

Planning Committee Report to Annual Parish Meeting 2024

The Planning Committee met monthly throughout 2023-2024 to consider an average 7.4 planning applications at each meeting and make their recommendations to Somerset (Mendip East) Planning. There was one meeting held under delegated authority. Members of the public have attended several meetings, and their views and comments were welcomed.

The Wells City Council Climate Emergency Motion 2019 has ensured the Committee focussed on how a planning application could be negatively by climate changes and where the plans show designs which are positive to the effects of climate.

Whilst most applications were for moderate changes to properties such as adding extensions, loft extensions, windows and porches, there have been some notable applications involving listed buildings such as the Bishops' Palace, the old Deanery, Cathedral School buildings, the Swan and Outline Planning for many repairs/ restorations and change of use in Vicars Close. They were assessed as to whether they met the 8 Material Considerations and decisions taken to recommend Accept or Refuse to the Local Authority Planning were recorded against each decision.

Applications for change of use are always challenging. Vacant commercial properties in the High Street and the lack of affordable housing in the City from Class E (Commercial Business and Service) to Class C3 (house, flats apartments) influenced the committee to approve change of use in this case in commercial buildings adjacent to 25/27 Broad Street. 9 members of the public attended for the application for change of use from Class C3 (Coachhouse) to Class E (14 Office spaces) in 2023/1236/FUL. The committee recommended Refusal. In both cases the outcomes have still not been decided by Somerset Mendip East Planning.

WCC recommended Refusal to 2023/0125/FUL Change of Use from Subway to Kebab House based on the lack of information relating to air extraction and ventilation of the kitchen. This application was referred to the Chair and Vice Chair of the Somerset Planning Committee because the recommendation of the Planning Officer for approval differed from that of Wells City Council. The Decision was made on 24 November 2024 to approve the application- with

conditions made that the extraction system should be tailored to the type of cooking carried out in the proposed restaurant. Wells City Council have not been informed of the outcome by Mendip East Planning.

I have requested feedback from Somerset Planning Authority on decisions which vary from Wells City Council's recommendations, but this is still not happening. Wells City Council will continue to seek feedback improvements.

Planning approved applications for the installation of a 20-metre-high slimline monopole on East Somerset Way and Whiting Way- the committee requested a Full Council review of the Wells City Council 2019 5G Precautionary Principle following the 2nd application, resulting in the removal of the Precautionary Principle based on improved research, and the National Guidelines and requirement to monitor safety following installations.

We received a talk by Somerset Council Tree and Woodland Officer, Bo Walsh on Tree Planning and Policy in August which was attended by 11 members of the public who wished to raise concerns about the lime trees in the Recreation Ground close to the Carlton Mews homes, and an application to remove a hedgerow. Mr Walsh explained the procedures that need to be followed in conservation areas and for tree preservation orders.

The Planning Committee has made 3 public comments on Planning Applications for larger housing developments outside the parish boundary of Wells, which will impact negatively on the services and infrastructure of the City. These comments were considered valid and taken into account in the decisions by the Planning Inspectorate for housing on land off Wookey Hole Rd, and by Somerset Council at New Farm Haybridge.

Wells Planning recommended refusal of application 2023/1275/FUL from the Churchill Retirement Homes for 44 apartments on the Glastonbury Rd for inadequate parking and lack of affordable housing. The outcome decision by Somerset is still outstanding.

Where applications involved a loss of biodiversity, the Planning Committee has taken a proactive approach, suggesting replanting more trees to replace the loss of trees which will be removed in the application. In the case of a recent Retrospective application for the construction of a Bund by Serious

Staging, Wells City Council Planning recommended refusal on grounds of removal of biodiversity without a survey before the works were started.

Future planning applications will necessitate consideration of changes to the environment and the resultant effect on biodiversity. In England, Biodiversity Net Gain is mandatory from 12 February 2024 under [Schedule 7A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 \(as inserted by Schedule 14 of the Environment Act 2021\)](#). Developers must deliver a BNG of 10%. This means a development will result in more or better-quality natural habitat than before development.

The **Wells Neighbourhood Plan** Process was reported on by the Steering Group to Planning through the year. Somerset Council carried out a Consultation Process, we received the Report from the Independent Examiner, and the Referendum passed the vote (1114 votes in favour and 255 against) on 25 January and resulted in the **Wells Neighbourhood Plan** being made by Somerset Council on 14 February 2024. The Planning Committee would like to officially record its thanks to the Chair of the Steering Group, Mr Adrian l'Anson, for his committed and dedicated work, to help Wells City Council achieve a very comprehensive and valuable Neighbourhood Plan.

I would like to end by thanking my fellow committee members for their support and contributions to all the above work we have undertaken. This Committee has to consider the implications resulting from Planning legislation and guidances and as we have seen this year- it is a moving feast!

Cllr D Denis

Chair of Planning & Environment Committee

Feb 2024