

PLANNING & ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE
REPORT TO ANNUAL PARISH MEETING – 21st APRIL 2008

I am gratefully indebted to all the members, 5 Parish Councillors and four co-opted, of the Committee for their efforts over the last 12 months. We are very fortunate to have such a wide range of experience and expertise in the village.

Over the past 12 months the Committee has considered 32 applications (summary attached), although it is interesting to note that only two new applications have been received since early December, perhaps a reflection of the current financial situation. Of the application considered the great majority were supported with only 5 being opposed. The objections made were either on the grounds of unsuitability for the site and impact on neighbouring properties and/or on a detrimental effect on the Green Belt, Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty or the Bathford Conservation Area. In the main the Committee's views were in accord with those of the BaNES planners but we are concerned that in a very few cases little regard appears to have been taken of local views and objections. We were more than a little disturbed with the outcome of the concerns we raised over the activity at the site known as 'Lavington's Yard', where an untidy but well concealed site has been turned into a much tidier but highly intrusive and visible eyesore at the entrance to the village, with the apparent blessing of BaNES planners.

Somer Housing has resurrected their plans for 3 new houses on Mountain Wood and the build is well advanced. The houses should be ready for occupation by the autumn, hopefully by those with a strong link to the village. Somer Housing are also looking at the large garage site at the lower end of Mountain Wood with a view to providing a limited number of garages and a larger hard standing parking area.

Plans are quite well advanced for the re-development of the former 'Tyndale' site. Future Heritage, a local development firm, gave an initial presentation to the Planning Committee in the autumn and held an exhibition of their proposed development in February, which was attended by well over 50 interested parties from the village. Comments on the design were on the whole favourable although the comment by one individual that 'the last thing we need in the village is yet more middle class housing' was a telling one. However, given the cost of the site, it is unrealistic to expect 'affordable housing' to be built there.

The eastern Park and Ride saga has continued to rumble on, and a number of alternative sites are now being actively considered. Thankfully the adoption of the Lambridge site is looking much less certain than formerly. Through one of the co-opted members of the Planning Committee we continue to liaise with the neighbouring Parish Councils on this matter.

We have been actively concerned in challenging the issues raised by the future development of the Bath area as, under the Regional Spatial Strategy, some 18 500 new houses are being proposed for the BaNES area, including, most worryingly, 1500 in the Green Belt to the south-west of the city. We have strongly supported the affected Parishes, as if one Green Belt area is breached it is highly likely that other areas, possibly on the eastern side of the city, may be at risk in the future.

We have also objected to proposed changes to the way BaNES deals with planning applications, which would have resulted in the Officers being responsible for virtually all decisions unless there was an objection from the Ward Councillor, who would then have been required to attend the resultant Planning Committee meeting. This would, in effect, have sidelined the input of Parish Councils, as well as any local objections. I am pleased to report that following representations from Bathford and a number of other Parish Councils the proposal has been dropped.

Cllr Hugh Baker – Chair, Planning and Environment Committee.