

PLANNING IN COLESHILL

The Parish Council thought that it might be helpful if we restated how we deal with applications for planning permission in the village. Our policy and practice have, in fact, remained the same for a number of years and have been discussed at open meetings of the Council but even so, it seems that there is still an element of misunderstanding in some quarters.

First, to dispel some myths! The District Council alone is the planning authority and the Parish Council can neither refuse nor grant permission for any form of development. On the other hand, we are what is called a “statutory consultee”; copies of planning applications and plans are sent to us automatically (delivered it often seems by a constipated snail) and we then have a limited period of time in which to say whether we object to the proposal, support it or have no comment to make. Our views have to be taken into account by the planning authority in reaching its decision. Unfortunately, this is not the same thing as the Council having to agree with our particular point of view since their professional officers will prepare a detailed planning analysis of their own which may reach a different conclusion and in any event, elected members are entitled to go against their officers’ recommendation. In effect, all the Council is obliged to do is to note the Parish Council’s position.

In responding to every application, the Parish Council must consider what is proposed against the (very) detailed policies contained in the District Council’s published Local Plan – a document of over 300 pages excluding plans and appendices! If we feel that we ought to “object” then we can only do so on well recognised planning grounds based on non-compliance with these policies. The process is far from being straightforward. The whole of the area around Coleshill is both Green Belt and Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which together would normally imply that hardly any new development can be permitted at all. However, the Local Plan designates most parts of the village as being excluded from the Green Belt and in these areas, limited and carefully controlled forms of new development will usually be permitted. Our concerns, therefore, tend to relate to such matters as the size and bulk of (say) a replacement house, whether it would result in a cramped form of development, the effect it would have on the character of the surrounding area (and on the amenities of neighbouring properties, in particular) and whether the proposal is generally four-square with criteria set by the District Council. These are matters on which there can be differing points of view.

What we cannot normally do is to take into account the specific needs or justification of the landowner (“ I **must** have that extra bedroom for granny”) however reasonable or understandable they may be. Applications have to be considered **objectively** without regard to personal circumstances. Similarly, the effect on neighbours (development too close, noise, overlooking etc) has to be judged dispassionately as best one can.

For these reasons, we do not normally approach the applicant about his proposals (except for clarification) neither do we directly seek the views of neighbours – in a small community such as ours it essential to be even handed and consistent. On the other hand, if the applicant (or his agent) wants to speak to us at any stage, or if a

concerned resident approaches us direct, then we are more than happy to talk and to take into account what is said.

So what do we do in practice? Armed with plans of the development in one hand and the Local Plan in the other, one of us studies the site from the road and from any other public vantage point. This usually gives us all the information that is needed to reach a balanced, objective view; exceptionally, where necessary, we will ask to go onto the site. Two councillors then consider the matter and a formal view on behalf of the Parish Council is reached. The clerk is then asked to communicate our views to the District Council and where we feel that we ought to object detailed reasons are given based on our analysis of the Local Plan policies.

The two councillors with delegated responsibility for planning are
Mike Smith. Telephone: 723046, e-mail Mike-Smith@imo-carwash.co.uk and
Richard Valentine. Telephone 725794, e-mail jrhv@sav.co.uk

We do welcome input from villagers on planning issues and look forward to hearing from individuals in the future: comments by email are especially helpful.

If you wish to inspect the plans of any proposed development, these are only available to view at the offices of Chiltern District Council who are the planning authority.

COLESHILL PARISH COUNCIL

APRIL 2004