



## FARNHAM SOCIETY PLANNING COMMITTEE REPORT AGM

My name is Yolande Hesse the recently appointed chairman of the Farnham Society planning committee. We are a small group of 5, Zofia Lovell, Michael Blower, Zack Wyse and Ella Cattell who has just joined us. We meet once a month. on zoom. We all feel that reviewing planning applications and what is happening in Farnham needs to be kept under watch as local authority planning departments are increasingly struggling to assess the mountain of applications with less and less experienced officers. Waverley, in particular finds it difficult to maintain its staff as the attraction for them to move into the private sector, and better pay, is great once they have gained a modicum of experience.

Over this last year we have been attempting to review the avalanche of applications that Waverley receive each week but it is becoming increasingly time consuming and the planning committee would certainly benefit from additional help so that it is not so onerous for so few.

Just to give you some idea of how Waverley compares with other authorities I have picked a couple of examples eg. WBC 2,138 applications for the year ending 22 June 22, which amounts to 41 applications per week on average. We can compare that to:

Stafford with similar population 135,000 to WBC's 126,000	14 per week
Oxford	26
Mid Suffolk	26
Lewes	12
Sevenoaks population 121,327	42
Cambridge	27
E. Devon	39
Waverley	41

(show Table 134 available <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-planning-application-statistics> )

**Table P134: District planning authorities<sup>1</sup>: applications received, decided, granted and delegated and environmental statements received, by local planning authority**England, Year ending June 2022 <sup>P</sup>

Planning authority	Total applications received	Decisions subject to a Planning Performance Agreement	Decisions where an extension of time agreement was made	Total decisions	Percentage of decisions delegated to officers	Number/Per cent	
						Total decisions granted	Percentage of decisions granted
Redditch	251	0	128	259	88	244	94
Barrow-in-Furness	316	0	100	296	80	277	94
Gosport	324	0	103	332	91	308	93
Tamworth	352	0	104	320	99	285	89
Harlow	360	0	117	356	94	298	84
Hyndburn	366	0	108	249	98	213	86
Crawley	369	0	219	279	95	248	8

Above is a sample of the 7 least busy offices. Below a sample of the 10 most busy offices

East Devon	2,029	0	781	1,966	94	1,812	92
South Oxfordshire	2,050	40	740	1,955	97	1,867	95
Wealden	2,091	0	1,075	2,132	97	1,834	86
Waverley	2,138	2	957	1,985	95	1,792	90
Sevenoaks	2,197	6	375	1,770	98	1,488	84
Harrogate	2,241	0	856	2,154	99	1,947	90
St Albans	2,270	0	996	2,253	93	1,897	84
Elmbridge	2,397	1	1,094	1,962	96	1,602	82
Stratford-on-Avon	2,433	18	1,107	1,761	93	1,579	90
East Suffolk	2,811	12	921	2,539	98	2,368	93

Waverley is the 7<sup>th</sup> in league table as being the most applications received in the year, out of 180 authorities. So you can see we live in a busy Planning area, because it is a lovely area to live and the Developers know this.

We had to make a decision earlier this year, to only review the most important applications, the ones we felt might affect the town most and many more residents. This has meant that a lot of smaller applications have not been reviewed.

The criterion for our reviews includes the applications in a conservation area, listed buildings/buildings of merit receive particular attention from us, merits of architectural design, whether existing buildings have to be demolished as a pathway to development, taking into account the street scene and whether it conflicts with planning policies. Farnham is a very attractive area for developers who are constantly circling around the edges of the town looking for any spare land to build on.

WBC is under pressure from Central Gov to build a certain number of houses. In

fact, if they do not grant PP to a certain percentage of applications, they run the risk of being 'taken over' by central government. A bit like put into special measures! It's called Tilted balance and WBC sit close to the balance being tipped!

Local Authorities are being required to build houses but do not have the powers to enforce developers, who have been granted permission, to build them. At the moment WBC have many extant permissions in place. (5,156 houses not built over the last 8 years)

The only condition they can require is that the development is started within 3 years. What constitutes substantive start can be a grey area, hence the knocking down of the Woolmead site, to be left with a pile of rubble, constitutes a substantive start and now means that the owner of the site has no time limit on its permission. We could be looking at the pile for years to come!

So, we are somewhat caught between our Local Authority trying to uphold the standard of design and environment considerations but at the same time and somewhat perversely, needing to approve as many houses as they can to meet central governments dictate.

- The WBC Local Plan requires 590 new dwellings to be built each year including 90 dwellings to meet Woking's unmet need
- over the last 8 years WBC has approved planning permissions for an average of 1,074 new dwellings to be built each year
- of these approved planning permissions only 40% of the dwellings have actually been built
- 8 years X 1,074 permissions per year = 8,592 total
- Of these only 40% have been built = 3,436. (429 per year)
- Therefore if we take the amount of houses actually built away from the permissions granted  $8,592 - 3,436 = 5,156$  houses not built over the last 8 years

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Currently we are gathering evidence of inappropriate development in one of our conservation areas where development has taken place and are hoping to use this as an example to lobby our Town and Borough Councils to follow the lead from Guildford BC in removing Permitted development rights from some, if not all, of our conservation areas.


We are also assessing the Waverley Affordable Housing SPD consultation. It appears that the focus of this document is to update and is primarily guided towards "First Homes". The document changes are more about altering the wording to tighten up on the various loopholes. We hope to submit our responses before the closing deadline at the end of this month.

Following the approval for the application at 80 – 84 East Street, correspondence has taken place between our Society and WBC and also our MP. Our concern focuses on the fact that often in brownfield regeneration, demolition and construction of new buildings, rather than retaining and converting buildings to alternative uses. The NPPF remains 'virtually silent on this subject.'

Turning from our application monitoring throughout the year, we gave our attention to the Farnham Infrastructure Board's consultation. We found this a very challenging exercise as like most of you, we all have opinions on what is best for Farnham's traffic problems. After much debate (and I do mean much debate) with our committee and the Executive, The Farnham Society finally submitted our response to the to the consultation. A summary of the statement appeared in the Farnham Herald a week or so again along with a plan illustrating a hybrid option. You can read the full statement on our website.

Finally, if you feel moved to help with the monitoring of applications or have any planning experience, especially legal training, we would be very glad of your help. If you are interested but would like to know more about this aspect of the Farnham Society do please get in touch.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Yolande Hesse". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, decorative initial 'Y'.

Yolande Hesse

On behalf of the Farnham Society Planning Committee

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