

Parish Office Replacement Windows

The saga of the replacement windows in the parish office has been going on for well over a year now. Readers will remember that Welton parish council (PC) submitted a planning application (number 139196) dated 28th May 2019 proposing to replace the dark wood upstairs windows at the parish office with white uPVC windows. This application was refused by West Lindsey District Council (WLDC) by notice on 31st January 2020.

At the February PC meeting, as reported in the March issue of the Welton **NEWS** (page 10), the PC took the decision to appeal the refused planning.

On page 9 of the March issue of the **NEWS**, we published an article written by Graham Nicholls entitled *How Planning Works*, which made reference to the replacement windows with reasons both for and against uPVC windows. In the May issue of the **NEWS** we printed a letter from the chairman of the WLDC, Cllr Steve England, clarifying the process for referral of a planning application refusal to the planning inspectorate, including the reasons why and when such an appeal can be made.

While the PC submitted an application for replacing the windows with hardwood and obtained quotes for installation, they also submitted an appeal against the refusal of planning permission for uPVC windows to the planning inspectorate and deferred installation of the windows until a decision was made by the planning inspectorate. It should be noted that there was no cost to the PC in making this appeal.

The planning inspectorate received and reviewed the PC's appeal, including sending a representative to make a site visit on 28th July. According to the planning inspectorate's report, the main issue was "whether the proposed development would preserve or enhance the character and appearance of the Welton Conservation Area, including its effect on the setting of non-designated heritage assets". The decision of the planning inspectorate, published on 10th August, was to dismiss the appeal. The report concludes that the installation of uPVC windows would, among other things, be in conflict with the PC's own *Welton-by-Lincoln Neighbourhood Plan 2015-2035*. The PC was aware of this conflict but according to the report of its meeting in February, described the neighbourhood plan as "rather woolly on the requirement". The planning inspectorate clearly didn't think it was 'woolly'.

In February 2019, Cllr Steve England had suggested that it might be time for a review of the Welton neighbourhood plan but at the PC meeting that month the decision was taken that a review was not necessary (see the February 2019 issue of the **NEWS**). Also in the February 2019 issue, we published a letter from a resident, urging residents to get more involved in village activities, including volunteering to assist with a review of the neighbourhood plan. Perhaps if the PC had reviewed the plan at that time, or appointed a committee of local residents to review it on their behalf, they could have revised it so that the requirement was not so 'woolly' and their appeal might have been successful or they might have decided that an appeal would be futile, depending on how they revised the requirement. It does seem rather obtuse of the PC to submit a planning application that goes against its own neighbourhood plan; and if the grounds for doing so are that the requirement is not clear in the plan, one has to wonder why they wrote it that way or have not rewritten it to make it clear.

Although one can have some sympathy with the PC wanting to save public money by going for the cheaper uPVC option, especially as other premises in the conservation area have them, it doesn't inspire public confidence in the neighbourhood plan that its authors should seek to set it aside. It is deeply ironic that this document has so far proved useless in regulating development and that the PC is so far the only body to have fallen foul of its provisions. If the government's proposals on planning go through there will be virtually nothing to stop anyone building on their gardens or adding another storey or two to their houses or knocking them down and building something new on the site. Meanwhile the PC can't even get a new set of windows.

Is this the end of the saga, or will the PC appeal the appeal decision by going to a judicial review? There doesn't seem to be any basis for this but watch this space.

The planning inspectorate's appeal decision can be read in full on the Welton **NEWS** website (www.weltonnews.org) on the *WLDC and LCC Updates and Announcements* page and on the WLDC website (www.west-lindsey.gov.uk).

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