

Planning report for Datchet Parish Council

25th April 2022

Annual public meeting to be held at Datchet Village Hall at 7pm

Discussion Points:

- 1) How local planning works and how can public get involved with an application:
 - a). A resident can respond to any planning application with weighted planning arguments for or against any application and that will count as a single resident or public comment.
 - b). The local Parish Council can respond to any planning application with weighted arguments for or against any application and that will count as a single Parish Council comment.
 - c). Enforcement – Anyone can write to the Local Borough Council to register or report an enforcement matter or one that they feel should be an enforcement matter and the Local Borough Council will register this report and manage this process at all stages.

At all stages of a planning application, an effective and professional Local Borough Council planning team should be able to oversee all the needs within planning law for and on behalf of residents and local Parish Council needs. Unfortunately, we do not currently have that effective support from our Local Borough Council as reported at a recent RBWM Parish Council meeting (held in March 2022). This is due to the ongoing budget cuts to experienced and senior Planning staff and a toxic working environment within the Local Borough Council that reduces the ability of the organisation to attract capable professionals to the planning department. This is not a Datchet Parish Council opinion, but one stated by a recent CIPFA report in 2020 and a subsequent Peer Review report in late 2022 that both highlighted these conditions affecting the Local Borough Council

ability to carry out its required duties to the residents of RBWM. We the Datchet Parish Council Planning members try to navigate around these obstacles on a day-to-day basis as a volunteer organisation on behalf of residents and report recommendations on local planning applications in an unbiased, fair basis, adding local knowledge and residents' views that are placed at the Parish Councils door. However, it is our duty to inform residents of the current position of the Local Borough Council and the impact it is having or will have on the future of Datchet.

- 2) Datchet Parish Council's hands are tied on nearly all local planning matters since the introduction of the latest NPPF (National Planning Policy Framework) and Borough's local Plan (BLP) were adopted – The current Borough's local Plan (BLP) is not in the interests of Datchet residents in my opinion as lead member for planning but currently it is adopted and we are being faced with ongoing pressures on infrastructure, traffic, pollution, over development of our village and a lack of concern for residents safety, health or risk to homes and businesses from the risk of flooding in the future.
- 3) The adopted Datchet Design Guide (DDG) has helped us report on planning applications and has added some weighted arguments to maintain our village's character, as we endeavour to support residents, but we are in the hands of RBWM planning officers as to the outcome of any planning application. RBWM can overrule the Datchet Design Guide (DDG) or any comments made by residents or Parishes but we hope to see improvements in the weighted arguments for Datchet residents in the future on local planning matters after the introduction of the Localism Act in 2011 but currently this is in reverse (see notes above)
- 4) We are working on the Datchet Neighbourhood Plan as a DPC document with the local DNP steering group which we hope may go some way to support our local planning need, but our hands

appear tied again as we are being pushed to work within the BLP & the NPPF, which do not support our village needs directly or in fact contradict our local needs. The DNP is in public consultation until 15th May, so we ask the public to raise issues that they feel are important to them, but the DPC would like to see more weight added to the DNP and DDG in all planning matters with more weight added to residents' concerns.

- 5) To address the lack of local input into any planning decisions we are trying to work closer with RBWM to find a way to give Datchet Parish Council more input of a local nature where the interests of the community are considered and not ignored as is the current situation. We accept we are not skilled planning specialists, but we can supply local input in many ways for residents that would support any planning application or protect residents when they have weighted planning arguments on any application.

- 6) We have a meeting set up in May to discuss with the leading officers of the Borough council to raise our concerns. Following this meeting we will be discussing with other parish Councils to collaborate on getting more input into local planning decisions. This meeting was suggested by me as Lead member for Planning to the Leader and Managing Director of the Local Borough Council on the basis that the planning department at RBWM is mentioned on numerous occasions as "not being fit for purpose" as they lack capacity and experienced officers. Additionally, they are struggling to find new staff to support enforcement and experienced planning departments. So, we are seeing how parishes can support the Local Borough Council planning team rather than being overlooked and Parishes can become part of the team rather than just a single weighted local input the same as a resident in planning matters. I am confident all Parishes can see local planning matters being devolved to them in the future to support local applications and residents with more weight. At the end of the day the Parish Councils' are the main point of contact

as a local authority and should not be overlooked as key part of the resident facing element of a Local Borough Council.

- 7) We have two choices on local planning at present, we either challenge how things are currently being managed from local and national levels or we shut up and lose our local identity and be pushed into accepting an “anything goes” planning policy, which we think is unacceptable for Datchet residents’ and we wish to support residents’ needs.
- 8) All current documents the adopted DDG and the DNP do not support our concerns on the BLP or NPPF as they are not allowed to write local policy that conflicts with more weighted policy from Borough or National levels. We will continue to put our village needs first but we have our hands tied at present.

All members at the Parish Council are working hard to represent residents needs within a challenging environment as outlined by this report to residents. We encourage any residents to come forward and help us keep and improve the quality of life for all the community of Datchet.