

Acorn Lodges: Statement from Dolton Parish Council

1. Dolton Parish Council (DPC) have no statutory or enforcement powers with regard to the Acorn Lodge site, our role is to represent the views of the community and we have ensured from the start that Torridge District Council were aware of this development and of our concerns.

2. Torridge District Council (TDC), with their licensing and planning sections, hold the statutory, licensing and enforcement powers with regard to the Acorn Lodges development. The laws and regulations regarding Caravan/Lodges sites are complex and convoluted and seem to involve both the Planning process and the the Regulatory and Licensing process. Whilst the TDC Planning Enforcement Officer has been visiting this site from the early stages, it has been as this development progressed that DPC became concerned that there seems to be a gap in the TDC oversight of this development, including such issues as site layout, screening, traffic, noise, disturbance, anti-social working hours etc.

3. The ward councillor arranged a meeting with TDC and along with three members of DPC, visited TDC on 24/10/2017 and presented the full range of our concerns over this development. The TDC solicitor has consider these points and delivered a reply. In essence, whilst complex, the planning, regulatory and licensing matters with regard to this development are all considered to be within requirements. Whilst we are not content with all these responses, they indicate that there is no support for us from TDC and that being realistic it is debatable whether there is any practical purpose in pursuing any legal or regulatory challenges to this development which is now here to stay.

It would seem that Dolton is not the only community in the UK which, having an existing campsite, has found itself 'stitched up' and 'clobbered' in this way. There seems to be a fault with the laws and regulations that allow this sort of lodges development to go ahead in this way; a letter has been sent to our local MP on this matter.

4. On 30/10/2017 the same 3 members of DPC and the ward councillor met with the 3 Directors of Royale Group in a visit arranged by the ward councillor. This was a positive step and gave some insight into the rather puzzling business background as to why we are where we are and what happens next.

They confirmed that the Dolton site is set up as a separate Limited Company with its own financial charges and so it stands or falls on its own merits.

The development work is nearly completed and they expressed apologies for all the disturbance and indicated a strong commitment to work with the local community in the future.

They also explained that the main business model for their group was to develop and run residential lodges site for the over 50's and they expressed a strong desire to widen the scope of the Dolton development to include residential units for the over 50's. Whilst they could probably relatively easily obtain planning permission for such a change, what they are seeking is community support for developing the site in this way.

5. Whilst it is easy to list all the problems, grievances, annoyances and objections to this development, nonetheless this site has now been developed and is here to stay and we need to consider what we can actually do now and what is the least worst option?

Some possible future actions are listed below:

6. We need to pursue the issue of screening, fencing and security, whilst it is worth double checking with TDC that they cannot impose any requirements, the most likely chance of success in this area might be by engaging with the developers and making this an issue in any negotiations with them.

7. It seems that come what may this site will, at the least, be going ahead as a holiday lodge site. Further to this, consideration needs to be given to the suggestion from the site owners of extending the use of the site to residential lodges for the over 50's. There are significant pros and cons to this possibility. Such an approach would fit with the main business model for this firm and they would give strong corporate support to make the site work on this basis. This may be an area where some professional advice may be helpful to ensure we are aware of all the significant aspects before any opinion is expressed.

8. Now we have contact details for the site owners and operators DPC needs to actively ensure that they follow up on the firms stated commitment to the community. We should seek to ensure that the firm liaises directly with the school to minimise disruption and ensure the safety of children entering and leaving the school.

9. The firm stated that they would be making good the approach road to the site past the Royal Oak, DPC need to contact Devon Highways to check who has ownership and responsibility for which parts of this access road with a view to ensuring that the whole access to this site through the square is made good.

Dolton Parish Council November 2017