

GRADE RUAN PARISH COUNCIL

Parish Clerk: Louise Clifton

clerk@grpc.org.uk

www.grpc.org.uk

Meeting with RNAS Culdrose, Cornwall National Landscape and Grade Ruan Parish Council – 5 June 2024, 14:00

Notes of the meeting as above held at the Sunday School Room, Methodist Chapel, Ruan Minor.

Persons present/Apologies

Grade Ruan Parish Council: John Trewin (Chair), Cllrs Jeb Preston, Nigel Green, Andrew Dale.

RNAS Culdrose: Lt Cdr “Tank” Murray, Pete McQuie

Cornwall Council: Cllr Anthony Soady

Cornwall National Landscape: Jim Wood

1. Introductions and updates on contacts since last meeting (9.11.22). JT is now Chair of the GRPC. LT CDR MURRY will be standing down in Autumn 2025. Cllr Dale is newly elected to the Council.

2. Background to meeting

The last meeting was held in response to the consultation about the ACP (Drone) activity at Predannack airfield (PDK). The consultation recommends regular stakeholder meetings due to potential impact in sensitive areas. Grade-Ruan Council’s Terms of Reference also require regular contact with RNAS Culdrose and Cornwall National Landscape (CNL – previously AONB), and Cornwall Council.

3. Matters arising from Minutes. (Please see the approved minutes of 9.11.22 for specific detail on these items).

- a) Flight patterns not connected to Predannack (repetitive straight line flying and manoeuvres between Grade Church and Kennack, which go over Cadgwith, Ruan and Kuggar). These are mainly stress and vibration test flights. This has a significant impact on the AONB / CNL, especially when cumulated with the movements related to the Predannack training activity. There are alternative areas in Cornwall which allow more space for the speed and heights required by Merlin helicopters. Feedback is that this is less of an issue now, but repetitive manoeuvring on a tight circuit remains a key issue. There is less winch (and no coast patrol) practice as the SAR is no longer based at Culdrose.

- b) Flight routes from Predannack (circuits): the points from the previous meeting of 9.11.22 were reiterated, especially regarding less experienced pilots, with some disturbance being unavoidable. Aircrews are regularly briefed about the local area, and alternative airspace will always be used wherever possible.

- C) Local flying timeframes and Night flying:

During the day, drones fly in the mornings, helicopters after 2pm. It had been noted that some daylight sessions commence after 17:00hrs and into the evenings which has a high impact, especially when merging into night flying.

Night flying can start 30 minutes after sunset, but 1 hour after is the minimum for the use of night flight goggles as there remains too much light earlier, and these can finish very late in the summer. Monday to Wednesday evenings are helicopters, drones on Thursday evenings. It is too bright (due to the perimeter lights) at Culdrose to do night flight practice. They also go to Lands End and Perranporth. Also Bodmin but the terrain does not work so well with the equipment. Every pilot must do 2 hours night per month, with at least 90 minutes on night

goggles, to keep their licence current. They do no more than the minimum requirement as it is expensive at £15,000 per sortie. The airspace above Lizard is Class G (basically open access).

When squadrons are away, there will be a noticeable drop in activity – they are getting ready to deploy this Autumn so it could be busy during the summer.

The Council asked that pilots continue to be briefed on the areas to avoid, as small adjustments can make a huge difference to businesses and individuals alike. It was confirmed that this does take place regularly.

4. Items and updates also relevant to the wider context of the Lizard Peninsula ‘National Landscape’:

a) 700X Squadron update: Their purpose is to evaluate uncrewed air systems that are new to the Navy (but they are all proven machines, not experimental). They have had jets, small and large quad helicopters and commercial machines such as Windracers and Banshees operating out of Predannack. Full size helicopter drones and solar powered and balloon machines now exist but there are none yet at PDK. The test routes are generally over the sea so less noticeable to residents. They post sentries on the cliff path if flying over it. Training drones must be within sight of the operator, larger units are long distance, remote or computer controlled. All have a kill switch (and the larger have a parachute to slow emergency descent).

There were local reports last winter of naval personnel flying drones from farmland. When asked, they said they wanted different landscape. Lt Cdr Murray advised that this was not authorised. Predannack gives them all the terrain they need, they only fly within the perimeter and straight out to sea. Civilians are prohibited from flying drones near Cudrose, it would be very dangerous if they lose control and hit another aircraft. There used to be a mapping in the control program that prevented commercial drones from taking off within the prohibition area, but the manufacturer has now turned that off. Significant fines or even imprisonment can be imposed for breaking this rule.

b) Update on operations based at PDK

When new are drones delivered, they write the test plan every week based on the machinery available to test. The noise level is much lower from drones than manned machine, almost silent in some cases.

Other organisations using 626 Volunteer Gliding School (VGS) RAF Air Cadet unit - winched.

Cudrose Gliding club will be using it for summer courses (two weeks); 2 model flying clubs; RAF Cadets (Drill sessions); very rarely Marines, but they are not permitted to fire weapons, dig or harm the plants.

Twice yearly Predannack Conservation meetings are still taking place with the National Trust and local landowners (half of PDK is leased from Nat Trust). GRPC and CNL to be included. Planning applications near the Cider Barn have raised the level of security at Predannack, eg improving the front gate, more notices and red flags as it is now a National Drone Hub. They cannot fence it all (as half belongs National Trust), so all the old airframes for fire training have been removed as they attracted trespassers. The old tower will be replaced or repaired – they need a fire station and offices. Wholeship (a civilian middleman between manufacturers and civilian users) has a temporary office at PDK. They want a proper building on the site; MOD to decide if they can have the land, which would require a planning application.

c) **Traffic:** Fire engine drivers must pass a course, and that has to take place on local roads – they used to send 2 engines as they were 4 seaters and needed 6 people per exercise. Changed the scenario to 1 downed aircraft, so now only 1 at a time. They do need more training for the narrow roads, however Lt Cdr Murray felt that often incidents are caused by other users.

GRPC and Cllr Soady would like an emergency plan for closure/restrictions to the road past Culdrose. Road users currently divert via Gweek. Technically it would be possible to open the road through Culdrose but they would have to stop flying and it would cause significant security issues. It would probably only be feasible for emergency vehicles. MOD owns land outside the East fence, where there is a track for maintenance. Cllr Soady presented a map showing this route and suggested a possible additional road via Nacsmerrin Farm, or to Pemboa farm. GRPC have contacted Cornwall Highways regarding the access. The Joint Lizard Parish Councils will continue to consider this.

The Hawk jet sited by the roundabout was a distraction/sightline issue; it is to be placed by the Public Viewing Area.

GRPC was pleased to hear about tree planting in conjunction with new fencing at Culdrose Base, and the recognition, especially by Commanding Officer Captain Stuart Irwin, that they are on the boundary of the Lizard Natural Landscape. Lt Cdr Murray said that every tree cut down had to be individually justified – new ones will be smaller and native (as they attract fewer birds). They now have bee hives and would like to create small ponds. Grass must be kept at a specific length to minimise the number of bird inhabitants.

d) Cornwall National Landscape (formerly AONB) .

Following the Glover review, all AONBs are now named National Landscapes; the same status as National Parks, as they are for conservation and enhancement of natural beauty, but do not have a requirement to provide recreational facilities. A special quality of Lizard Peninsula is tranquillity – so avoiding concentration of noise is desirable. CNL remains a Consultee via Natural England for planning matters with a statutory Management Plan. The Levelling up and Regeneration Act changed the obligation to now ‘actively seek’ to further the purposes of the National Landscape, not just have regard to it. This will be tested through planning appeals over time, with no new guidance issued yet, but the direction of movement is positive. Culdrose has an Environmental Protection Officer, who also covers plans for fuel/oil spills etc. The dark sky is very precious, CNL try hard to avoid the approval of new homes whose design will issue lots of artificial light (eg glass fronts, exterior lighting). Predannack has an exception to allow no lights on their Windsocks to help maintain the dark sky.

5. Ongoing communication

All stakeholders wish to keep communications open, with shared awareness and recognition. Interim Email contact should continue as in previous years for direct issues and enquiries as appropriate. Next meeting could potentially be held in July 2025 as Cdr Murray will be leaving in November 2025.

The Chair thanked everyone for attending and the meeting closed 15:30