

REPORT OF THE PLANNING COMMITTEE 2016-17

Since the May 2016 AGM the Planning Committee has looked at 235 applications some 11 more than the previous year. Throughout the year each set of Councillors with their own expertise and local area knowledge have looked through and discussed varying applications for building replacements, re-developments, house additions and, of course the huge number of applications in respect of tree felling or crown reducing especially in the more wooded parts of the Parish.

Of those 235 applications we only raised 20 objections but TMBC only agreed with just 2 of these cases. Two other decisions are awaited. Sometimes it does feel as if our localised knowledge and expertise are being ignored or over-ruled, perhaps, because the national Government has leant heavily on Borough Councils to meet the pressing needs for new homes. That said it is the fine detail such as the aesthetic considerations or the view from the perspective of the street scene and the effect upon neighbouring properties where we might differ from a Borough-wide viewpoint.

In respect for the applications most have been for small scale extensions, changes of garages into living accommodation and for the pruning of our very valued tree-scape that so

marks our Parish. The Planning Committee have stood their ground in objecting to the removal or reduction in those with TPOs whilst take a more relaxed view about conifers or those trees which were not part of the natural landscape.

The big issues that have been looked at and fully discussed have included the re-development of the former Somerfield Site in Station Road for some 95 dwellings. Keeping an eye on developments at the Aylesford Business Centre, the change of use from open storage to one of vehicle storage and preparation at the Nil Desperandum site , in Maidstone Road, Blue Bell Hill. This is for a new facility for some 2000 BMW – type vehicles (Big Motoring World) where access is already very limited right on the Buckmore Park roundabout. The go-kart circuit has also applied for extensions to opening and operations, although this might be postponed due to the sad death of the owner, John Surtees the former World Motor Racing Champion of both 2 and 4 wheels. There could also be changes in the future due to the very recent decision by the Government to select Route 3 as the new crossing of the Thames east of Gravesend and the effects that this may have along the M2/M20 & Blue Bell Hill corridors. We await these proposals with some trepidation!

The other major cause for concern this year has been the re-development plan for the former Aylesford Newsprint site. Here there is concern over the exact number of units

proposed, the change from business to residential units within the whole development and its effects on an already well over crowded road network. Here at every peak hour period the road network is log-jammed and needs to be seriously studied and answered. A new lane is being inserted to take traffic to Maidstone Hospital along Hermitage Lane as I write this summary. Whilst I am reporting on this area the problem of a smelly and noisy Fish Van at the Holtwood Farm Shop will not be gone as the Borough agreed to its permanent siting at this point, one that we lost to TMBC as we did again at Tunbury Avenue in Walderslade where we objected to plans to demolish a bungalow and put in three terrace houses with a change of vehicular access from a quiet side close and full on to the busy Tunbury Avenue close by the Robin Hood junction. On a more positive note I can report that we were successful in removing a motor trader from parking his large Transit type vans opposite Catkin Close and the entrance to Tunbury Primary School. He had been using them as tool and parts stores and made the area look a real untidy place. I am glad to say that he has now gone and that a Planning Enforcement Order on his rented property in nearby Chippendale Close also meant that he could not keep several disintegrating motors there leaking motor oil all over the pavements and also looking like a real tip, he has since moved out of there as well.

A further application from the owner of the Upper Bell site in Chatham Road, Blue Bell Hill for 13 flats and 4 semi-detached

houses, parking and access changes was challenged as being out of scale in this area of outstanding natural beauty. During the year the Planning Committee also looked at the TMBC local plan and we have been ably guided by the Parish Clerk about these proposals and the effects that they would have on the Parish in general. This included the preparation of a draft list of questions to be asked of TMBC at an appropriate meeting. Further away from the centre of the Parish we have been up-dated on the revisions to the Rochester Airport developments and the various comings and goings in respect of Peters Village and the ever welcome new bridge crossing the River Medway at Wouldham.

Obviously with several of these applications being `large` in both scale and effect they will naturally pass over into the report from this Committee for next year. Finally it is my duty to thank Janet & Neil for the readiness over the large volume of paper that is utilised in these applications and for seeing that it all safely reaches us in time for each meeting and to Cllr Barry Smith who has deputised for me at the January meeting this year which was held on my birthday!

Cllr Malcolm Wright

Chairman Planning Committee