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To: chris.borg@nalc.gov.uk

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Subject: CONSULTATION - Planning 'model design code'

Dear Mr Borg

Westhorpe Parish Council would like to make the following comments as their response to this Consultation.

Q1 - Yes

Q2 - Yes

Q3 - Yes

Q4 - the preferred option in Q4 is the first option: 'where they relate to change of use to residential, be limited to situations where this is essential to avoid wholly unacceptable adverse impacts.'

Q5 - Yes

Q6 - Yes

Q7 - Yes

Q8 - Yes

Q9 - Yes

Q10 - Yes

Q11 - Yes

Q12 - Yes

Q13 - Yes

No Question 14

Q15 - Westhorpe Parish Council broadly supports the National Model Design Code.

Q16: Generally the Consultation seems to apply to the bigger picture and collectively they broaden the opportunity for Planning officers to approve proposed developments rather than them being accountable in applying the 3 tests (social, economical and environmental) of sustainable development. In essence the bigger the goal, the easier it is to score. There is a lot more wriggle room for trade-offs and therefore it is easier to presume approval.

- Each government in power vows to simplify the planning system. In fact the opposite happens. It becomes a more lengthy beaurocratic process and always seems behind events, so that this opens the door for appeals because Local Plans always seem to be under review and not up to date.
- All planning departments are under resourced and cannot keep up to date and meet targets.
- The standard of Councillor Development Control comments at planning meetings need drastically raising as many Councillors do not appear to understand the planning system.
- The current government proposed a little while ago a shake up of the planning system which, on the face of it, was a system which would grant approval in principle in advance for areas of land. This would then speed up the process and applicants would have to then just submit details to gain a speedier consent.
- Totally separately was the Building Better Building Beautiful Report. The Parish Council is aware this caused controversy as everyone's view of beauty is different.

There is a problem across the country with poor quality designed development of all types. The recent change of use classes has made that easier unfortunately. Planning Officers are not qualified to comment on design although this does not stop them offering comments. Many local authorities already make use of design panels where a scheme has to be presented before planning application. There used to be a quango organisation called CABE (Commission for the Built Environment) set up by the government which appeared to work well across the country, but this no longer exists. This would appear to be the same, but presented as a new initiative.

Any self respecting architect should follow the guidelines for design as set out in the consultation review without needing a design code. However, there are poor architects and many planning applications are not done by architects. Local Design Codes could work, but the concern is that they could become a prescriptive "pattern book" which developers follow slavishly to achieve a consent quickly instead of going thoroughly through the design process and understanding the site and the community.

Local design codes of course will require more community engagement. The danger in this process is how to achieve meaningful engagement and avoiding nimbyism. People are always very active in objecting to applications, but it may be more difficult to obtain constructive comments to create local design codes and make better planning applications if the community do not want development at all!

Westhorpe Parish Council trusts these comments will be carefully considered.

Kind regards

Mrs Julia Dunicliffe
Westhorpe Parish Clerk
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