

Peat extraction proposal defended despite protest

Applicants for controversial peat digging on a massive scale at Sharpham have defended their plans from angry residents, saying they had to carry out exhaustive research before they were given approval for the works.

Somerset County Council recently granted permission to dig 24 hectares of peat at Cradlebridge, Sharpham, despite opposition from residents living near the site and members of Glastonbury Town Council.

Ben Malin of Terraqueous Ltd, the environmental consultancy acting as agents for the peat digging applicants, Durstons Garden Products and Eclipse Property Investments Ltd, said that since the original application was filed in 2005, research and testing had been undertaken to establish the permeability of the site and determine boundary protection measures.

In November 2009 a report was signed off by South West Geotechnical and Somerset County Council, establishing the permeability of the site and

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deeming the proposed protection measures satisfactory.

Richard Bond, owner of Eclipse Property Investments and chairman of the Somerset Peat Producers Association, said: "This is the first time that any peat production company in the country has gone into this level of detail."

Mr Malin added: "It was only after this exhaustive process that the regulation committee granted planning permission. The application has been backed up by robust technical data from fieldwork. Clay bunding has been proven to work through field trials."

The report concluded that potential impacts, such as noise, dust, visual impact, boundary protection and traffic had been adequately addressed by the applicant.

Digging peat releases greenhouse

gases, and the government has indicated that it is looking to reduce peat consumption.

However, Somerset County Council planning control team leader for minerals and waste, Philip Higginbottom, said: "The extent to which this happens is debated."

"There is still a national need for peat and Somerset has a part to play in meeting that need."

Regarding the environmental issue Mr Malin said: "The best place to extract peat from is archaic peat land and agricultural land rather than undrained bog."

"Peat is a good fertiliser carrier and the demand still exists."

"We have a detailed landscaping scheme and you will only see a small area of peatland from Glastonbury Tor."

The site will become a wetland nature reserve in 20 to 30 years' time, when the peat extraction process is complete.



From left: Ben Malin and Richard Bond at the Ham Wall nature reserve, a former peat digging site

Fears over potential damage

Sharpham residents say home and farmland will be damaged by the digging and have opposed the peat extraction plans from the outset.

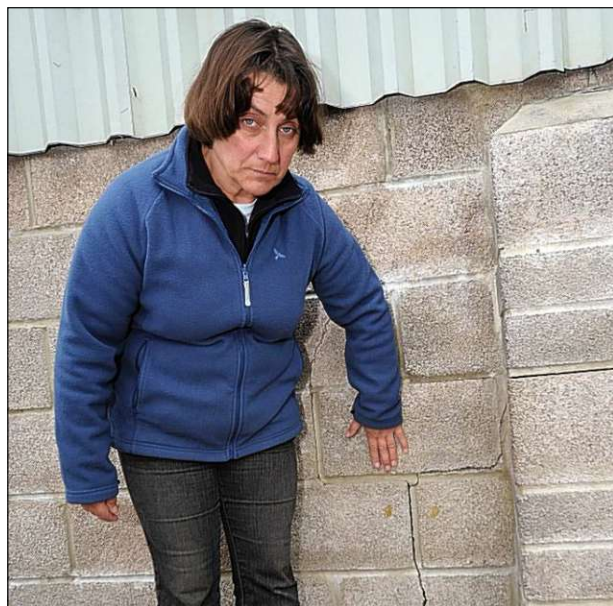
Sharpham parish clerk Val Norton said cracks appeared in her barn within six months of the start of peat digging next to it. She believes they are caused by subsidence as a result of the peat extraction.

Mrs Norton said: "We will end up with water on three sides. As well as our home being affected the wildlife in the adjacent fields will flee when the digging starts."

"In my opinion the one with the most money and the best solicitor wins. Briony Lazirides of Manor Farm, Sharpham, who also faces being surrounded by water and whose home has been damaged by subsidence, has been told it will become a civil matter between her and the applicants. Who can fight them?"

Lawrence Kelland has lived at Rose Cottage, Sharpham for 27 years and wrote to the Somerset County Council regulation committee before it approved the plans.

He said: "The insurers in-



Val Norton beside the crack that has appeared in her barn since the peat digging started next to it

vestigated and established the cause of the problem as de-watering and subsequent decay. We had to move out while they undertook massive remedial

works. "Peat digging can only take place after land has been drained. It is during this phase that the damage is done."

Man failed to meet court date

A warrant has been issued for the arrest of a man who failed to turn up in court last week.

The man is facing allegations of assault, criminal damage and public order in Glastonbury, and at the Tucker's Fish and Chip Shop in Wells.

Kye Joseph Housden, aged 22, was due to appear before South Somerset Magistrates facing a total of eight separate charges.

It is alleged that on March 24 at Tucker Street, Wells, he assaulted William Anderson by beating and destroyed food stuffs worth £300 belonging to Tuckers Fish and Chip Shop.

He had also been charged with using threatening, abusive or insulting words or behaviour during the same incident.

Then, in a second offence on

June 23, at Cinnamon Lane, Glastonbury he was alleged to have committed a similar public order offence, as well as assaulting a police constable in the execution of his duty.

Mr Housden has also been accused of assaulting a second police constable that same day, after he was taken into custody at Yeovil police station.

In a later incident, which took place on July 21, he is accused of assaulting Sarah Bell by beating at Northload Street, Glastonbury, as well as destroying a pair of spectacles that were worth £70 and belonged to his victim.

When Housden of Pateley Place, York, failed to attend court, the chairman of the magistrates issued a bench warrant, not backed for bail.

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