

Stow Town Council meeting, 29th October 2020. Report from District Council

Planning. Once more! I have been fortunate to be on the planning committee at CDC for four years & I have learnt a lot. Not all ward members have had that experience, & often, applications are taken to the planning committee where there is no planning reason to overturn the officer's recommendation. Indeed, I was guilty of this myself in my first year or two. In order to try & avoid this happening on a regular basis, CDC are looking at the suggestion that any applications which ward members wanted to bring to committee would be screened in advance by the chair & vice chair of planning & a couple of the senior officers. Where the reasons for bringing the application to committee are not "planning reasons" for example the number of objectors, the chair would have the option of not allowing it to be debated by the committee. This is obviously quite a change, & will have to be debated at Full Council, & I should be interested to hear your opinion. This week, I had to consider whether or not to bring the Camp Gardens application to committee. The only planning grounds for doing this is concern about the size of the houses in comparison with the cottages at the lower end of Camp Gardens. The planning officer & conservation officer would ideally prefer that the houses were slightly smaller, but they have already negotiated a decrease in size & several other changes with the applicant & both agreed that the current design is acceptable. Of course, the risk is that if the current application is refused, the applicant will take it to the planning inspectorate who may allow it & say that he can build the houses as big as he likes! However, I was in two minds about whether to take it to the committee & so I did refer to Juliet Layton, chair of planning for her advice. Her opinion is that the current design is reasonable & that there are no solid planning grounds for refusing it. So she has allowed the officer delegated authority to permit, & I think that this is the sort of discussion which will be more frequent in future.

Maugersbury Rd car park. I visited the car parks today & was not pleased to discover that the pay & display machine has still not been set up. The machine has been in place for at least six weeks & we are waiting for the electricity company to connect the necessary supply. There is a new supplier, PayByPhone operating the service on behalf of CDC. I noticed that visitors there seemed to be able to use the new system easily, so I hope that there have been no more disgruntled visitors. I will remind the appropriate officers at CDC that this is something which needs chasing up. The car park was absolutely full when I visited today.

Civic Pride. There is money available from CDC to improve the appearance of town centres. This includes things like rubbish bins & street signs which need replacing. I am sure that Heather is on the case for this, but if you see anything which you think would qualify for a grant in this respect, please to bring it to Heather's attention.

Sport & Leisure facilities. There was a Full Council meeting last week at which the support for leisure facilities was discussed. There was unanimous agreement to provide financial support to SLM, the company which manages the Council's leisure centres for another six months in the hope that they can be kept open with appropriate safety measures in place. The contract with SLM expires in 2023. Jenny Forde, the Cabinet Member for Health & Wellbeing has conducted a district wide survey to discover what facilities are available at present & to seek resident's opinions on what should be provided in future. This includes local & private clubs, gyms etc which are not under the Council's control. A cross party working group will be set up in the new year to discuss the winning of the Council's own centres beyond 2023.

Climate Emergency. I know that some of you attended the webinar run by Chris Crookall-Fallon, the Council's Climate emergency officer. He is keen to engage with the wider community & would be happy to arrange events either vitally or physically when allowed which would be open to residents.

Waste service. I think that this is more or less back to normal, with few missed collections although the volume of waste generated, especially packaging, remains high. I have had an email from a resident to let me know that she has heard from residents who find the new recycling system too complicated & are putting all their recyclables in one box. I will put out a letter in a month or so reminding how to triage their rubbish & why this is important.

Future lockdowns. The next few months are very uncertain. Covid cases are rising in the Cotswolds, & today Stow was very busy with visitors. Officers & members at CDC are operating services as normally as possible, responding to changes in the situation as they occur.

Dilys Neill, Ward District Councillor, Stow, Maugersbury & the Swells