

# HUNGERFORD TOWN COUNCIL

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**MINUTES** of the **Environment and Planning Committee** meeting held on Monday 9<sup>th</sup> October 2023 at 7.00 pm in the Library, Church Street, Hungerford.

**Present:** Cllrs Fyfe, Carlson, Keates, Coulthurst, Greenwell, Simpson, Cole. Cllrs Hudson and Armstrong entered later. Also present, District Councillors Gaines (DG) and Vickers (TV)

In attendance: Claire Barnes (Town Clerk)

**EP2023050**      **Apologies for absence** - Cllr Winser. Also, District Councillor Benneyworth

**EP2023051**      **Declarations of interest** - None

**EP2023052**      **Approval of Minutes of the Meeting held on Monday 11<sup>th</sup> September 2023 and update on actions.**

**Proposed:** Cllr Carlson

**Seconded:** Cllr Coulthurst

**Resolution:** To approve the minutes of 11<sup>th</sup> September 2023 as a true record, two abstentions.

**Outcome of actions:** A flowchart from WBC clarifying the criteria for fast tracking applications has not yet been received from District Cllr Vickers. Other actions are complete.

Cllr Hudson entered.

**District Councillor Tony Vickers (TV)** presented a power point to the committee. **See attached.** TY also read out two relevant questions put to him recently from the opposition, along with his responses. **See attached.**

In answer to various questions from councillors, further information was given as follows:

The number of vacancies in the planning department at WBC is just over 10%.

**ACTION:** DG will find out how many employees there are in the whole department.

There is difficulty with recruiting to fill these vacancies due to the lack of skill set available in planning, ecology and conservation, which is a nationwide problem. WBC are also reaching out to local schools. The government are promising pay rises next April as part of levelling up which may help attract job applicants. WBC will be outsourcing the work to clear the backlog and anticipate catching up by the end of the financial year. They guarantee hitting the turnaround time on applications providing the money is forthcoming.

TV added the cost of reinstating the neighbourhood notifications will cost no more than half the cost of cutting them. They will be using bulk mail deals to save money on postage.

TV was asked how you reconcile a development of 200 houses to be net zero. It is widely agreed that building regulations should be upgraded to aim for lower carbon emissions. Some builders are using low carbon targets as their USP. Privately funded developers and off-site construction can achieve better than current policy.

TV was asked why we do not get a second chance to express our opinion if the planning decision goes against HTC's position. TV agreed that local knowledge should be taken more notice of, and it is a problem that much is done under delegated power.

**ACTION:** TV will cover the above point at his talk to service tomorrow and try and make changes. Developers need to stick to their commitments regarding affordable housing. The price of land should not be a reason alone to claim that a development is unviable. TV advised legislation could soon be in place to allow council tax to be charged on property developments that should be occupied but are not.

Cllr Armstrong entered.

**EP2023053**

**Planning applications:**

**a) 23/02180/REG4**

The Library, Church Street – Andrea Hodgkin

Solar PV Roof Panels

**Proposed:** Cllr Greenwell

**Seconded:** Cllr Cole

**Resolution:** Support

**b) 23/01032/CERTP – THIS APPLICATION HAS BEEN WITHDRAWN**

Norgate House, Tealgate, Hungerford, RG17 0YT

Change of Use of existing Office building (use Class E) to a state funded school (use class F1(a)) on a temporary basis of two academic years

This was noted. The application has been superseded.

**c) 23/02196/HOUSE**

14 North View - Mr and Mrs T Badgett

Retrospective approval of porch to side of property, proposed new single storey extension and proposed rear dormer window.

**Proposed:** Cllr Cole

**Seconded:** Cllr Carlson

**Resolution:** No objection

**d) 23/02251/LBC**

25 High Street Hungerford RG17 ONF

Remove 1 no. Internal door and build 2 no. partitions for changing rooms

**Proposed:** Cllr Cole

**Seconded:** Cllr Coulthurst

**Resolution:** No objection

**e) 23/02203/TPC**

The Laurels, Eddington, Hungerford, RG17 0DZ

T1 – Oak – Prune away limbs encroaching onto building alignments achieving 2m clearance – close to roof and windows T2 – Willow – Pollard back to previous points – tree management.

**Proposed:** Cllr Fyfe

**Seconded:** Cllr Coulthurst

**Resolution:** No Objection

**f) 23/02250/COND**

John O Gaunt Community Technology College, Priory Road, Hungerford, RG17 0AN  
Application for approval of details reserved by conditions 7 (community use) and 8 (Management and maintenance) of planning permission 22/01156/REG4 – Refurbishment of an artificial turf pitch (ATP) (8123 sq. metres) with associated features including: Extended 3G football turf pitch (7420 sq. metres): 4.5m high ball stop fencing with entrance gates to form an enclosure around FTP perimeter; 1.2m high and 2.0m high pitch barriers with entrance gates internally within fenced FTP enclosure; 15.0m high LED floodlights (6no.) around FTP perimeter; hard-standing areas for pedestrian access and circulation, portable goals storage, as well as vehicular access(688 sq. metres).

**Proposed:** Cllr Simpson

**Seconded:** Cllr Armstrong

**Resolution:** Object pending further information from district council and local representatives (including Football Club), due to errors in report, lack of local representation and lack of clarification of costs and lighting.

**ACTION:** DG to speak to the case officer.

**ACTION:** Clerk to speak to Football Club and JOG School

**g) 23/02062/NONMAT**

Hungerford Leisure Centre, Priory Road, Hungerford RG17 0AL.

Non-material amendment to approved planning permission 21/02551/REG3 – New dance studio – as single storey extension to existing leisure centre. Amendments: Reduction in height of the building from 2.8m to 2.4m (internal ceiling height); Reduction in extent of glazing to one elevation. To meet fire standards for unprotected areas.

**Proposed:** Cllr Keates

**Seconded:** Cllr Simpson

**Resolution:** Support

**EP2023054**

**Case Officers Reports:** These were read out and noted.

The following planning decision was discussed in some detail: -

**23/00826/FUL** Hungerford Railway Station Car Park, Station Road, Hungerford - Churchill Retirement Living/ Archel Homes/Archel Hungerford. Redevelopment for retirement living accommodation for older people comprising 45 retirement apartments including communal facilities, access, car parking and landscaping and 2 cottages.

HTC strongly objected due to the demographic, unsatisfactory parking, lack of affordable housing, access facilities and building design. The application was refused.

Committee were pleased with the outcome however concern was voiced that the developer may appeal the decision, particularly as the Highways authority have accepted a lower number of parking spaces, swayed by a transport assessment carried out by the applicant.

It was commented that the development is open to those age 55 plus. Residents are likely to still be driving so would require a parking space. Others may need a parking space for their carer. The application was compared with other types of retirement homes in the area such as Audley Inglewood who provide care on site. This is not being offered at Churchill. It was noted that the average anticipated age for residents at Churchill is 79.

**ACTION:** DG will speak to the transport officer who has dismissed our concerns. The application is for 17 parking spaces opposed to the recommended 45 which equates to 1 space per 2.6 flats.

The meeting closed at 20.20 pm.

# Hungerford Town Council Environment & Planning Committee 9 Oct 2023

District Cllr Tony Vickers,  
Portfolio Holder for Planning &  
Community Engagement



## WBC Planning Facts

- ❑ 2287 applications to date in 2023 (84 cases in Hungerford)
- ❑ Determination within statutory target of 8 weeks or agreed extension of time
  - 100% of majors
  - 79% of non-majors
- ❑ Some applications taking 3-6 months to determine depending on complexity & level of engagement
- ❑ Challenges include nutrient neutrality delays & lack of capacity in ecology & conservation
- ❑ Appeals – 11/21 dismissed, 5/21 allowed, 3 w/d and 2 out of time



## WBC Planning Facts

- ❑ Overall, 5.41FTE vacancies across Development Management & Enforcement and more in Policy
- ❑ Mix of budget pressures and recruitment difficulties
- ❑ WBC not alone – recruitment and backlog is a national problem – DLUHC bid for £90k in 23/24 to address backlog of (mostly) minor applications
- ❑ Key vacancies being covered by internal secondment pending perm recruitment (Development Manager, East Team Leader) and agency (Enforcement, DM & Ecology)
- ❑ New Conservation Officer started this week – Natasha Sturrock joins Debra Inston



## How 'green' are we?

- ❑ Council on 5 Oct declared Climate and Ecological Emergency to highlight importance of nature in WB
- ❑ Distinction between what action WBC itself can take (reduce 'operational' carbon) and how it can seek to influence the district as a whole
- ❑ 'Green thread' runs through Local Plan Review – at examination; holding out to retain strong wording
- ❑ LPR draft SP5 Responding to Climate Change will require sustainability statement with planning application – currently, not legal to do so



## 'Green' Conservation Areas

- ❑ Must abide by national legislation
- ❑ This does not preclude taking action to reduce carbon footprint, just needs careful consideration
- ❑ Planning weight and planning balance
- ❑ Example – UPVC windows (thermal qualities and cheap but need replacing more often and more embedded carbon than wood)
- ❑ **Member Q responses....**



## Other planning issues

- ❑ Levelling Up & Regeneration Bill (LURB)
  - National Development Management Policies
  - Shorter timescales for plan-making
  - Area Wide Design Codes
  - National Infrastructure Levy to replace CIL
- ❑ Uplift in planning application fees (1/4/24)
- ❑ Introduction of 10% Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) requirement on major planning applications delayed to New Year



**Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Planning & Community Engagement by Councillor Benneyworth:**

*“Could the Portfolio Holder please advise how the Liberal Democrat’s manifesto pledge to re-introduce neighbourhood notifications for planning applications is progressing?”*”

**The Portfolio Holder for Planning & Community Engagement answered:**

Thank-you for your question. The manifesto pledge to re-introduce neighbour notification letters is progressing well and in fact we intend to start sending them out this week as part of a pilot project. As an interim measure, we are using an in-house team to do this but we expect to move to an automated system in the very near future once the digital links are set up.

**The Chairman asked:** *“Do you have a supplementary question arising directly out of the answer to your original question. A supplementary should be relevant to the original question and not introduce any new material?”*

**Councillor Benneyworth asked the following supplementary question:**

*“question”.*

**The Portfolio Holder for Planning & Community Engagement answered:**

The parameters are as follows:

- Major applications – 50 m buffer around the plotted red line.
- Minor applications including Householder – immediate neighbours to the side, front and rear. If there is a highway in between the proposal and neighbours, then this will be included.
- Other applications – as above.

We will only notify neighbours on the submission of the initial application. We will not write to them with any amendments, or when the decision is made under delegated powers.

**Forecast Cost**

It is estimated that the in-year cost to Planning Services is between £8 - £10k (including the interim process). This is only an estimate as if the authority receives more major applications, then we will be sending out more letters.

It is estimated that over a 12-month period using the automated service approach that between 20,000 and 24,000 letters will be sent out on planning applications, with a total cost of circa £11.5k.

**Question (M) Meeting on 05 October 2023**

**Relevant Officer(s): Eric Owens / Katharine Makant**

**(M) Question not related to an item of business submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Planning & Community Engagement by Councillor Boeck:**

*“How is the Portfolio Holder going to address the shortage of staff in the Planning service?”*

**The Portfolio Holder for Planning & Community Engagement answered:**

Thank-you for your question. We have a number of vacancies within the Planning Service at present, owing partly to a national shortage of professional planners and partly to the Council's own budget challenges which has made it necessary to freeze recruitment to non-business-critical posts. However, we are delighted to welcome two new officers into the Conservation and Developer Contributions teams this week and we are actively recruiting a permanent Development Manager, a Planning Policy Team Leader and a Principal Ecologist. Earlier this year, we welcomed two new graduates into the Development Management team and our recent procurement of a supplier of Level 7 Apprenticeships means we are able to offer development opportunities to existing staff to qualify as RTPI accredited planners.

Finally, last month we submitted a bid to the Government's Planning Skills Delivery Fund for £90,000 to buy in additional support to clear the current backlog of planning applications - we hope to have some further good news on this later this month. In the meantime, we're making sure that all applications that come in are validated as quickly as possible and consultation initiated, even if we can't immediately allocate them to a case officer.