



## Newsletter No.31 – 18<sup>th</sup> July 2019

Dear Resident,

### 1. Proposed changes to Elmbridge BC's Planning Process

We have recently become aware of proposals by Elmbridge Borough Planning Officers, supported by some senior councillors, to change the way planning applications are decided. Details can be found under agenda item 5/19 at:

<http://mygov.elmbridge.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CIId=130&MIId=3056>

Key changes that are proposed are:

- To remove householder applications and single dwellings from going to Committee, unless referred by a Ward Member. Currently any application would go to Committee if there are 5 objections or more.
- For a deadline of 28 days from validation to be introduced for Ward Members to refer items to enable more decisions to be taken within the 8 or 13 week target dates. It is also recommended that referrals should be accompanied by a planning reason.
- Minor applications, excluding single dwellings, would go to Sub Committees if there are 15 objections or more and Major applications with 20 objections or more would go straight to Planning Committee. The intention is to avoid the need for applications to be determined twice at both Sub Committee and Planning Committee.
- Amend the Planning Service's procedures for public speaking. The current trigger only applies to Area Planning Sub Committees and is where 10 or more written objections from separate households have been received within the consultation period, or alternatively a petition has been received and signed by a minimum of 50 signatories and their respective addresses. In both cases only addresses within the locality of the application site will be counted.
- Extend public speaking procedure to Planning Committees. It is also proposed that any application on a Sub Committee or Planning Committee agenda would be eligible for public speaking.

TRG is concerned that no public consultation or discussion is proposed before a final decision is made. This appears to us to be wrong in principle and counter-productive in practice if the Council wishes to encourage public engagement in the planning process and to

prevent further erosion of already fragile public confidence in the system.

The paper presented to the June EBC Planning Committee meeting has a number of flaws that make it an unsound foundation on which to build changes to the current system. In particular:

- There is no clear statement of what officers are seeking to achieve. Is it to increase efficiency? Is it to improve the quality of decision-making by officials and/or councillors? Is it to reduce the scope for objectors to raise their concerns about proposed developments? Is it to reduce an accumulated backlog of cases, in which case councillors might wish to ask for some analysis of why this has occurred?
- There is no proper cost-benefit analysis.
- There is no proper assessment of risks. Risks that need to be exposed include the potential impact on the workload of the full Planning Committee (note that it is envisaged that public speaking would apply under the new arrangements); pressure to increase the size of that committee to ensure individual wards are not disadvantaged; additional pressures on ward councillors as 'new' householder and single applicants press them to take up cases; an increase in public concern about the fairness of the system; and over-reliance on the recommendations of planning officials on delegated applications as the scope for scrutiny and challenge both by applicants or councillors is reduced.
- There is a suggestion that the reasons for a referral should be strictly confined. On the surface, this might appear uncontroversial but there are several areas in current Supplementary Planning Documents that are open to a significant differences in interpretation that can be evaluated more effectively through the sub-committees, on which ward councillors with an intimate knowledge of their areas sit, rather than left to the 'professionals'. The interpretation of local character is a classic example. There are several cases where planning officers have recommended acceptance only for the application to be rejected by a sub-committee and for the Planning Inspector to support that decision. Clive House in TRG's area is a case in point.
- The statistical comparisons with other Surrey Councils are interesting but not particularly valuable in looking at the system in Elmbridge. Our aim should not be to boost our position in a particular league table but to ensure that we have a system that serves the needs of Elmbridge and its residents.
- The report notes that the primary role of councillors sitting on a planning committee is "not to represent local community views". This sends a message about the culture in the Planning Department that, when taken in conjunction with the tendency in individual reports simply to dismiss views of residents has having been dealt with, continues to be worrying.

The matter is to be decided by the main Planning Committee meeting on July 23rd at 7 p.m. at the Civic Centre in Esher. This is a public meeting so residents are welcome to attend. If you share the TRG Committee's concerns, please e-mail the Leader of the Council, Stuart Selleck ([sselleck@elmbridge.gov.uk](mailto:sselleck@elmbridge.gov.uk)) and the portfolio holder for Planning, Karen Randolph ([krandolph@elmbridge.gov.uk](mailto:krandolph@elmbridge.gov.uk)) copied to our three local ward councillors, Peter Harman, ([pharman@elmbridge.gov.uk](mailto:pharman@elmbridge.gov.uk)) Tom Catton [tcatton@elmbridge.gov.uk](mailto:tcatton@elmbridge.gov.uk) and Charu Sood [csood@elmbridge.gov.uk](mailto:csood@elmbridge.gov.uk) and make your views known.

The TRG Committee has made its own representations ( copy available on the website :

[www.trgweybridge.com](http://www.trgweybridge.com) under 'News'), but the more views that are expressed, the better.

## **2. Parking Considerations in the Planning Process.**

We are aware that as occupants start moving into the Landmark Building, 30 Queens Road, many Triangle residents are nervously awaiting a deluge of additional cars looking for spaces because of inadequate parking provision in the Landmark building.

The Committee has written to our three ward councillors to highlight this concern because we believe insufficient attention is paid by planning panels to parking provision, and too much credence is attached to disingenuous comments by Planning Officers that the public transport in this area is good and, in any case, young professionals do not have cars (!).

As an example, there are only 50 spaces for 46 apartments, most of them 2/3 bedroom, in the Landmark building. In addition, the block includes retail units for which no parking provision is made. We estimate an additional 40 cars will be seeking parking spaces, mostly in the Triangle (though are aware of residents in other nearby areas who are also nervous).

We appreciate EBC actually rejected the Landmark application twice, although not on the basis of insufficient parking space provision, and it was only passed by the Inspector on appeal.

It is, however, an instructive illustration that claims by developers, all too often supported by Planning Officers, that adequate parking provision has been made need to be scrutinised closely and, if appropriate, challenged by our Councillors.

On-street parking in parts of the Triangle is almost impossible during working hours. Sadly, it is soon likely to become as difficult during evenings (with all the consequent problems of loss of sight lines, drives obstructed by overhanging cars etc).

We have therefore asked our elected representatives to be vigilant and outspoken in representing residents' interests in all future applications as regards this issue.

The Committee would also welcome feedback from residents on their parking problems so we can gather evidence for future discussions with Surrey County Council. Please email us at [trgweybridge@gmail.com](mailto:trgweybridge@gmail.com)

## **3. Clive House, 12-18 Queens Road, KT13 9XE**

Residents will recall that the second application to redevelop this site was rejected by Elmbridge Borough Council. The decision date was 5/2/19. The Government website states: 'If you disagree with a decision, you must appeal within 6 months of the date on the decision notice from your local planning authority'. This means that the developer has just under 4 weeks to lodge an appeal. Late appeals by developers are, however, not uncommon, especially when the appeal is lodged to coincide with a holiday period when residents are either away or otherwise distracted.

The Committee will continue to monitor the situation and keep residents informed if an appeal is lodged.

## **4. TRG Committee**

The Committee is delighted to welcome Brian Cuell as a member. Brian is Chair of the Barrington Lodge Residents' Association. Other Triangle residents who would like to join the Committee or participate in TRG activities should email [trgweybridge@gmail.com](mailto:trgweybridge@gmail.com) or speak to Nick Thrupp on 01932 855579.

## 5. Communications

TRG normally communicates with residents via email. Please let us know at [trgweybridge@gmail.com](mailto:trgweybridge@gmail.com) if you would like to be added to our e-mailing list.

If you would like to comment on any of the above or raise any other issues with the Committee, please email us at [trgweybridge@gmail.com](mailto:trgweybridge@gmail.com)

**The TRG Committee (Nick Thrupp, Dave Arnold, Brian Cuell, Ferdi Fischer, Greg Popper and Alan Wright) Website: [www.trgweybridge.com](http://www.trgweybridge.com)**