



THE FRIENDS OF ABINGDON CIVIC SOCIETY

Members' Bulletin – January 2021: Planning Report

Despite Covid there has been a steady flow of planning applications over the last few months. We can't look at everything so tend to concentrate on the larger applications such as the new developments in North Abingdon and proposals in the conservation areas. However, we have noted an increase in 'garden grabbing' and conversion of shops and offices in the town centre into very small flats with limited or no external facilities. This is likely to increase substantially under recent and proposed further changes in planning law. The Civic Society – and many other bodies - responded to the recent Planning White Paper, pointing out the inadequacy of and the lack of evidence for many of the proposals, which represent a drastic diminution in the scope for local people, even elected representatives, to influence planning decisions.

The most notable applications recently are as follows.

Northcourt: land adjacent to the Abingdon United Football Ground. As reported previously, the application to build a block of nine flats was refused by the Vale and went to an appeal hearing early in 2020. We (represented by Richard Tamplin) made strong representations, as did a group of local residents, but the hearing was not completed and the reconvened date fell foul of Covid. However, we have now heard that it is to go ahead (virtually) on 8 March. We will be there.

Abingdon School: Crescent House and Austin House (Waste Court). Amended applications for these two boarding houses have been submitted but they did not address any of our comments with respect to the deleterious effect on the Albert Park Conservation Area. We have objected again to both proposals and await developments.

North Abingdon developments

Despite our objections to the development on the corner of **Wootton Road and Dunmore Road (King's Gate)** on the grounds of poor design, traffic problems, and noise and pollution from the A34, permission was granted and work has now started. We had a small success in that an application from the developers to delay providing safe access to the site until after the first 30 houses were occupied was withdrawn after we and others objected.

After a long silence the application for the development **North of Dunmore Road** between Tilsley Park and Oxford Road has now been submitted. We are still looking at this, but an immediate concern is the poor standard of design, the predominance

of larger (and less “affordable”) homes and the lack of information about the service centre and the primary school which were promised in the community consultation.

The supermarket chain Aldi contacted the Civic Society and others for our comments on a proposed store in the north corner of the **Circus Field**. We were cautiously supportive as it will provide local shopping facilities for both the new developments and other nearby housing, but would want to be sure that appropriate traffic arrangements are in place. However, we are concerned that the Council is still keen to have housing on the remainder of the site, despite its inappropriate location. The planning application has just come in: we will be looking closely at it.

Conservation Areas

Roger Thomas has been closely involved in the Town Council-led appraisal of the Albert Park Conservation Area. The draft has now been submitted to VWHDC, who will in due course launch the required public consultation.

We have kept a close eye on applications within the Town Centre Conservation Area, and have commented on several proposals involving conversions of shops to flats in both listed and unlisted buildings. A particularly poor example was the conversion of 40 Bath Street (Eileen’s dress shop) to a one-bedroom flat, which was approved by VWHDC.

Garden grabbing

Garden grabbing, or ‘gentle densification’ as it is defined in the Planning White Paper, has increased, particularly in some of the old Harwell Estates which do not have the protected status of conservation areas. Despite our best efforts, we have not been successful in preventing this, and fear that now precedents have been set it will be difficult to deal with in the future.

Our submissions in relation to the named applications above can be found on the Vale website <http://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/services-and-advice/planning-and-building/find-application>

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