

Chairman's Report. July 2015

One of the most contentious issues we are asked to deal with as a Parish Council tends to be Planning Applications as these can have a huge impact on the people involved. The amount of influence we are able to have on them will soon increase as we have completed the initial research and consultation with our residents via a questionnaire and this year those results will be used to draw up a Neighbourhood Plan which will carry much greater weight with the Planning Authority in the shape of Cornwall Council.

The way we consider applications is changing too. With the stringent budget cuts that they are facing at Cornwall Council the decision has been made that no longer will all the documents and large scale plans be sent to Parish Councils free of charge; instead we must access them via the Planning Portal and print them off ourselves. This change is being challenged due to the extra workload and expense it is creating at a Parish Council level, but whether that challenge is successful remains to be seen.

Thankfully we are actually ahead of the game on this as we had taken the decision earlier this year to modernise our practices and procedures. We have bought a projector and with the use of screens instead of all huddling around a single plan it is displayed in a format large enough and clear enough for all to view. It is early days, but this seems to work well and also gives us the facility to view photographs taken on site visits or key documents provided by applicants or objectors.

These changes are a definite improvement and will make our job easier which is to be welcomed. They do not however absolve us all from the responsibility of ensuring we understand all aspects and both viewpoints in cases where there is a contentious application. We do ourselves no favours in the eyes of the public if we give the impression that the first time we have looked at an application is when it is being discussed in Council. Nor do we repay the public's faith in us if we are barely quorate at meetings.

I have had members of our parish questioning me about both these issues this month; asking if our meetings are even legal when we have less than half of Councillors present? They are and I explain that it is sometimes necessary for Councillors to miss a number of meetings due to health or personal issues, but due to the quality of their contribution when they are present it has been our view that such absences may be authorised so that those Councillors may return when circumstances allow. They also asked in relation to one recent Planning Application, when members had been taken time to view plans by the applicant on site whether those members had also taken a similar amount of time and effort to read their objections and to view the site from their viewpoint prior to the meeting?

We are never going to please all of the people all of the time, but as long as we do our best and are seen to be conscientious and fair in our deliberations I am sure we will continue to enjoy support from the people who we are here to serve.