**Blewbury Parish Council (BPC): Annual Planning Report, May 2024**

Planning in Blewbury

There have been 26 applications for planning permission or listed building consent since the last Annual Planning Report in April 2023 (compared to 28 applications in the previous year). four applications are awaiting determination by the local authority. All applications determined during the year were granted by the LPA, apart from one, which is now the subject of an appeal.

BPC assesses planning applications primarily by email. Contentious applications are then discussed and agreed at monthly council meetings. Note that BPC is only a consultee: we do not make planning decisions.

BPC scrutinises applications on the basis of the policies in the village’s Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP), along with the Vale’s planning policies. If an application conforms to both the NDP and the Vale’s local plan policies, ‘material considerations’ are the only other means we may use to object to an application. Planning law does not define material considerations – they are derived from case law, but can include:

* Overlooking and loss of privacy
* Overshadowing and loss of light
* Local circumstances (local knowledge from the PC is key here)
* History of a site e.g. if contaminated
* Local knowledge of drainage or other possible problems with services
* Noise, disturbance, smells
* Traffic and highway issues
* Scale of development
* Over-dominance
* Public view across the land
* Loss of important open spaces
* Landscaping
* Design, appearance, layout and materials
* Retention of important physical features
* Conservation of buildings etc.
* Impact on surroundings e.g. whether it affects the character or an area
* Emerging planning policy, depending on what stage it’s at.

They cannot include:

* Morals or motives of the developer
* Effect on the value of a property
* Private property rights such as boundary or access disputes
* Possible future development not included in the application
* Comparison with other previously approved schemes on the site
* Matters covered by laws such as alcohol or gaming licences, or Building Regs.

Those interested in planning applications should first of all consult the Vale’s website\*.  BPC encourages parishioners to email the Vale’s planning office, either in support of or against an application – the more voices that are heard, the better.

\*https://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/vale-of-white-horse-district-council/planning-and-development/

The presumption in favour of ‘sustainable development’ remains enshrined in the National Planning Policy Framework – this means that the job of planners at the Vale is to enable (rather than block) planning applications that meet the criteria.

Blewbury’s Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP)

The PC was very sorry to hear of the recent death of Eric Eisenhandler, who helped to research and write the village NDP over the course of two long years. The document was adopted in November 2016, after much painstaking copy-editing, formatting and proofreading by Eric. It is a legal document which the Vale’s development management officers must take into account when making planning decisions, and is an incredibly helpful, evidence-based resource that is often cited by the PC in planning objections or comments. This fact alone is testament to the importance of Eric’s contribution to the village, although of course he was instrumental to the success of many Blewbury initiatives over the years.

The NDP was adopted in November 2016 and the PC plans to start a review of the NDP when the Vale/SODC’s joint local plan is adopted. Various omissions and a loophole relating to the definition of agricultural buildings have come to light in the years since the NDP was made. New policies could relate to the following broad subjects:

* climate change
* discouraging loss of gardens to encourage biodiversity and minimise flooding
* providing greater protection for green lungs within the village
* energy saving and retro-fitting measures for old buildings
* the lifecycle/environmental cost of materials used in new developments

Conservation Area Appraisal

The PC voted to ratify the Blewbury’s new conservation area appraisal in February this year. It is currently going through the final processes of being formally adopted by the Vale. The PC will be able to use this new, evidence-based document to protect and enhance the conservation area, including its green spaces.

Planning in the Vale of White Horse DC

South Oxfordshire DC and the Vale are working together on a joint local plan which will apply beyond 2031 (when the Vale’s current local plan expires). The PC agreed a comprehensive response to the latest consultation from Vale/SODC on proposed policies late last year.

The Vale’s published five-year housing land supply position, as of December 2023, is 6.56 years, which provides a more comfortable buffer than in recent years.

Plans for Didcot Garden Town carry on developing slowly – we continue to monitor these.

The Oxfordshire Growth Deal and the Joint Strategic Spatial Plan (JSSP) 2050

The former *Oxfordshire Growth Board* is now *The Future Oxfordshire Partnership (FOP)*. This body was responsible for delivering the JSSP for the whole county, but this venture collapsed after the county’s six local authorities failed to agree on housing allocation. According to its website, the FOP helps oversee ‘projects that the councils of Oxfordshire are seeking to deliver collaboratively in the fields of economic development and strategic planning’ (including the City Deal, Housing and Growth Deal, Housing Infrastructure Fund and the Oxfordshire Rail Connectivity Study). The FOP, which meets six times a year, also represents Oxfordshire on matters of regional interest.

Lydia Inglis, Blewbury Parish Council