



**S&A PRODUCE & MARDEN COMMUNITY
LOCAL LIAISON COMMITTEE MEETING
Wednesday 27th September 2017 6.00 p.m. @ Brook Farm, Marden**

MINUTES OF MEETING

ATTENDEES:

Sandra GLADWYN (SG)	○ Parish Councillor
Arthur FRASER (AF)	○ Parish Councillor
Jude NORCOTT (JN)	○ Public Relations Manager – S&A Produce & Local Liaison Committee Secretary
Trevor GREGORY (TG)	○ Finance Director – S&A Produce
Peter HOLDER (PH)	○ HR Director – S&A Produce
Richard BATHO (RB)	○ Parish Footpath Officer

1. Apologies & Minutes of last meeting

- Apologies were received from KG and the Committee acknowledged that MP had unfortunately had to stand down from the Liaison Committee due to ill health. DR was also not in attendance.
- CHP
The Company advised that the Combined Heat & Power (CHP) facility was now due to be commissioned in October.
- Brook House
Due to difficulty in obtaining appropriate contractors to execute the works, it is expected that commencement of the renovation will be delayed until later next year.
- Footpath issues – MR22A
JN advised that she had spoken with S&A's Farm Manager who continues to monitor the water flow in the ditch and will deal with any issues should they arise.
- Future planning applications
There is an assumption that the planning applications will go before the planning committee on 1st November, although this has not yet been confirmed.
- Traffic
CCTV footage of any vehicle activity overnight at Brook Farm continues to be monitored daily. Any external haulage vehicles found to be accessing Brook Farm during night time hours are contacted and instructed to refrain from doing so. These actions appear to have been successful in helping to stem the flow of traffic between the hours of 10pm and 6am. As previously advised to the Committee, the Company has established its Brierley Court Farm site near Leominster as a vehicle operating centre. Whilst completion of the centre is still underway, once the centre is operational it will help to reduce the need for S&A vehicles to return to Marden during night time hours.

Additionally, TG advised that the supermarkets are changing their models with regard to imported fruit and switching to direct supply. Consequently, the through put of imported product in the Company's packhouse will be reduced, as in many instances S&A now supply customers directly from their partner growers overseas. This change should in turn result in a decrease in the level of foreign vehicles accessing Brook Farm during this winter season, compared to last year,

○ Noise

JN advised that since the last meeting she had received a small number of complaints from the longstanding regular complainant. JN had subsequently spoken with KG who had also been in receipt of similar communications.

○ Site meeting at Paradise Green

In KG's absence, AF advised that any proposed traffic measures with regard to these highway issues are currently on hold.

- JN advised the Committee that for their information, additional signage was to be erected in and around Bodenham, in order to prevent HGV's taking unsuitable and incorrect routes to access Brook Farm. The Company are covering the cost of the signage which will be put in place by Balfour Beatty in due course.

○ Community Fund

AF had not received any further details in respect of possible support for an additional piece of play equipment at the village playing fields.

○ Litter pick

SG advised that the next village litter pick would take place on Saturday 14th October. JN agreed to arrange for the provision of a group of seasonal workers to assist as on previous occasions.

ACTION - JN

2. Brook Farm up-date

a. Activity to date

- Planting of the autumn crop had taken place slightly later this year. Harvesting of this crop was now commencing and will continue into mid/late November due to the heated tunnels. TG advised that heating has also been installed at the Brierley site although it is currently awaiting a supply of gas. AF enquired as to whether lighting would be utilised in the tunnels again at Marden and TG confirmed that the LED lighting will be in use in February. Overall this year the strawberry season had been reasonable, coupled with an excellent asparagus season from the growing sites at Kings Caple and Holme Lacy. As mentioned previously a slow process of change had commenced in relation to imported fruit.
- The Committee were advised that the Company are seeking to install a biomass boiler which will burn wood to provide heat for the polytunnels. A full planning application is required and plans are expected to be submitted over the next few weeks. The wood for burning will be brought into Brook Farm on a weekly basis in the form of 3-4 loads per day, but on weekdays only. The vehicles transporting the wood will be of the same size as the lorries that carry fruit. With the decrease in activity in relation to imported fruit, the number of vehicles associated with the biomass boiler should not result in any extra vehicles travelling to and from Brook Farm than at present. The biomass boiler will be situated next to the hot water tank which it will also supply. As a result, it is hoped that there will be less reliance on gas although it is expected that gas will still be required from time to time.

- A number of caravans are shortly to be replaced with pods. This will happen predominantly over the winter period in readiness for the spring. During this time, it is likely that local residents will see the pods as they are transported through the village to Brook Farm. PH advised that in light of Brexit, there is a need for the Company to provide a point of difference in order to attract and secure the right seasonal workers and a good standard of accommodation is key to this. The new pods will be ensuite and they will accommodate 2 workers per pod. The pods will be arranged in a suitable layout to create a community environment, with communal cooking and laundry facilities. This is the case at the Company's Brierley Court Farm site which consists solely of pod type accommodation. The Company extended an invitation to SG and any other members of the Committee to view the pod area at Brook Farm once it was completed.

3. **Seasonal worker update**

- There are currently 391 workers on the Brook Farm campsite and this level will be maintained for the new few weeks.
- Recruitment has proved challenging this year and it is expected to become more so before improving. Regaining returnees may be an issue for the Company going forward. The level for this year has been maintained at 66% as per last year, although repeating this next year may prove more difficult. The situation is not helped by advantages arising for workers to seek employment in other countries, e.g. the rate of the Euro, and there is also a perception that after Brexit, migrants may not be so welcome in the UK. PH continued that the Company has definitely witnessed an upward trend in early leavers this season, when workers have earned sufficient monies. This is often related to tax free thresholds. As a result, it had been necessary to recruit again later in the year in order to maintain the required headcount. This process had resulted in a significant number of new workers as opposed to returnees. PH assured the Committee that consequently during the induction process, the required emphasis had been placed on all community issues, highlighting any where necessary, e.g. cycling in the village. Additionally, local residents will notice more new workers in and around the village.
- Seasonal workers this year were predominantly Bulgarian. The disciplinary rate was low with 98% of any issues work related as opposed to connected with social behaviour.
- AF enquired as to the number of seasonal workers that will be on site over the Christmas period. TG responded that whilst a final figure is yet to be processed, with lower activity levels in the packhouse due to the decrease in imported fruit, it would be logical to expect that less workers will be required.

4. **Local community issues**

a. Amberley storage site

RB asked if the Company could enlighten the Committee on the activities and usage of the Company's storage site at Amberley. It had been brought to RB's attention that in addition to the piles of steel on the site, there are now numerous square bales wrapped in black polythene, which RB presumed to be coir in relation to the polytunnels. In addition, there are mounds of spent coir. There is a concern that the aforementioned are attracting rabbits and rats which in turn are visiting neighbouring properties. It was agreed that RB would investigate further to ascertain if there is a significant problem in respect of rats; he would speak with one of the Parish Councillors whose property backs on to the storage site. Additionally, TG confirmed that it is appreciated that the site is somewhat unsightly for the nearby residents. The Company will take any appropriate actions should RB discover any serious issues which need to be addressed.

ACTION - RB

5. **Community Fund**

- There were no requests tabled and the Committee were reminded to advise the Company should any worthy causes come to their attention.

6. **A.O.B.**

- TG

TG announced that with effect from 31st December he would be taking semi-retirement from the Company. As a result, TG would be relinquishing his responsibility for the Company's PR and in turn his involvement with both of S&A's Liaison Groups. The Company's Commercial Director, Daniel Martin, would become responsible for PR and will in future be attending all Liaison Committee meetings. TG thanked the Committee members for their help and support since the Liaison Group was established, concluding that the Company wish these meetings to continue as they are considered an important part of the Company's relationship with the local community.

- Next meeting

Wednesday 11th April at 6.00 p.m.