

PLANNING COMMITTEE



9 JANUARY 2013 - 2.30PM

PRESENT: Councillor P Hatton, Chairman; Councillors M G Bucknor, Mrs V Bucknor (substitute), D W Connor, M Cornwell, D Hodgson, M J Humphrey (substitute), S J E King (substitute), B M Keane, A Miscandlon, Mrs F S Newell, T E W Quince, D Stebbing and W Sutton.

APOLOGIES: Councillors M I Archer, Mrs K F Mayor and D R Patrick.

Officers in attendance: G Nourse (Head of Planning), Mrs E Cooper (Member Support Officer) and T Lewis (Principal Solicitor).

*** FOR INFORMATION OF THE COUNCIL ***

P143/12 COUNCILLOR SCRIMSHAW

Members joined the Chairman in standing in remembrance of Councillor Scrimshaw, a member of this committee, who sadly passed away on 5 January 2013.

P144/12 PLANNING APPLICATIONS F/YR11/0482/F, F/YR11/0895/O AND F/YR11/0930/F - PROPOSED PLANNING COMMITTEE VENUE

Members considered an appropriate location to hold the proposed Planning Committee meeting on 23 January 2013 to determine applications F/YR11/0482/F, F/YR11/0895/O and F/YR11/0930/F.

Members received a presentation, in accordance with the local council participation procedure, from Councillor Mrs Laws of Whittlesey Town Council. Councillor Mrs Laws stated that at the Whittlesey Town Council meeting held on 12 December 2012, the Town Council fully discussed the instruction given to Planning Committee by Fenland District Council's Cabinet to make arrangements for the three related supermarket applications, only applicable to Whittlesey, to be considered at a future meeting to be held at Wisbech St Mary, being extremely disappointed to learn of Cabinet's decision, which she assumes ignored the Town Council's written request.

Councillor Mrs Laws expressed the view that a precedent has been set, with it already being proved that Whittlesey has a very suitable venue at The Manor Leisure Centre that comfortably accommodated Planning members, speakers and a sizeable seating area for the public with ample parking facilities for responsible vehicle owners. She asked why these important planning applications for Whittlesey are even being considered in being discussed some 15 miles away from its electorate, asking if in fact they should be re-heard when Planning Committee had already made, in her view, valid planning decisions on 29 August 2012.

Councillor Mrs Laws expressed the opinion that the committee has the opportunity today of rebuilding the confidence of Whittlesey people in the planning process, stating that since 19 September 2012 meeting Whittlesey people have massive concerns about the planning process resulting in a huge loss of confidence in Fenland District Council's members and officers. She asked members to consider what impact a decision to hold the 23 January meeting at Wisbech St Mary would have, feeling it would only compound concerns.

Councillor Mrs Laws made the point that the most important people in this whole issue are the people of Whittlesey and its surrounding villages who would be impacted by the final decision, who believe since 19 September that they have been ignored, and today is a day when Planning Committee can either start to change or when they can add to the concerns. She feels that recent comments published indicate that the Planning Committee are not of a mind to hold a further meeting at Whittlesey for two reasons, which the Town Council feels are completely unfounded.

Councillor Mrs Laws referred to comments from the Chairman of the Planning Committee and stated that the Town Council is appalled that Councillor Curtis has been principally blamed by one of his own colleagues for speaking out in the press for the decision to hold Whittlesey supermarket applications at Wisbech St Mary. She stated that Councillor Curtis has always had the full support of the Town Council and done nothing less than any elected councillor should do by continuing to fight Whittlesey's corner to ensure complete visibility of the planning process, fair play and delivery of the best development package for its area.

Councillor Mrs Laws expressed the view that the valid planning meeting on 29 August at The Manor Leisure Centre went well, there was a fair amount of cheering and clapping but only between speakers and at no time did this interrupt or halt proceedings. She asked why residents of Whittlesey and its villages are being blamed and criticised for displaying enormous interest and passion about the future of its town.

Councillor Mrs Laws questioned why this meeting is being held to discuss a meeting following, in her opinion, the valid Fenland District Council's Planning meeting held on 29 August and why the relevant decision notices have not been issued? She hopes that members will take the Town Council's strong request into consideration if the three related supermarket applications are to be debated at a further meeting on 23 January 2013 in that the venue must be arranged in Whittlesey giving its electorate every opportunity of attending within easy travelling distance.

Members received a presentation, in accordance with the public participation procedure, from Mr Oxley on behalf of Sainsbury's as an interested party. Mr Oxley expressed the view that these applications have been challenging for members to consider and decide upon, knowing that members deliberated at great length having the interests of Whittlesey at heart.

Mr Oxley expressed the opinion that the future of Whittlesey should be first and foremost and residents have a great desire to play a part in these applications by representing themselves and speaking to the committee, with it needing to be a transparent and accessible process.

Mr Oxley attempted to provide the context behind his application for a supermarket at Whittlesey, but was stopped by the Chairman who reaffirmed that the meeting was solely on the venue considerations and not on specific applications. Mr Oxley challenged this view, feeling that the context was important in the venue considerations, however, the Principal Solicitor agreed with the Chairman that the discussion should focus solely on discussion on the venue.

Mr Oxley made the point that three committee meetings have been held on these applications, with 9 hours of debate, and he feels that extensive and massive scrutiny has already been undertaken on these applications. He expects the next meeting would be a replay of these extensive committees and requested that Whittlesey is put at the forefront of this meeting where public presentations are required to ensure the right decision is reached, as residents were given the opportunity at the meeting of 29 August 2012.

Mr Oxley expressed the view that due to the extensive time that the committee would consider the applications, as it has done on previous occasions, the residents of Whittlesey need to be given

easy access that suits them and it is only fair to the people of Whittlesey that the meeting should be in Whittlesey.

Members received a presentation, in accordance with the public participation procedure, from Councillor Curtis, a District Councillor. Councillor Curtis expressed the view that the most important thing to recognise in this issue is the people of Whittlesey and the committee in making its decision should take this into consideration.

Councillor Curtis referred to what has happened since the meeting on 29 August 2012, which has made the people in Whittlesey suspicious and concerned about planning in Fenland. He feels that members have the choice of re-building the trust of Whittlesey people in planning or go the other way and create further mistrust.

Councillor Curtis referred to the blame that has been apportioned in moving the meeting to Wisbech St Mary, but feels the people of Whittlesey see through this. He expressed the view that Whittlesey residents are the important people, the meeting should be transparent, should be in front of them and accessible to them, which can only be undertaken in Whittlesey.

Councillor Curtis expressed the opinion that the committee needs to start building bridges in the planning process and people need to have confidence in any decision that is made on these applications.

Members made comments, asked questions and received responses as follows:

- Councillor Stebbing stated that he has no hesitation in supporting what has been said by the speakers, there is mistrust in Whittlesey who have read what is in the media or seen on the TV and local councillors have tried their best to provide the actual statements and reasons behind them. He feels that it is only right that the meeting should be held at Whittlesey;
- Councillor Connor agreed with this view;
- Councillor King asked if there has been Legal advice on where to hold the meeting? The Chairman stated that Legal advice is not required as it is a matter for the committee. Councillor King asked if The Manor is big enough as a venue to accommodate everyone? The Chairman advised that it was;
- Councillor Bucknor expressed the view that Councillor Curtis acted in the correct manner by stepping down from the Planning Committee to represent the people of Whittlesey. He feels that as the Council Chamber is too small to hold the meeting that it is right that it is held in Whittlesey;
- Councillor Sutton supported the comments of previous speakers and stated that he support the meeting being held in Whittlesey;
- Councillor Cornwell made the point that there are a serious number of issues in these applications that are pertinent to Whittlesey and he was prepared at the start of this meeting to propose that the meeting be held in Whittlesey;
- Councillor Mrs Bucknor stated that for accountability and transparency the meeting should be at the heart of the community it concerns and it should never have been considered being held anywhere else.

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Proposed by Councillor Stebbing, seconded by Councillor Connor and **decided that the Planning Committee meeting on 23 January 2013 to determine applications F/YR11/0482/F, F/YR11/0895/O and F/YR11/0930/F be held at The Manor Leisure Centre in Whittlesey.**

(All members present declared, in accordance with Paragraph 2 of the Code of Conduct on Planning Matters, that they had been lobbied in the past on these applications, but not in respect of the venue considerations)

(Councillors Miscandlon and Stebbing stated that they were members of Whittlesey Town Council)

2.55pm

Chairman