

Minutes

Name Of Meeting : Ditchingham: Transport & Highway Issues, Mineral Extraction by Lafarge Aggregates Ltd

Held on: Tuesday 18 April 2006

Time: 14:30

Venue: Ditchingham Village Hall

List of Attendees:-

Cllr A Burrell (Chairman)	County Councillor for Clavering Ward, NCC
Mr J Smith	Clerk Ditching Parish Council
Mr J Green	ENRAGED
Mr F James	Vice Chairman Ditchingham Parish Council
Mr H James	Chairman Ditchingham Parish Council
Mr J Chadd	Leathes Prior Solicitors (acting for ENRAGED)
Mr R Carden	Councillor South Norfolk District Council
Mr T Edmunds	Developer and Travel Planning Services Manager, NCC
Mr J Larter	Admin Assistant, NCC

1.0 INTRODUCTIONS

Mr Edmunds explained the scheme of Delegated Powers in place within the County Council in relation to the role of the Highway Authority in planning matters. In particular he set out the role Mr D. Higgins played as Highways Case Officer, his role as Developer and Travel Planning Services Manager and the roles of Mr M. Jackson (Director of Planning and Transportation) and Mr B. Marfleet (Head of Planning and Transport Strategy).

Mr Edmunds remarked that while he was aware that Enraged had made other enquiries concerning matters of conduct & governance of the Lafarge application, including writing to the Cabinet Member for P&T that discussions within this meeting should be limited to Highways matters.

2.0 APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR FOR MEETING

It was agreed Councillor Burrell would chair the meeting.

3.0 RESPONSES TO HIGHWAY QUESTIONS PREVIOUSLY ASKED BY ENRAGED IN RELATION TO:

3.1 COMPLETENESS OF FOI RESPONSE 23/2/06

Mr Edmunds confirmed that all information contained in our highway case file (minus the exceptions recorded in correspondence between Maureen Orr and Enraged) was provided.

3.2 **HIGHWAY AUTHORITY: PLANNING CONSULTATION PROCESS AND PROCEDURES**

The question concerned the issue of NCC following procedure? Mr Edmunds highlighted the quality assured process the Department of Planning and Transportation works under, which has set various standards of control across the services provided. Highways development control has relatively detailed procedures. Mr Edmunds highlighted that the highways case officer did not comply fully with the 'Highways Development Control procedure DV1'. No notes were recorded of significant discussions with the applicant or their advisers, the 'Major Developments Planning Application Checklist' (Form DV1/I) was not completed and the planning proposal was not reported to Planning and Transportation Department's internal 'Development Team' meeting.

Non-compliance with procedures was considered by all present to be a significant issues that required further consideration in order to avoid any reduction in confidence of the Highway Authority's professional judgement.

3.3 **ASSESSMENT OF HIGHWAY ISSUES**

Mr Edmunds set out that notwithstanding the non-compliance with internal procedures, it was the opinion of NCC that there is clear evidence that the highways development control case officer appointed to this case (who is the most senior case officer within the Department) had undertaken a professional assessment of the development's likely impact in highway terms and that the case officer had liaised with other Highway Authority staff responsible for road safety engineering, route hierarchy and traffic management in assessing the proposal and in reviewing the professional traffic evidence submitted both in support of the proposal (by Scott Wilson Kirkpatrick & Co Ltd) and in opposition to the scheme (by G H Bullard and Associates).

Aspects of the merit or otherwise of the assessment carried out to date were then openly discussed. It was agreed that it is inevitable that transport/highway professionals in assessing proposal may come to different views. An example of this is this case the fact that G.H. Bullard and Associates (engaged by ENRAGED) and Scott Wilson Kirkpatrick & Co Ltd (engaged by Lafarge) have come to completely different views as to the suitability of the proposals in highway terms.

Mr Green expressed concern over the apparent lack of a site visit and of consideration of other safety aspects concerning the road. He referred to correspondence on file that led to the extension of the 40mph limit in Ditchingham in which he promoted a campaign following a personal accident on his own residential access onto the B1332. Mr Edmunds confirmed that he had reviewed the file including correspondence therein with Norfolk Constabulary. Mr Green confirmed that (although anecdotal) it was apparent that there had been significantly fewer accidents in the immediate vicinity of his house since the 40mph scheme had been established. Mr Chadd then presented a folder of press cuttings concerning the accident history of the [relevant] stretch of the B1332.

Mr Green pointed out that whereas the Lafarge [Scott Wilson Kirkpatrick] report was largely limited to the consideration of the [site] access issues, the Enraged [GH Bullard Associates] report considered the route from the A143 to the A47 at Norwich.

Mr Chadd expressed concern that Mr Higgins may have been biased towards Lafarge as he clearly had discussions with Lafarge, yet there were no records on file for this main distributor route. Mr Edmunds stated his colleague Mr M. Tracey gave 'informal' pre-application advice that the County Council would not welcome another access direct to B1332 but favoured use of the existing side road (subject to any improvement works required).

In particular Mr Edmunds highlighted that many of the previous accidents had been caused by speeding and the concept of a right hand turn lane to provide access to the site would 'open up' the road to overtaking, which would probably increase speeds and may even cause more accidents, whereas Mr Green remarked that the road is too narrow for 2 HGVs to pass and that Mr Higgins comment in this regard for them to slow down in order to pass was absurd. Mr Edmunds commented that it would not be the intention of NCC to promote a campaign that would be detrimental to successful measures previously implemented and agreed that it would be appropriate to again survey the width of the carriageway.

Mr Edmunds stated he has the utmost confidence in Mr Higgins competence, but agreed that confidence in the Highway Authority's assessment is currently very low, and that as a result, and given the views expressed about the inadequacies of the B1332, the Highway Authority will (if the proposal is resubmitted) carry out a fresh review of the highways issues that such a scheme would present. With this in mind, Mr Edmunds said that he intentionally had not personally reviewed the specific merits of the [now withdrawn] application as [given the matters of procedural irregularity previously] that he would be the appointed case officer on the application being resubmitted and would do so on the occasion of a future application.

Mr Edmunds agreed to write to Lafarge to 'put them on notice' that the view of NCC with regard the appropriateness of the application was 'an open mind' and that a procedural review would now occur. It was generally agreed that this would be appropriate as it was possible that Lafarge may have considered the application more favourable given the 'positive' feed back from Highways.

3.4 ROUTE HEIRARCHY AND B1332

Mr Edmunds explained that Norfolk's Route Hierarchy was approved by Members in December 1980 (The Route Hierarchy identifies different types of routes throughout the County according to their function and level of use). A review of the Route Hierarchy was conducted in 1994 when Members confirmed that the B1332 should remain as a strategic route within the County classified as a Main Distributor Route within the County's Route Hierarchy (nationally the B1332 has the status of a 'Secondary Distributor' in the National Route Hierarchy). The County Council currently has no plans to review or alter the status of the B1332 nor does it have any plans to significantly improve the route in either safety or traffic capacity terms.

Mr Green suggested that as the road has seen a significant increase in traffic in both volume and dimension, and as such has become much more dangerous, so should be assessed again. Mr Green expressed concern that the road was not of the standard 5.5m width, (as previously indicated) and as a result could not safely accommodate existing traffic, hence an extra 42-125 HGV movements a day that the Lafarge application may generate would only serve to justify a full review of the B1332 status.

4.0 **RESPONSES TO HIGHWAY QUESTIONS PREVIOUSLY ASKED BY PARISH COUNCIL IN RELATION TO THE 'SUITABILITY OF SCHEMES' ON B1332**

Mr Edmunds confirmed that there were no plans to 'traffic calm' B1332 in connection with the mineral proposal.

Mr Chadd recommended the County Council should ask Lafarge for the correspondence of Mr Higgins meetings with them. Mr Edmunds stated he would be willing to write to them with the concerns from this meeting.

Cllr Burrell asked Mr Edmunds if he would take a look at any new evidence in relation to improving the B1332, to which he agreed (or would pass on to other more appropriate officers within the Department).

Mr James passed a sketch plan of A143 / B1332 'chicken' roundabout to Mr Edmunds with concerns about the design of the A143 (south) to B1332 circulatory carriageway, which was reported to do little to slow traffic undertaking this manoeuvre. Mr Edmunds confirmed he would pass to his colleagues that considered such matters and ask they respond direct to Mr James.

5.0 **OPPORTUNITY FOR QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION**

No additional matters were raised.

6.0 **NEXT STEPS**

Mr Edmunds to write to Lafarge concerning the highway and procedural issues raised.

An internal review of highways procedures will be undertaken.

Chair thanked all for attending and closed the meeting.