



**LIDDINGTON PARISH COUNCIL**

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Ms V Yull  
Committee Officer  
Democratic Services  
SBC

10<sup>th</sup> January 2019

Dear Vicki

Your e-mail dated 14 December 2018 was considered by this Council at its January meeting.

I have now been instructed to write to you, as suggested, with our comments on the Borough Council's Codes and Protocols.

1. Turning first to the Local Code of Corporate Governance, we see:

*"2.2 Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement.....*

*Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting, and audit, to deliver effective accountability."*

*"3.6 The Council is committed to increasing public involvement in decision making and devolving power to individuals and local organisations. We will seek and respond to the views of stakeholders and the community. The Council will do this by.....*

- *Implementing the Council's Consultation Policy and utilising an appropriate range of consultation methods.*
- *Making use of local forums at ward, parish, and neighbourhood level to maintain communication with all the Borough's communities and other stakeholders".*

*"3.13 Ensure that Members make decisions in an open and transparent way....."*

(Pausing at this point, it should be mentioned that despite this clear and unambiguous wording, the Locality Meetings which encouraged useful dialogue have been abandoned by your Council, and further, that the Borough-Parish Liaison Meetings seem to have become less frequent.)

2. Looking now at the Members Planning Code of Good Practice (which states it was reviewed one year ago), and referring to paragraphs 8 and 10, we find:

*"8..... Don't allow documents to be circulated at Committee meetings which have not previously been submitted to the committee as all parties may not have time to react to the submissions, and you may not be able to give proper consideration to the matter." .....*

*"10.....If you feel there is insufficient time to digest new information or there is simply insufficient information before you, request that further information. If necessary, defer or refuse*

I have quoted the above paragraphs in view of what follows. I turn now to recent examples of how your Council's high aspirations have not been followed in practice. Relevant officers of the Borough are aware that for the last few years there have been a number of large-scale planning applications affecting this Parish and surrounding areas.

On 10 April 2018 the Planning Committee was due to deal with an application for additional houses, over and above the maximum numbers already agreed, at the Badbury Park development. This development has caused significant increase in traffic on our village roads. Prior to the Planning Meeting our Councillors considered the draft conditions proposed to be attached to the planning consent, if the Committee was minded to grant permission. They were reasonably satisfied with protection to be afforded by draft conditions relating to the roads, and one of our Councillors, Adrian Moore, attended the Committee Meeting to observe the discussion. However, when the Planning Officer presented her report, she stated that the Highways Agency had agreed with the applicant that the proposed conditions could be relaxed upon a promise to pay the Borough Council a contribution towards the road improvements. Apparently, this had been notified to the Planning Department at 1645 hours that day, the meeting starting at 1800. Cllr. Moore attempted to make representations about this *volte-face* but was prevented from speaking by the Chair of the meeting. The way in which our Councillor was treated was taken up with your Council at the time and that aspect is now closed. The purpose of mentioning it now is to give an example of how your Council is not following its own code of conduct. No-one else had any chance to say anything about this significant last minute amendment.

Unfortunately, something similar happened recently. The Planning Meeting on 11<sup>th</sup> December had agenda items for two applications affecting our Parish - for a new phase of a further 300 homes adjacent to Badbury Park, and a separate application for 70 homes on a constricted site in the Parish. I notified the Committee Clerk that a representative from Liddington wished to address the meeting, and Cllr. Moore and our Chairman, Gordon Wilson, attended. Cllr. Moore had read the Planning Officer's report and recommendation relating to the 300-house proposal, and had prepared a speech of approximately five minutes, this being the normal time allowance. However, the Committee Chair informed him that because others - including another parish council - wished to make representations on this matter, he would be reduced to a mere three minutes.

Furthermore, in both the abovementioned applications, once again there appears to have been a last minute "deal" between the Applicants and Highways England whereby the draft conditions contained in the Officers' reports were diluted without consultation with anyone else, and this fact would not have been apparent to any interested party who was not actually present at the Meeting. I have set out these examples in detail because they show that in practice the worthy principles contained in the various Codes and Protocols may be honoured more in the breach than in the observance. The job description for "Member of the Planning Committee" states that the members should abide by the Members' Code of Good Practice, but there is nothing further in the role description for the "Chair of Planning Committee".

This Parish Council believes that these job descriptions should be rewritten with greater emphasis on the need for fairness to all participants in the planning process. Borough Councillors should be reminded of the need to involve local community bodies, such as parish councils, in their deliberations.

My Council makes no apology for its wish that parish councils are given an enhanced status in their relationship with the Borough, and not treated as an annoying nuisance on the fringes of a debate. In recent months because of the Borough's financial constraints, it has devolved to the parishes large parts of its former functions, resulting in substantial increases in responsibilities and workload, much

of which shouldered by unpaid volunteers. It is not unreasonable for the parishes to ask for something in return.

In regard to the specific examples given above, we submit that with large scale planning applications like these, a time of five minutes is insufficient to set out a case especially when the Parish Council is concerned enough to request for the application to go to Planning Committee and have taken the time to attend in order to present their case/concerns. The Parish Councils are after all acting in the best interests of their local residents who will be affected by the decision. It would also be appropriate if substantial changes occur in the content of planning applications during the planning process, that these be notified to parish councils. Then consultation be invited, rather than for something very different than the original being presented to the Planning Committee without any further notification.

In closing, I should like to refer you to the Parish Charter and Planning Protocol 2015. Much of what I have mentioned in this letter is covered by this document, particularly Appendix 2 and Annex 1 (paragraphs 10, 15, and 17 of the Annex are especially relevant). Would it be sensible for this document to be re-issued to all relevant personnel?

Yours sincerely

Val Curtis  
Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer  
Liddington Parish Council