Article for the Chinnor Pump – January 2022

Firstly we wish you all a prosperous and Happy 2022.

He year has started off with our being informed that another developer is trying to bring forward a new 50 plus homes site on the edge of the Village. This is the same site as that which was refused at appeal for Cala Homes on Crowell Road by Planning Inspector Barton a couple of years ago.

Lynn may not necessarily agree with me on all of my points, but we are united in taking the view that this should be refused again.

I find it extraordinary that the developer is asking the Planning Inspectorate to agree this application, ignoring our Planning Officers’ advice, the statement from Thames Water that they cannot cope with the existing level of sewage let alone addition flow, the comments and reasons given by Inspector Barton in his refusal, the provisions of the newly up-dated Chinnor Neighbourhood Plan (NDP) and our Parish Council’s comments, and the provisions of the new but long delayed Local Plan. We must also remember that our NDP means that we as a community benefit from a reduction in the Land Supply Requirement to 3 years.

As far as I can see, the developer is trying to use a ‘loop hole’ for provisioning which says that ‘development for age restricted dwellings (for people aged 55 and over), may be allowed.’ The government’s objective with this back in 2012 was to provide homes for the elderly to ‘down-size’ and free up larger family homes for younger people. Personally, I view the restriction to 55 years old as a nonsense, given that the State Pension age for most is now 66 and being raised in the near future. It should be at 70 years old. For this purpose, if you agree with me, do let John Howell MP and Secretary of State Michael Gove know what you think. This is particularly important as the Secretary of State is presently reviewing the Planning Laws!

Another ‘issue’ for me is the way that communities are expected to produce NDPs which are supposed to represent the Community. They are written by people who are not experts but who do know the community. The obscenity for me is that developers, who’s only real interest is profit, are allowed to employ very highly qualitied lawyers to use legal technicalities to overturn the NDP provisions. In the Planning Appeal enquiries that I have attended, I have really resented listening to these lawyers telling the Inspector what the community really meant, which is as far from the reality as Postman Pat is from the real Royal Mail. On top of this, the appeals can cost the Council upwards of £100,000, and let’s be clear, it’s your money as tax payers that is being drained by these appeals. I suspect that the developers, using their highly expert lawyers and accountants, are able to off-set their costs against tax, so no real cost to them. We, the tax payer, get to meet that cost too. Perhaps you might like to mention that in your letters to Messrs Howelll and Gove as well.

On the subject of sewage pollution, some of you may be aware that as Chair Of Scrutiny I am setting up a Task and Finish Group to see what we as a District Council can do to try and alleviate this issue. Over the build up to Christmas, it became clear to me that this issue also affects our sister council, the Vale of White Horse and I have decided to make it a joint group with three councillors from each authority on the Group. One of SODc’s representatives on the Group is our own Cllr Lynn Lloyd. This is not going to be a quick piece of work, and nor will the group be able to look into individual cases. Again it affronts me that the developers, like Taylor Wimpey, Bellway and Perssimon to name a few, take massive bonuses whilst our residents are left to mop up the effluent, and don’t get me started on the ‘experts’ advice that ‘it will be all right!’

Right, enough ranting.

Something positive. Some of you may know that I have a heart condition that is waiting ablation treatment. (No, don’t ask what that is!) Last year whilst doing my daily socially distanced exercise of walking round the village square, I realised that the high point is St Andrew’s Church where I had to stop to catch my breath, wheezing and leaning on the grave yard wall. Lynn and I discussed this and it occurred to us that it might be a good place for a public bench, perhaps on the corner of Church Road and Church Lane.

So next time we were in the Parish Office we mentioned it to Liz who agreed it was an interesting idea and took it to the Parish Council for their views. In short they agreed and applied for a Grant for a bench to mark the Queen’s Jubilee next year and Lynn and I were pleased to agree this just before Christmas. So, thanks to Liz and the Council for supporting the suggestion and taking it forward.

I will stop here as I am sure that the Editor is already aghast at the length of this submission. Thank you Linda and Joanie for your support in publishing our articles!

Ian White. SODC Councillor.