

THE PLANNING ADVISORY GROUP (PAG)

Report to the Annual Parish Meeting
10.05.23

The Planning Advisory Group was formed in 2014 and is appointed by Walberswick Parish Council to vet and report on planning applications relating to the Village. The Parish Council uses the reports at its discretion in responding to the Local Planning Authority on behalf of the village.

PAG comprises professionals with experience of architecture and planning. Its members are Paul Bradley (who also Chairs the group), Alan Gomm, Katherine Gomm, John Nichols and Bill Ungless. Kay Ungless acts as the group's administrator and point of contact between the group and Walberswick Parish Council.

The Group provides comment regarding full planning applications, amendments to proposals and Variations of Condition applications. Since our report last May, we have reported on 20 applications in the past 12 months. Of these applications one remains undecided, four were withdrawn and the rest were approved by ESC – there were no refusals. For comparison, it was the opinion of PAG (supported by WPC) that 8 applications were recommended for approval, 1 should be withdrawn and 11 were recommended for refusal.

In addition to providing planning reports, the group reviews and comments on changes to planning related policies proposed by East Suffolk Council that potentially affect the village. In the past 12 months we have commented on 3 separate policy documents, namely the ***Development in Coastal Area Supplementary Planning Document*** and the ***Housing in Clusters and Small Scale Residential Development in the Countryside Supplementary Planning Document***. Most recently we reviewed and commented on the revised ***Southwold Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan***, which proposes boundary changes affecting the Ferry Road Car Park. We are hopeful the revised Appraisal resolves the unusual issue of part of Walberswick being in the Southwold Conservation Area, and the anomaly that the car park has planning restrictions relating to permitted development that do not apply to the rest of the village.

In an attempt to enhance communication and relations with the Planning Department at East Suffolk Council, a meeting was held during September 2022 between John Nichols and myself, Josie Bassinette (Walberswick Parish Council), Philip Ridley (Head of Planning and Coastal Management at ESC) and Councillor David Ritchie (Cabinet Member with responsibility for Planning and Coastal Management at ESC). The meeting was helpful in several ways; it increased ESC's understanding of how WPC and PAG operate, and we were able to highlight examples of harm being caused to the Conservation Area. The primary outcome of the meeting was the opportunity to convey that Walberswick has an important but fragile quality, and that its residents care about the planning decisions that shape, and are altering, the appearance of the village.

To conclude, it should be stated that the aim of the PAG is not to block all development, but rather to carefully assess proposed change against national planning policy and adopted local plans, policies and statutory designations. In doing so we accept that Planning Officers generally know their own policies, but also that they do not always possess in-depth awareness of the subtle local qualities that comprise the unique and valued character of this village. In our reports we attempt to convey how a proposal, irrespective of size, may affect small scale change; such as reducing the quality of a valued view, the closing of a gap in a streetscape, or the impact of inappropriate materials used in a sensitive setting – we feel this is particularly important as the accumulative effect of incremental change is the erosion of the character and quality of the built and natural environment.

Paul Bradley
Chairman, Planning Advisory Group