

## **Planning, Highways and Consultations Committee Report**

### **Annual Parish Meeting 12<sup>th</sup> March 2019**

Thank you, Mr Mayor. By your leave, I would like to read my Report aloud and will leave a copy of it with the Town Clerk for further publication.

The Local Planning Authority for Abingdon is the Vale of White Horse District Council. Among the responsibilities of the District Council are Development Control and the Local Plan. Oxfordshire County Council also has a role in planning, particularly in relation to highways and matters such as mineral extraction. Abingdon-on-Thames Town Council is a statutory consultee in relation to all planning applications within the parish, which means that the law requires this Committee to be consulted on and to respond, after due consideration, to every Planning Application submitted within the parish of Abingdon-on-Thames. The final Decisions themselves, to refuse or to allow Planning Permission, are made by the other two principal authorities, as alluded to just now, and the bulk of these decisions are routinely made by the Vale of White Horse District Council.

During the past 12 months, from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2018 - 31<sup>st</sup> March 2019 this Town Council Committee will have considered a total of 227 applications in all. As a matter of interest, fewer than 10 of the recommendations we made were contrary to the final decision made by the Vale of White Horse District Council, meaning that the Town and Vale Councils have agreed on over 95% of applications.

We are aware that planning can be quite a contentious area and there are increasing pressures, everywhere. but particularly in Abingdon, to meet housing needs. When the Town Council considers applications it must only make recommendations in relation to material planning considerations. This means that we need to look at matters such as:

- The Statutory Development Plan
- Oxfordshire Structure Plan
- Waste & Minerals Local Plan
- Vale of White Horse Local Plan
- The Town & Country Planning Act 1990
- Planning/Development Briefs produced by Vale of White Horse District Council
- Government Advice
- Planning Policy Guidance Notes
- Circulars
- Previous Planning decisions (including existing uses)
- Amenity considerations
- Traffic generation, parking and safety
- Design
- Materials
- Crime and community safety, and
- Need (eg. Agricultural Workers Dwelling)

The Council must not take into account non-material planning considerations, so these are not normally considered in determining applications. Therefore the following matters are not normally relevant to determining a planning application:

- Loss of property value
- Land ownership and boundary disputes
- A loss of a private view
- Legal rights/consents
- Deeds, covenants, private rights of way, licences
- Internal layout
- Provision of services, and
- Matters controlled under other legislation

When the Town Council recommends refusal of a planning application we inform the District Council and flag the matter up with local District Council ward members, asking them to “call the application in”. By call-in we mean that the application would go to the Vale full planning committee rather than be determined just by the Officers and/or the Chairman of the Vale Planning Committee, in accordance with the Vale’s constitution. If the call-in is successful the Town Council does retain the right to speak at the Vale planning meeting.

I understand that all local planning authorities are under considerable pressure and have to be extremely careful in ensuring that applications are determined strictly in accordance with material planning considerations. I understand that in future if the District Council, for instance, were to refuse planning permission and it were then found that a high percentage of their decisions should be overturned on appeal, then there exists the prospect that they could lose their powers to determine planning applications and therefore we would lose the power locally to have any input at all.

Having said that, the planning process is more open and transparent now than it ever has been. The Town Council’s own planning committee meets every three weeks and all its meetings are open to the public. Every agenda, every set of Minutes and every Report is published online on the Town Council website ahead of the meeting, and members of the public have the right to speak to any applications on the agenda, as long as we are informed by 12 noon on the day of the meeting. I am delighted, Mr Mayor, to report that there has been a marked increase in the number of members of the public taking the time and trouble to avail themselves of this opportunity to bring their planning concerns to our Town Council Committee: we have welcomed representations from no fewer than 19 – one, nine - members of the public this year, which demonstrates an increase of more than 150% over the number of people – merely 7 - who turned out to address us last year. It is very heartening, I believe, to see the public taking this increasing amount of interest in the business of their Town Council.

With 227 applications having been discussed by the Town Council during the last year I cannot tonight go into detail on specific applications. Mr Mayor, I would like to thank our Council’s Staff and every Member of this busy Committee for their hard and painstaking work on Planning matters over the last 12 months, and I do hope that this short report gives you a comprehensive overview of our activities.