

SHRIVENHAM PARISH COUNCIL

Memorial Hall
Highworth Road
Shrivenham
Oxon
SN6 8BL

14th June 2021

Dear Cllr Smith,

You may recall that I wrote to you in November last year expressing my concern about the Planning Department's dealings with developers with regard to two planning applications (**P20/V2125/FUL & P20/V1279/FUL**). Though they were for small developments – 4 and 10 houses – they were unallocated in the Local Plan Part 1 and, as such, were contrary to both Core Policy 3 of the Plan and paras 3 & 12 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

In reply to my email, you asked if you could forward it to Bethia Thomas to look into and for her to get back to me. You also asked if it could be forwarded to the deputy CEO with responsibility for Place, and I agreed to both. Since then I have heard nothing from either person.

I am now writing to express the concern of Shrivenham Parish Council (and most of the village) about the decisions of the Planning Committee to allow these two developments but, more importantly, about various comments by the professional planning team that may impact on prospects for further development in Shrivenham. Our misgivings have developed as follows:

1. During discussions at the Planning Meeting on 11 Feb 21 to consider April Cottage (**P20/V2125/FUL**), the Planning Officer pointed out that the Planning Department was looking for windfall sites in the whole of the Vale area and that this application was exactly what was needed. In answer to a further question the Officer announced that the number of houses allocated as strategic sites in the Local Plan Part 1 was **only a minimum number**. I subsequently wrote to the Planning Officer to query these policy changes and to ask her to explain the reasoning behind:
 - a. The decision to ignore both the Local Plan and the NPPF in considering speculative applications;
 - b. And the policy changes, both from the point of view of the search for windfall sites and the indication that the number of houses allocated for strategic sites in the Local Plan is a minimum number.

The response from the Planning Officer did not answer these questions but the email resulted in the second application (**P20/V1279/FUL**) being withdrawn from the next Planning Meeting and the developer being asked to give evidence in relation to the local need for this development. The reply from the developer was an unconvincing attempt to justify a need for any more housing in Shrivenham.

2. Despite clear evidence that there is no need for any more houses in Shrivenham, the Townsend Road application (**P20/V1279/FUL**) came before the Planning Committee on 2 Jun 21 with the recommendation of the Planning Department. Before it was passed by the Planning Committee, questions were asked about the need for any more houses in Shrivenham. One member, Councillor M Pighills, had visited the village and felt that it was already over-developed and asked if

there was a limit to the amount of development that a village would be expected to sustain. He was told that the Planning Department ***did not intend to put a limit on development in Shrivenham.***

The dire situation in Shrivenham must be well known to you by now and so we are very concerned about this apparent change in policy. We had expected that now the Local Plan Parts 1 and 2 have been approved and the Neighbourhood Plan had been passed at referendum by an overwhelming majority, we were safe from any more speculative development. But, the Planning Officers' statements, described above, have come as a great shock. It would appear from this, that we are no longer safe from further speculative applications and that our village and its already overloaded services are threatened with being overwhelmed. To add insult to injury, the Planning Officer concluded his remarks by stating that something similar had happened to Kingston Bagpuize and that they appeared to be recovering from the overdevelopment. This seems to suggest that more housing is in the pipeline for Shrivenham and that we would, eventually, recover from it, though that didn't seem to be the case when I listened to representatives from Kingston Bagpuize arguing against more development at the 11 Feb Planning Meeting.

We feel that we have been badly let down by the Planning Department. It would now appear that the contents of the Local Plan, the Neighbourhood Plan and the NPPF are being swept aside for windfall sites and Officers are not prepared to set a limit on the number of dwellings that can be built in Shrivenham.

For any plan to succeed, it needs a clear aim. I am at a loss to see any aim in the various statements that have emanated the Planning Department with regard to Shrivenham except to assist the developer as much as possible to make their application acceptable and to dismiss the valid objections of the residents of the village.

I urge you to revisit existing policies as it would appear that the guidance provided in the Local Plan, the Neighbourhood Plan and the NPPF is either being ignored or forgotten. In this respect, I would like to remind you that Paragraph 2 of the NPPF 2019 emphasises the point that: 'Planning law requires that applications for planning permission be determined in accordance with the development plan,' and 'Where a planning application conflicts with an up to date development plan, PERMISSION SHOULD NOT USUALLY BE GRANTED'.

Finally, I would appreciate your thoughts on the Planning Department's assertions that:

1. The number of houses allocated as strategic sites to a village in the Local Plan is a minimum number;
2. And, why they are saying that there is no limit on the amount of development that would be allowed in Shrivenham.

Regards

Richard

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