

AYLESFORD PARISH COUNCIL RESPONSE TO THE TMBC PROPOSAL TO
RESTRICT PARISH COUNCIL ABILITY TO RESPOND TO PLANNING
APPLICATIONS

Aylesford Parish Council (APC) is strongly opposed to these proposed changes as this is seen as a means of further excluding Parishes from the Planning Consultation process. They believe this change will only lead to Parish Councils struggling to be even able to respond to these important issues within their Parish.

In respect of the opportunity being given to respond to planning applications being limited to 21 days only starting from the date of the issue of the List B, whilst meeting the legal requirement, forgets that Parish Councils are democratically elected bodies. As democratically elected bodies they meet to enable members of the Council to discuss, deliberate and formulate their view, using their extensive local knowledge, on each individual planning application. Currently APC meets once a month to determine its views on planning applications meaning it meets every 28/35 days. Therefore, it is very likely there would not be meeting of this committee to consider about 25-30% of all the applications being consulted on in its area. This will cause significant problems for Parish Councils and could limit the consideration given by the whole Council to each planning application.

Additionally, the other significant change is that Parish Council's will no longer receive hard copies of the papers relating to the planning applications. This will cause significant issues both for the Council and particularly for individual Councillors. Currently during this pandemic crisis this is how the system works, with no hard copies sent out. However, this has caused problems for APC members who have struggled to access these documents online which may be because of the equipment not being up to the job or an element of a lack of skill with individual members. They have accepted these difficulties as a short-term solution in these difficult times. This very significant change, if made permanent, will exclude some democratically elected members from this consultation process which cannot be acceptable.

Finally, it does seem inappropriate to be proposing such changes at this time with all the current difficulties being experienced by everyone during this current crisis. Surely it could have been delayed until democratic processes were getting back to some form of normality and proper consultation taking place rather than this speedy process for introduction in September thereby not needing to go back to the well-established existing system at all.