

WITNEY ANNUAL TOWN MEETING 2020

REPORT TO THE ANNUAL TOWN MEETING FROM CHAIR OF THE PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE – CLLR SMITH

The Planning & Development Committee meets every three weeks and the main business is responding as consultees to planning and licensing applications that fall within Witney town, and near our borders in neighbouring parishes such as Hailey and Ducklington. We can say 'no objection'; we can say we do not object and make comments or suggestions based on local knowledge or we can raise objections to proposals. Planning permission decisions are then made by officers at the District Council and, where objections are concerned, a committee of councillors, at West Oxfordshire District Council.

Bus Shelters

Last May, the new committee inherited a decision that needed to be made about the bus shelter above Corn Bar on Corn Street. Houses were being built with windows right behind the bus shelter but the builders still hadn't been given permission to move the shelter slightly. Our first meetings therefore involved far more than commenting on planning applications. It made the council think through how to deliver on our responsibility for bus shelters in the town. Bus users on Corn Street were inconvenienced whilst the building was carried out, but we ensured that the developer paid for a new bus shelter and an additional shelter, which has been fitted on Burwell Drive.

Consistency

We are seeing regular planning issues that crop up on the various estates in the town, often to do with covenants on the land that restrict the type of fencing or trees and shrubs, or even windows, that can be installed to replace original features. Our response to WODC each time has been to call for it to enforce the rules consistently across each case. We want see all residents treated fairly, especially where planning rules are restrictive.

We have been assuming that town centre flats will attract residents who do not necessarily have cars, so we do not generally insist on parking spaces for these. Away from the centre, however, we take a dim view of proposals that want to maximise the number of dwellings but really don't have enough parking spaces. We also look out for floor space areas to ensure living standards are adequate.

Active Travel, Connectivity and the Economy

In line the council's recognition of the Climate Emergency, and in the interests of public health, air quality and local productivity, we are a committee that points out opportunities to improve cycling and walking infrastructure. We always check for adequate secure cycle storage in plans for new houses and flats. We advocate for installation of electric car chargers.

We are also concerned with connectivity to rail stations, bus routes and for the A40 to get its long-awaited Shores Green junction, with public transport and cycling options that can flow freely. We are keen that any new park and ride at Eynsham also has buses to and from Witney so that shoppers and clients can use that hub for Witney as the destination.

Sewerage

Whilst not a planning consideration, the developers of sites designated for large developments are beginning to submit planning applications at a time when the local community is becoming aware that Witney's sewerage system is frequently overloaded. Surface water finds its way into the foul water system during heavy rain and the storage tanks overflow. There have been discharges into Colwell Brook and Madley Park Brook as well as the river. The Committee calls for upgrades to the sewage capacity when it responds as a consultee and has deep concern at the prospect of connecting more properties to a system that currently cannot cope. The Committee has additional concerns about the surface water that may be generated by large scale developments.

Infrastructure Development Plan

The Committee has drawn up an Infrastructure Development Plan so that large and small developers can see, alongside WODC and OCC, what Witney really needs. With new estates pencilled in for the East and North of the town and the emerging new community to the West, the Committee intends to keep the need for well-connected roads, footpaths, bus routes, cycleways as well as schools, surgeries and shops at the centre of all discussions. Several areas of Witney really need a community centre, and these are important entries to the plan. We will do our best to work with the other councils to shape Witney for the benefit of all residents.

Cllr Ruth Smith – Chair of Planning & Development Committee