

Dr Janet Davis
Clerk to Broadmayne Parish
Council

VIA EMAIL

Date: 19/08/2021
Ref: n/a
Officer: Michael Garrity
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Dear Dr Davis,

RE: Changes in planning application notification procedures

Thank you for your letter of 14 July. I apologise for the delay in my reply. I was on leave at the time and have been catching up with a number of matters.

You have raised concerns about notification procedures for planning applications and decisions. The particular areas of concern are:

1. The move away from direct neighbour notification letters
2. Asking applicants/agents to place site notices on their sites
3. That parish councils no longer appear to be notified when decisions are issued.

The recent changes are intended to streamline our processes at a time when application pressures on the service are at a sustained high level. This is occurring at a time when changes had also been introduced in response to Covid (such as asking applicants to put up site notices) and a wider transformation programme which requires us to harmonise all our legacy authority software systems onto a new single platform – this in itself is vital but is highly time-consuming for many of our officers. This been in progress for over a year now, and we are preparing to migrate remaining planning records from former council systems over the forthcoming weeks.

The challenge for the planning service is to ensure we are able to appropriately notify communities in a manner that is compliant with regulatory requirements while also ensuring we improve the efficiency of our systems to manage the demands upon the service. Site notices are a statutory requirement and are also capable of being seen by anyone who passes by the site, not just the neighbours who immediately adjoin the site. Conversely, direct notifications are selective by their nature and yet cumulatively generate significant additional resource demands on the planning service at a time of immense pressures. On balance it was thus considered that the use of site notices (as well as direct notifications when statutorily required, complemented by use of the website and notifications to town and parish councils) was sufficient to publicise the applications while also providing some important time savings for validation teams, although I do acknowledge your concerns about moving away from direct notifications.

The practice of requesting applicants to place site notices on their sites was introduced during lockdown but has continued in appropriate circumstances (and subject to agreement of the applicant/agent). However, it should be noted that applicants are asked to provide photographic proof that they have placed the notice in a suitable location. Officers can also check for the notice when they carry out a site visit. Hence, whilst I understand that there may be concerns that this approach is open to misuse, officers should be in a position to check if the site notice is correctly displayed.

Notifying parish councils about decisions has not been universally in existence across all of the legacy authority areas and our practices are being harmonised as we migrate systems onto the new platform. Unfortunately, this may mean that we are unable to support some of the processes that were previously in place. Nevertheless, it is our intention to review the customer-facing aspects of our systems once the convergence process is completed. This will include a more user-friendly web portal that should provide scope for user customisation of information, but I'm afraid I can't confirm details of this until we have moved beyond the convergence phase of the project.

I have noted your request for these changes to be reconsidered. Whilst at this stage there is no immediate intention to revert to the previous approach for the reasons I have outlined, I would like to keep the situation under review as we progress the transformation work.

I hope this response has provided a better understanding of our reasons for the changes, and I would like to thank you for taking the time to raise these important issues.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Michael Garrity', written in a cursive style.

Michael Garrity
Head of Planning
Economic Growth and Infrastructure