

Response of Petition Planning Group to Report by Head of Regeneration and Planning concerning Activities at Gibraltar Farm, Silverdale

We wish to place on record our appreciation of the thorough manner in which Mr Dobson has handled this matter since the Council Resolution of September 2011.

Conclusions

- 1. We welcome the recommendations of the report as providing a framework for setting out future expectations at Gibraltar Farm.**
- 2. The site has expanded from 15 touring caravans to approximately 60. We accept that a major part of this increase results from an admitted error within the Planning Office, and accept the apologies of Mr Dobson and Councillor Hanson at the Council Meeting of 14 September 2011. We consider that this level of expansion should in itself be seen as an important factor in resisting further development.**
- 3. We have serious concerns regarding the potential acceptance of static caravans (paragraphs 6.4, 6.5, and 8.5 of the report). For many residents of Silverdale the prospect of a static caravan park to the South of the village, when there are already two large sites to the North, is anathema. Conceding static caravans would be seen as:**
 - a) the abandonment of both Saved Policy TO5 (paragraph 5.6 of report), and Policy EC3.3 (paragraph 5.10);**
 - b) a reward for aggressive unauthorised development, particularly as the report concludes that the change of use to a static caravan site constitutes a breach of planning control (paragraphs 4.11., and 4.16).**
- 4. A consequence of accepting statics would be the implied acceptance of wintering caravans on site. Permitting winter use of the site would constitute yet a further unacceptable extension of the site's former permissions, and usage.**
- 5. There remain three further issues we have raised in the discussions which have taken place with the Council's Officers since September 2011, and which lead us to make the following requests.**
 - a) that a limit be set for the number of tents on the tent field.**
 - b) that the position of motor caravans and campervans be clarified. We request that such vehicles, of whatever size, be restricted to the touring caravan area. Anything less will lead to ambiguity, with potential for future applications for development on the tent field.**
 - c) that a condition be imposed banning access to the shore from the site by vehicles and water-craft.**

Additional Information

1. Paragraph 5.10 draws attention to the significance of developments which **“adversely affect an internationally designated wildlife site directly or indirectly”**. That part of the coast which lies to the west and south of Gibraltar Farm has multiple designations as **a Special Area of Conservation, a Ramsar Site, and a Special Protection Area**.
2. Paragraph 3.3 refers to “a yearly event in the form of a camping rally for motorcyclists”. Up to 2006 this event was held at Leeds Children's Holiday Home, to the north of the village. However, there were complaints to the site owners from the neighbouring Holgates Caravan Park, and in 2007 it was switched to Gibraltar Farm, where it was carefully controlled for the first year. Subsequently those controls have been relaxed so that in 2012 loud music was audible across the village until after 2.00 a.m. on the morning of Sunday 14th October.
3. **All exempt organisations are required to adopt a Code of Conduct in accordance with a Model Code issued by Natural England**, which is the body responsible for issuing exemption certificates. In summary this code
 - a) **discourages rallies next to permanent or commercial caravan sites;**
 - b) **requires organisations to**
 - i) **avoid any site to which the Local Authority has valid objections,**
 - ii) **avoid interference with local residents, their normal activities and enjoyment,**
 - iii) **ensure the caravans do not interfere with the enjoyment by others of landscape or wildlife, especially in areas designated for landscape or wildlife.**

Further Context in Relation to Silverdale, and Our Experiences in Pursuing the Petition

We refer Members to the background set out in the papers included with the agenda of the Council Meeting of 14 September 2011, in particular the document “Have you visited Gibraltar Farm Caravan and Camp site Recently?”. This was distributed to households in the village prior to circulation of the petition, and is appended to this document.

At the start of the petition process we drew attention to the discrepancies in the statements made in the planning applications of 2004 and 2009, the weight of contemporary evidence against the retrospective claims then being made, and the lack of financial accounts to support those claims. We reach the end of the process with an issue of the claiming of grants from the Rural Payments Agency, and the use of the same fields for caravanning and camping.

We are conscious that since the petition was raised attempts have been made by those who disagree with us to minimise the level of opposition in the village, and to discredit hard evidence that we have presented, e.g. it has been reported that the photograph taken in April 2011, and used in the paper supporting the petition, was being described as an old photograph from years back.

The traditional campsite at Gibraltar Farm was seen as an integral part of the village, and

was well supported, with 2 of the petition organisers having given practical assistance to the former owner, and welcoming the new owner, and his family, with lunch and good wishes for the future.

The former and current owner are both members of the Burrow family, which is well established in the village and makes a significant contribution to village life. It was therefore not surprising that the most common reason we were given for not signing the petition was that of personal loyalty to, or friendship with, a member of the Burrow family. Never the less over 440 residents signed the petition, a significant majority of those contacted.

At a local political level some members of the Parish Council have supported development at Gibraltar Farm – one even telling one of the objectors that it was inevitable that in time the site would extend along the shore from the farm to Shore Road. In 2010 the then City Councillor told two of the petition organisers “I can see what James is doing, but I can't help you because I've known him since he was so high”. The attitudes of local representatives perhaps made the petition inevitable.

While the petition organisers have been determined to stick to the issues in this matter it has been a source of sadness that some supporters of the owner, and some users of the site, have at different times behaved in an aggressive and intimidatory manner to those who have challenged developments at the site. We believe that it is right that the Committee is aware of the sense of vulnerability felt by some of those involved in the petition.

We would emphasise that at all times we have wished to resolve the issues amicably. During the discussions since the Council resolution was passed Mr Dobson took 2 initiatives to bring the parties together – initially by way of a joint meeting of representatives, subsequently by way of a joint site meeting with a single representative from each side. On both of these occasions we expressed willingness to proceed in the manner suggested, but on both occasions the representatives of Gibraltar Farm declined to meet with us.

And Finally

In the event of an appeal, against any decisions the Committee may make on the basis of the recommendations in the report, we will be prepared to support the Council with the provision of such evidence as we have obtained, or act as witnesses in support of such evidence.

Signed:

Marie Atkinson
Barry Ayre and Monica Placzek
Pauline Beckford
Ann Bond
Joan Brindley
Major and Carol Brownhill

Roger and Nancy Cartwright
Denise Dowbiggin
John and Brenda Eden
June Greenwell
Bob and Val Hamnett
John and Jean Holland

Margaret Haworth
Stuart and Anne Imm
David Player
John Webb
Joy Sharp
Roger Spooner and
Dorothy Bates

Date: 15th November 2012

Appendix

Have you visited Gibraltar Farm Caravan and Camp site recently?



We are concerned at the increase in area and intensity of use at the Gibraltar Farm camp site. We are even more concerned about how much bigger and busier it will get in future, if not controlled. This picture was taken at Easter - and it doesn't show all the tents and caravans that were there. There were some 170 caravans - about 60 on the approved site, over 100 at a 10-day club event (the club told Lancaster City Council there would be 30), plus caravans on other fields, plus tents. This could become the permanent state of things. Is that what you want?

Set out below are responses to comments we hear when this subject comes up in conversation.

There's been a campsite there for years, without any real problem. There are problems now. Many changes have been made, some of them without necessary planning permission. The site has become significantly bigger and busier since 2007. Several hundred people have an impact on the village as well as the immediate neighbourhood, and that impact should be properly considered, not imposed on others by a single family.

It supports a young family on a working farm. The Burrow family told the parish council last year that they wanted 'a traditional, simple caravan and camp site on their working farm'. Most residents would, we think, be happy for the farm to have that financial support. But there is a question of scale and balance. The picture looks more like a major commercial enterprise than a farmer's side line. The farm is now entitled to have 60 or so caravans on the approved part of the site for over 8 months a year (Lancaster City Council meant to approve 34, but made a mess of it). Those 60 caravans alone can produce a substantial income (individual touring caravans are charged £16/night minimum with hook-up).

It's good for village shops and businesses. Yes, it's part of the village's life and economy - but again there's a question of balance and appropriate scale. Residents have legitimate interests as well, and we spend money locally all year round.

Aren't you being alarmist? We don't think so. The site has a history of exceeding the limits set for it - it had planning permission for only 15 caravans. The family may say they want a 'simple site' but actions speak louder than words. When they sought

planning permission for a second farmhouse in 2004, supporting documents said that there was a 'full complement of 15 caravans'. In 2009, when a claim was made to be allowed 60 caravans on the basis of 10 years' use, the application said that there had consistently been 55-70 caravans at holidays and summer weekends for 20 years or so. The risk, of course, is that there will be further claims for even more caravans and tents, if the current level of activity continues without being challenged. So there could be 100 or 150 pitches in the foreseeable future. Even without such a claim, large areas in addition to the approved site are already being used for tents, more caravans, rallies, and private parties. Lancaster City Council has yet to make a decision on what action it will take on these.

The economy is more important than landscape. The local economy *benefits* from landscape. The opening sentence of the Gibraltar Farm website reads: 'Welcome to **Gibraltar Farm**, a traditional family run working farm situated in the heart of the Arnside and Silverdale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, surrounded by breathtaking scenery and views of Morecambe Bay.' In other words, it uses scenery, views, and the AONB to market the business, just like most other local tourist enterprises. The business gains a clear commercial benefit from these, so should (like the rest of us) accept some restrictions in return.

It's not really visible/it doesn't affect us. It is visible, and it could affect you. It's very conspicuous from viewpoints further round the Bay (e.g. Grange), and was visible from Lindeth Road at Easter. Everyone will know places which have become bywords for being surrounded and spoilt by extensive caravan development. Do you want Silverdale to become one of them?

'They' won't let it happen. It is happening already! Moreover, the perception in some official or semi-official quarters is that there is strong support in the village for continued expansion at Gibraltar and no widespread concern or opposition. We do not think that is true - but the concern and opposition need to be voiced.

Opposition is pointless, because of powerful local interests and ineffective councils. That is defeatist, and self-fulfilling! None of us wants to spend time arguing about caravan development, but we think it needs to be done. No one should feel intimidated.

What can I do? You can sign the petition we will soon be circulating, urging Lancaster City Council to apply its own policies, meet its legal obligations with regard to the AONB and keep Gibraltar properly controlled in future. And you could give us your contact details in case further action is needed.

Set out below are the names of some of those of us who are concerned about this. We are all Silverdale residents, many of whom have lived in the village for a long time. Some of us are, or have been, caravan owners.

Thank you for reading this.

Marie Atkinson

Barry Ayre and Monica Placzek

Pauline Beckford

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Roger and Nancy Cartwright

Denise Dowbiggin

John and Brenda Eden

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