

THE PLANNING ADVISORY GROUP (PAG)

Report to the Annual Parish Meeting

17.04.24

The Planning Advisory Group was formed in 2014 and is appointed by Walberswick Parish Council to vet and report on planning applications relating to the Village.

PAG comprises professionals with experience of architecture and planning. Its members are Paul Bradley, Alan Gomm, Katherine Gomm and John Nichols. During November 2023 the group was joined by Ben Whiting, a house builder with in-depth knowledge of the planning system. Bill Ungless retains close links with the group as a Consultant and Kay Ungless acts as the group's administrator and point of contact with Walberswick Parish Council.

The Group provides advice regarding planning applications, amendments to proposals, Variations of Condition applications and proposed changes to Local Planning Policy.

The opinion of the Planning Advisory Group is just that - an opinion shaped and formed during group review of all material judged against national and local planning policy. We have minimum numbers to ensure meetings are quorate and also for the separate process of approving the advice prior to it being sent to WPC – who then meet, the advice is discussed, shaped and ratified by councillors prior to being sent by WPC to ESC. Importantly, the Parish Council uses PAG's advice at its discretion in responding to the Local Authority on behalf of the village. By the time a report is uploaded to the ESC website upwards of thirteen individuals will have looked at the application, and the report, and expressed their views.

Since our report last May, we have commented on 29 applications in the past 11 months. Of these applications ESC approved all but one, which was refused on technical grounds and has since been resubmitted. In some instances PAG has been able to suggest revisions to schemes, and where applicants and agents are willing we have seen improvements made prior to applications being approved. However, it is clear that the PAG and WPC share a united response to proposed changes within the village, and this is not being upheld by ESC.

It should be stated that it is not the intention of the PAG, or the Parish Council, to raise an objection to all development. The role of PAG is to assess applications against national and local planning policy, particularly the Walberswick Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan (2013) and the East Suffolk Coastal Local Plan (2020). In particular the question PAG asks itself when looking at applications is whether the proposal would preserve or enhance the qualities of the village, the Conservation Area, the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and the Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs). We are particularly keen as a group that applications follow and uphold location specific policies covering the village and that incremental change – often seemingly small and insignificant proposals – don't have the effect of eroding the rural quality of Walberswick - the loss of native hedging in favour of fences is a good example of this.

In addition to the advice provided to the Parish Council, PAG is involved with the research and writing of the Neighbourhood Plan, and we believe this document is essential for preserving and enhancing the character and quality of Walberswick's built environment.

Paul Bradley

Chairman, Planning Advisory Group