

From Ickleton Parish Council

Dear Councillor (and Leader) Bridget Smith

I am replying on behalf of Ickleton Parish Council to your letter of 5th February giving an update on items referred to Planning Committee. I regret that I cannot attend tomorrow's Planning Committee Meeting. I would ask that this email is forwarded to all Members of that Committee, please.

I note what you have said. I thought it might be helpful to all involved if I comment from Ickleton Parish Council's perspective. We understand that a legal challenge to South Cambridgeshire District Council (SCDC) is in the pipeline from others, but do not wish to say anything about that. We are concerned with the way the delegation system with regard to planning proposals has been operating since the automatic referral of Parish Council objections (where Officers were in support) to Planning Committee was ended.

If the present delegation system had operated to date in a way that Parish Councils had experienced to be transparent, fair, and reasonable, there would not be a problem. However, this has not been the case.

In September 2017 I asked prior to the Planning Planning Forum what % of Parish Objections were referred to Committee. The answer was 6%. The issue was supposedly under review. One year on, and the referrals were 5% of Parish objections. The review had not, and still has not, taken place. It was clear that, regardless of how strongly Parishes objected to a proposal, or of how many sound planning reasons were put forward by them, there was only one chance in 20 of their concerns going to Committee.

It's all very well for one single elected Member (Planning Committee Chair) to be involved in the delegation process, but he or she will not have visited the site, may have little knowledge of the community, and is faced with the views of the Case Officer and those of a Senior Planning Officer (neither of whom are likely to have close knowledge of the settlement). No wonder 95% of Parish objections are

brushed aside. At every opportunity we are told by SCDC how important our views are, but we are seeing in practice that our views only matter if we happen to support the Officers.

In addition we have found the letters explaining why our objection has not been referred to Committee add nothing to the Delegation Report and are little more than a rehashing of that document. On occasion the explanations have been perfunctory, and sometimes factually incorrect.

We appreciate that Planning Committee needs to focus on the larger applications, but a glance at their Agendas will show that the small application has been virtually excluded. Householder applications at Committee are an almost extinct species.

In short, Parish Councils feel the current arrangements for delegation take away much of the influence we used to have and give rise to a democratic deficit that is keenly felt, particularly in the smaller communities. We are fed up with reviews that are promised and which never materialise. Reform, involving a good measure of rebalancing, is needed – and quickly, please.

Best Regards

Terry Sadler

Parish Councillor (and former Chairman)