

**A Record of a meeting of
the Pennoxstone Court Farm
Community Liaison Group
held on Thursday 20th February 2020**

Present:

Mr Neil Cockburn	Owner, Pennoxstone Court Farm
Mr Scott Low	Herefordshire Council Planning Enforcement
Mr Jack Everit	Local Resident
Lt Col Andrew Eames	Local Resident

1. Actions from the previous meeting

There were no matters arising from the previous meeting that were not addressed in the agenda.

2. Compliance

Mr Low confirmed that there were no outstanding issues of compliance, neither had any complaints been received. The Local Planning Authority held the Site Management Plan, which had been provided iaw Condition 19, and had received the required return (Condition 19(f)) showing where polytunnels were to be located for the 2020 growing season. Mr Cockburn would be happy to provide a copy of this return to the Parish Council, should it so desire. He observed that the planning permission was for less acreage than had previously been farmed and that this, together with the effects of Conditions 2, 3 & 4, inevitably reduced the scope for moving the tunnels between the areas; it was unlikely, therefore, that there would be much change in their dispositions over the next few years.

3. Issues Raised

a. The Group considered the report provided by the Chairman of the Parish Council, which addressed principally the issues of transport and the noise caused by spraying operations.

I. Transport. Mr Cockburn observed that he had provided a Transportation Management Plan iaw Conditions 16 & 17 and that, in particular, he endeavoured to avoid hold-ups caused by HGVs attempting to pass on narrow roads by deconflicting traffic so that only one lorry was moving in the area at any one time. He would continue to provide route instructions to the haulage companies, but in many case these were not passed on to the drivers who were in any case unfamiliar with the area. It appeared that not infrequently the only information provided to them was delivered by SMS and contained simply a telephone number, a post-code, and the name of Mr Cockburn. In view of this, Mr Cockburn intended to amend the route signage to show 'COCKBURN' in addition to 'PENNOXSTONE FARM', since the latter name often meant little (or nothing) to the drivers. He was concerned that there continued to be interference with these signs; their removal was counter-productive since it resulted in drivers using roads which were entirely unsuitable for HGVs.

ii. Spraying. The Group observed that the timing of spraying operations was dictated in large measure by the weather; they could not be undertaken in the heat of the day without scorching the crop, so that morning and evening spraying was inevitable. Mr Cockburn was mindful of the inconvenience that this might cause, and continued to seek to identify measures to reduce the decibel level. Notwithstanding Condition 15, and reminding the group in parenthesis that work in the fields sometimes began at 4:30am, he agreed that spraying would not normally begin before 6:00am nor continue after 10:00pm.

b. Colonel Eames reported that he had asked Parish Councillors for issues (other than those noted above) of which they were aware; none had been reported to him, nor was he aware of any from any other source. He had been asked by the Chairman to provide a short report to the Parish Council at its next meeting, together with a copy of these notes for the Parish Council website; the Group was content that he should do so.

c. Neither Mr Low nor Mr Everit were aware of any issues. Mr Cockburn had had no issues (other than those referred to in the Chairmans's paper) raised with him since the last meeting.

4. **The 2020 Season**

Mr Cockburn reported that preparations were underway for the growing season, with a labour force of some 25 currently on site. This would increase over the next months, rising to a peak, he thought, in the order of 180 in the period June - August. Blueberries had proved not to be economically viable, but there was an increasing demand for raspberries - of which in 2019 the farm had produced 200 tons compared with 600 tons of strawberries - and this would be reflected in the 2020 planting.

5. **The 2021 Season**

The Group noted that the restrictions on immigration recently proposed by the Government would, if followed through, impact adversely on farming in general and on fruit, vegetable and salad production in particular. There was some doubt that there was sufficient UK-based capacity to meet the agricultural labour demands (there being for the time being effectively full employment), and the higher wages necessary to attract staff already employed elsewhere would inevitably result in higher prices in the shops.

6. **The Next Meeting**

The Group agreed to meet next at the end of the picking season, on a date and at a time to be agreed, to consider what lessons might be identified and how they might affect the 2021 season.