotel is calling it, you have a building projecting from the back, with a substantial amount of glazing and lighting which goes against the Dark Skies Initiative. It will be visible to the Carperby side of the Dale. That is going to have a considerable impact on the landscape. If you step into the field from the Church you are stepping into pastoral setting of that part of the Dales. We don't want to see lodges with screening around them. The caravans and tents are only temporary not a fixed Lodge. The locals like to see caravaners and campers you are taking all of that away.

Cllrs enquired as to the materials which would be used for the Lodges. Cameron Brook said that they have not secured a supplier yet but they will be steel frame and modular, with wood timber cladding with some elements of construction off site and then brought in. They are looking at different ways of doing the footings to minimise disruption to the ground. Screw piles 3 ft. Drainage one pipe in and out. Size and height typically 8.9 ft height internally by 4.5metres.

Cllr Cromey-Hawke said that they are changing use by extending permanent accommodation to outside space creating 15 more rooms. He also said that they are marketing it as wellness focused resort and was interested as to how they would deliver the wellness focus. The Operations Manager said that the General Manager is interested in the local area and they would be looking to provide bike hire, linking up with a walking app, providing picnics from the Deli, etc.

Cllr Wood asked if they were looking to host local community groups as unfortunately the Hotel could no longer host the long standing Domino Team. The Operations Manager said that they would look to host local groups in the future.

The Operations Manager said that post covid the world has changed, economic changes, huge increases in staffing and food costs, etc. so the Hotel as it stands is not commercially viable. Investing in the Lodge accommodation will extend the season. The conversion to the bottom line is better for accommodation than for food. They also need to enhance the Food & Beverage offering.

Cllr Cromey-Hawke said that there were inconsistencies in the Planning Application and an article in the local press. The former claims to increase jobs from only 11.5 - 12 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) whereas the latter stated the creation of 17 jobs. The Operations Manager said that up to 17 jobs would be created e.g. groundsman, housekeeper, increase in kitchen, bar staff and support staff. Cllr Wilman enquired as to whether the laundry was inhouse or outsourced. The Operations Manager confirmed it was outsourced.

Cllrs enquired as to how much of the refurbishment work is being carried out by local contractors. The Operations Manager said that they had experienced problems sourcing local tradespeople.

Mrs Pointon said that a local Hotel and Restaurant, the Wensleydale Heifer in West Witton serves superb food with superb service. They have achieved this very successfully without increasing the accommodation.

The Operations Manager said that they may not introduce 15 Lodges all at once, may be introduce 6-8 initially in preparation for the 2024 season as there is a business risk for the Hotel.

Cllr Walker enquired as to when the Hotel would likely to reopen after the refurbishment. The Operations Manager said that as it is a soft refurbishment, they hoped that it would reopen mid-February 23. They were looking for suggestions for renaming the restaurant and Deli with locally inspired names with a nod to the history of The Palmer Flatt.

Cameron Brook said that he will instruct the Planning Consultant to address the questions that he and his colleagues were not able to answer at the meeting.

The Chairman asked if they had any questions for the Parish Council. There were no questions. The Parish Council thanked the representatives for coming to talk to the Parish Council. The representatives from the Aysgarth Falls Hotel left the meeting at 8.45pm.

Following the receipt of a number of concerns from Parish residents, the Parish Council discussed the Major Planning Application at length.

The Parish Council felt that the proposed expansion is totally out of keeping with the area and will permanently change its nature. They felt that the development does not add anything the area needs, but it does take away facilities that the area cannot afford to lose.

The Parish Council said that in planning terms the major development is not in the public interest, particularly locally because of its damaging impact on the local economy, and the local community as a whole and for its lasting detrimental effect on the environment and the landscape character.

Concerns were discussed about the light pollution from the Lodges and the Terrace Extension directly over the immediately adjoining SSSI of Aysgarth Falls.

There was also concern about the well-used footpath from Aysgarth village across the fields to Aysgarth Falls. Converting the last part of this walk to 15 screened off Lodges will change the nature of the immediate area and damage the experience visitors have come for and may dissuade people from using the footpath across that area choosing to walk along the roadside instead.

Cllrs also discussed the Westholme Caravan Park (Aysgarth/Burton-cum-Walden Parish area) the largest touring caravan park in the Parish was lost in 2008 when the whole site was converted to lodges; this Park had space for 40 touring caravans, 3 sites for camper vans, plus two fields set aside for camping. Much of that regular trade was lost to the area as the only other spaces for touring caravans in the immediate area [at that time was] the smaller site at what is now The Aysgarth Falls Hotel.

The Parish Council also considered the YDNP Local Plan which highlights the importance of retaining budget accommodation to make the National Park more accessible to diverse groups, within walking distance to local services and the Park's best natural resources. There were concerns that the application seeks to abolish this existing provision and replace it with a 'high-end hotel offering', which will not be affordable to many. It seeks to diminish the impact of this disposal by highlighting the presence of other sites several miles away and in adjoining Dales, however the Parish Council felt that it does not lessen the local need or justify closing this site adjoining one of the National Park's most popular attractions, Aysgarth Falls.

The Parish Council was also very concerned about the amount of waste water from the 15 lodges and that the small sewage treatment plant by Aysgarth Falls was already nearly at full capacity and did overflow at times of high rainfall. The community's residents, especially those connected to this system, are concerned that if approved, the overflows will be more frequent and that they will have to deal with the consequences of these within their properties.

Another concern was the impact upon local businesses including the shop at Aysgarth Garage and tea rooms. The Aysgarth Falls Hotel is planning to become a full-service resort offering food and drinks at all times of the day including fine dining and casual dining in the restaurants, bar facilities, and the planned delicatessen addition; this will result in making visiting other local outlets less attractive from a cost and convenience perspective.

The Parish Council resolved to **strongly object** to the Planning Application as it stands.

Action - Clerk to e mail YDNPA with strong objection to the Planning Application to cover the following areas:

- Loss of Touring Caravan and camping space which provides more affordable stays in the immediate area
- Impact on existing sewer system
- Impact to Local Business and Economy
- There is already a 'Lodge Holiday Park' in the immediate vicinity, which also has planning applications "under consideration" for their own expansion/diversification. The Parish Council have submitted an "objection" to that Application
- Provision of Employment
- Premises Licence
- Impact on Environment
- Impact on the Footpath, Rural Setting, and Visual Amenity

5. Methodist Chapel, Aysgarth

Concerns had been received from Aysgarth residents re plans for the Aysgarth Chapel without the appropriate planning applications. **Action - Clerk to contact YDNPA.**

6. Water/Ice at Kelspring, Aysgarth

Concerns had been received from Aysgarth residents re dangerous flooding and ice at Kelspring, Aysgarth to Thornton Rust Road. **Action - Clerk to contact Area 1 Highways to ask if they would arrange a meeting with Highways, Yorkshire Water and the Parish Council.**

7. Any Other Business - none

Date of next meeting - Thursday 16th February 2023 at 7.30pm at Aysgarth Institute.

Meeting closed 9.45pm