

Annual Town (Parish) Meeting – Wednesday 10th March 2021

Report from the Chair of Planning, Highways and Consultations Committee

In Abingdon, the Local Planning Authority is the Vale of White Horse District Council. Amongst 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. The Town Council is a consultee in relation to all planning applications within the parish. The decisions themselves are made by the other two principal authorities, with the bulk of the decisions made by District.

The Town Council's Planning, Highways and Consultations Committee considers all applications which are made in Abingdon and during the year from April 2020 to date it will have considered more than 200 applications.

Planning can be contentious and there are increasing pressures, particularly in this area, 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:

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

The Council must not consider 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 raise the matter 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 District Council’s full planning committee rather than be determined by the Officers and / or the Chair of the planning committee, in accordance with the District Council’s constitution. If the call-in is successful, the Town Council does have a right to speak at the District Council planning meeting.

Local planning authorities are under considerable pressure to ensure that applications are determined in a timely manner and in accordance with material planning considerations. At the same time, the planning process is more open and transparent now than in previous years. The Town Council’s planning committee meets every three weeks, and all its meetings are open to the public. All agendas and reports are published online ahead of the meeting and members of the public have the right to speak to any applications on the agenda if we are informed by 12 noon on the day of the meeting.

The meeting has considered over 200 applications over the year. We have also considered a range of other consultations on matters including highways and transport.

Albert Park Conservation Area

Report from Cllr Jim Halliday

When considering applications in the Albert Park Conservation Area, we have been limited by the fact that this area does not have a Conservation Area Appraisal. These appraisals are important because they help to identify the special interest and changing needs of an area. An appraisal provides the basis for the development of a programme of action that is compatible with the sensitivities of the historic area and enables local authorities to fulfil their statutory duties to protect and enhance conservation areas. Appraisals also inform policy and assist development control.

Due to resource limitations at the District Council, the Town Council formed a small working group of councillors and residents to prepare an Appraisal for the Albert Park Conservation Area. During the year, the Group has prepared a draft appraisal which has been reviewed by the Conservation Team at the District Council. The Working Party are now revising the document prior to its submission to the District Council, who will then carry out a formal public consultation and, if necessary, revise it, before it is "adopted". It is the Town Council's plan that once the Albert Park Conservation Area Appraisal has been completed, the much larger challenge of writing an Appraisal for the Town Centre Conservation Area will start.

Neighbourhood Plan

Report from Cllr Grace Clifton:

Since last year's Annual Parish Meeting, there has been an enormous amount of progress in moving our Neighbourhood Plan forwards, despite not being able to meet

in person. In October and November last year, individuals and small teams carried out PLACE assessments of their neighbourhoods across Abingdon. These assessments looked at the following aspects of living in an area: planning, landscape, architecture, culture, and engineering. The results from this have been used to map how Abingdon is now and capture some aspects that people would like to keep. At the end of November, representatives of the various societies and groups of Abingdon were invited to provide some information about their priorities and input into the emerging PLACE assessments.

In January, our Steering Group was formed. This is made up of individuals from across Abingdon with an interest in moving the Neighbourhood Plan forward. It is chaired by Simon Hills, and a member of the Town Council, Cllr Grace Clifton, sits on the group. At the time of writing, 10 focus groups looking at different aspects of living in Abingdon are taking place, to allow a wider cross section of our community to input into our emerging priorities. Themes such as access and movement, leisure and sports and culture are being explored. We have also set up two focus groups specifically aimed at children and young people. When we have received all the data back from these focus groups, we will be able to identify the core priorities that residents would like to see in our Neighbourhood Plan. We hope to have an early draft ready by the end of this year.

If you would like to see the progress of our Steering Group, or would like to get involved, updates are regularly posted on the Abingdon Town Council website: <https://www.abingdon.gov.uk/neighbourhood-plan> and pushed out through ATC social media channels.

Conclusion

I would like to thank our Council's staff and Members of this Committee for their hard work on planning matters over the last 12 months.

Cllr Lorraine Oates

Chair of the Planning, Highways & Consultations Committee 2020-21