

Beyond 'I Don't Like It': Crafting Powerful Responses to Planning Applications in Our Community

When a planning application is submitted that affects our village, it's important to know how to respond effectively. Understanding the planning process, the hierarchy of planning documents, and the role of various committees can help ensure that your voice is heard in the right way.

The Planning Process and Key Documents

In England, the planning process is guided by a hierarchy of documents that decision-makers refer to when assessing an application. These documents ensure that any development fits within a broader vision for the area and meets certain standards.

1. **[National Planning Policy Framework \(NPPF\)](#)**: This is the highest-level document, setting out the government's planning policies for the whole country. It provides guidelines on how sustainable development should be achieved, and all local and neighbourhood plans must align with it.
2. **[Local Plan](#)**: South Cambridgeshire District Council creates the Local Plan, which sets out planning policies and identifies where development should or shouldn't happen over the next few years. It is specific to our district and includes policies on housing, employment, transport, and the environment.
3. **[Neighbourhood Plan](#)**: This is a plan developed by our Parish Council with input from the local community. It allows us to have a say in how our area should develop. Once approved, it becomes part of the statutory development plan, meaning it has legal weight in decision-making.
4. **[Village Design Guide](#)**: While not a statutory document, our Village Design Guide provides additional guidance on the character of our village. It includes details on preferred building materials, styles, and the preservation of local heritage. It is a valuable tool for ensuring that any new development is in keeping with the look and feel of our village.

The Role of Committees

When a planning application is submitted, two main committees are involved in the decision-making process:

- **Parish Council Planning Committee:** Our Parish Council has a Planning Committee that reviews all planning applications affecting the village. This committee makes a *recommendation* to the District Council, either supporting or objecting to the proposal. While the Parish Council doesn't have the final say, its recommendation is an important consideration for the District Council.
- **District Council Planning Committee:** The final decision on a planning application is made by the District Council's Planning Committee. This committee considers the application in light of all relevant planning documents (NPPF, Local Plan, Neighbourhood Plan) and the Parish Council's recommendation, along with all other comments from public, District teams (Conservation, Environment etc) and County Highways.

How to Make a Strong Representation

When commenting on a planning application, it's key to focus on *material planning considerations*. These are the valid reasons that the District Council can consider when deciding whether to approve or reject an application. Material planning considerations can include (but are not limited to):

- Overlooking/loss of privacy
- Loss of daylight/sunlight or overshadowing
- Scale and dominance
- Layout and density of buildings
- Appearance and design of development and materials proposed
- Disabled persons' access
- Highway safety
- Traffic and parking issues
- Drainage and flood risk
- Noise, dust, fumes etc
- Impact on character or appearance of area
- Effect on listed buildings and conservation areas
- Effect on trees and wildlife/nature conservation
- Impact on the community and other services
- Economic impact and sustainability
- Government policy (NPPF)

- Proposals in the Neighbourhood Plan
- Proposals in the Local Plan
- Previous planning decisions (including appeal decisions)

Comments like "I don't like it" or "I don't trust the applicants" are *not* material planning considerations. Here are some others that are also not valid grounds for objection, however strongly you feel:

- Who the applicant is/the applicant's background
- Loss of views
- Loss of property value
- Loss of trade or increased competition
- Strength or volume of local opposition
- Construction noise/disturbance during development
- Fears of damage to property
- Maintenance of property
- Boundary disputes, covenants or other property rights
- Rights of way
- Personal circumstances are generally not a material planning consideration

Conclusion

Responding to a planning application is an opportunity to help shape the future of our village. By understanding the planning process, referencing the right documents, and focusing on material planning considerations, you can ensure that your feedback is both relevant and impactful. If in doubt, the Parish Council Planning Committee is always a good place to seek advice or clarification.

Let's work together to ensure that any development in our village respects its unique character and meets the needs of our community.