

## SPRING PLANNING REPORT

We were quite busy at the end of last year with two controversial items. The first was the consultation on the Government's proposal on **Relaxation of Planning Permission Requirements**'. Bernard Wainwright has kindly highlighted our response as follows:

The Department of Communities & Local Government (DCLG) recently consulted on ministerial proposals to relax the need for planning permission for certain extensions to homes and businesses. Under the Town and Country Planning Acts, extensions to houses have not needed planning permission if they are no more than three metres deep in the case of semi-detached or terraced properties or four metres for detached properties – such allowances are known as “permitted development rights”. Ministers now propose that, for three years, these rights should be extended to allow the depth of extensions to be doubled without permission. Related relaxations would apply to offices and certain business premises. The purposes of these relaxations are to help kick start local building activities while also reducing the costs involved in making and processing applications.

On behalf of the Hatch End Association, we responded to the DCLG consultation, setting out our objections to the main features of the proposal. These objections were made in the light of HEA's experience over 30 years or more of reviewing local planning applications, often numbering nearly 100 a year, by householders and businesses. During this time we have seen little evidence of demand for extensions large enough to justify doubling the permitted development rights – householders' applications rarely seek more than an extra metre if that on top of the current limit. Moreover, no evidence was produced in the consultation of any significant demand for larger extensions. The only figures quoted were merely theoretical assumptions for illustrative purposes.

The proposals gave no indication of ministerial awareness or conception of the un-neighbourly effect of larger extensions on neighbours' properties. For example, in terraces, often with small gardens, extensions of six metres will be prominent; and where a property has such an extension on both sides the boxing-in effect on the “middle” house and its amenity space will be overwhelming. At the other extreme, local residents living in a detached house assure us that they will not welcome seeing across their garden fences or from a rear window eight metre extensions appearing at will.

In our view, the current limitations strike the right balance, while the new proposals fail to protect the public good, will reduce the quality of housing, change the character of areas and erode standards of living and amenity for occupiers. Sometimes the proposals may produce added drainage problems or put biodiversity at risk. Sometimes an applicant may play safe by requesting a so-called “certificate of lawful development”, thereby substituting an alternative documentation which will be more expensive for local authorities because not fully self-financing.

The proposed three-year period is in effect a trial period, perhaps implying uncertainty about positive effects, while guaranteeing an impact on local councils' enforcement activity and future planning decisions. With a three-year period of relaxation of present rules, the contradictions between “before” and “after” will be horrendous and appeals and legal arguments will be costly for everyone involved. With real or apparent differences in treatment, considerable bad feeling may be created and fester between neighbours and between businesses and their local community. The public will have to put up with any

consequent change of policy after three years with its inherent concerns about precedent and its effect on local authority resources; nor would it make a poor policy better to extend it indefinitely.

A number of relaxations of a roughly similar nature and intent were proposed for many business premises, on which corresponding comments were made where appropriate.

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The second item concerned Morrisons' application to add a single deck over part of their car park to provide extra parking as they already have permission to extend their retail floor-space to the railway boundary. They need extra spaces to replace those lost by the new development and to meet any demand associated with a larger store.

In December their consultants put on a four-hour public display of images of their proposal in the Arts Centre. Eighty people attended including our Chairman, Julian Maw, councillor Jean Lammiman and me. Eighteen people filled in forms and probably sent objections to the Planning Department. The majority of objections come from the high rise flats of Dove Park. One objector describes the deck as "hideous" but we like to be more constructive and say that the structure is "raw" and needs some cladding. We have some sympathy with Dove Park over their loss of views and boundary trees but some of their other complaints about noise and pollution are hard to justify as they are some distance away with the ambient noise of the railway and traffic on the bridge in between them and the deck. Unfortunately, Morrisons find themselves on a restricted site with the green belt to the south, the railway to the west, the Arts Centre to the east and finally the Uxbridge Road to the north.

In addition to the cladding, we have asked for a tree screen, preferably evergreens, round the perimeter of the site and sensitive lighting to overcome objections about light pollution. Morrisons are about to put in revised plans that address these requests and we understand the deck will be locked after trading hours. We shall insist that in any planning consent, there must be a condition to allow dual parking arrangements with the Arts Centre to continue.

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At the end of November, the Chairman and I went to a planning committee meeting at the Civic Centre in support of residents in Cedar Drive who were objecting to the conversion of a family home into two self-contained flats with only one parking space. Unfortunately, the application was granted, but not unanimously. Councillors in support were worried that if it was refused and went to appeal it could be allowed at cost to the Council.

On the other hand, a retrospective application for a boundary fence on the corner at 8 Altham Road was refused by the Council early this year because of its "excessive height". The Council had advised a fence of 1.3m after a previous application was refused for a 1.9m boundary fence. The new fence is 1.5m (1.2m solid fence plus 0.3m of trellis) and it is not over-powering. Unusually, we supported this application and we hope it is successful if it goes to appeal. Normally we do not support applications as we only have the manpower to object to plans or request modifications to plans.

Finally, at Copse Farm, in Brookshill Drive, the locally listed barn continues to deteriorate and the Council have yet to find legislation that requires the owner to stop the rot!

## **PLANNING REPORT FOR MEETING MONDAY 25 MARCH 2013**

Applications in hand and \*\* = those to be commented on.

- Tall Trees Nugent's Park: locally listed: S/S side to rear extension
- 57 Evelyn Drive CA:S/S rear extension
- 11 Park View; single & 2 storey side to rear extension
- 6 Royston Park Road: S/S rear extension
- 38 The Lawns: Single and 2storey side, S/S rear extensions
- 3 Wellington Avenue: Single & 2 storey side & S/S rear extensions
- 504 Uxbridge Road: re-submitted for demolition of garage, 2 storey side extension etc
- Chantry Works, Chantry Road: Change of use from warehouse to dwelling house and construction of new floor
- \*\*Ask 246-248 Uxbridge Road: Al fresco dining to rear of locally listing building
- \*\* Morrison's Supermarket: Revisions to proposal for decked car parking
- \*\* Greenacres, Oxhey Lane, Herts GB: Traveller's application for 12 caravans and outbuilding, hard standing etc re-submitted.
- \*\* Broadfields, Headstone Lane GB: Playing field to be used for 74 touring caravans, ancillary buildings and hard-standing

### **Recent Decisions:**

- 36 Wellington Road (The Haven) – illuminated sign on frontage – granted
- 59 The Avenue - demolition of garage and plan for new garage – granted
- 11 Colburn Avenue – extensions – granted
- 109 Rowlands – extensions – granted
- 308 Uxbridge Road (Greek restaurant ) - Use of frontage for tables and chairs - granted
- \*\* Unit 3 Leeway Close Redevelopment to provide 4 flats over 3 units - refused
- \*\* 49 St Thomas Drive Single & 2 storey side ext; single & 2 storey rear ext - refused
- 10 Milne Field various extensions - refused.

### **Consultation from 21 March – 3 May:**

Post Hearing Main Modifications on:

- Harrow & Wealdstone Area Action Plan Development Document
- Development Management Policies Development Plan Document
- Site Allocations Development Plan Document

AS 21.3.13

S/S = single storey: GB Green Belt: CA = Conservation Area.