

MAKING YOUR VIEWS KNOWN- A GUIDE TO COMMENTING ON PLANNING APPLICATIONS

Introduction

Our surroundings are in a process of constant change. Old buildings are demolished and replaced. Changes are made even to buildings familiar to generations of local people. Sometimes the changes are cosmetic such as a new advertising sign for a shop. Sometimes they are more substantial such as an extension or constructing an entirely new building.

Changes to buildings are governed by planning law. In most cases the developer needs to apply to the Council for planning permission before the changes can be made and in all cases the Council has to consider the application seriously.

We all have our own views on what makes a good or bad planning application. You don't need to own a property to make a planning application and you don't need to be a neighbour to object. No matter how trivial, major or outrageous you may think an application is, you have the right to object.

How can I find out about an application?

We automatically write to next-door neighbours when we receive a planning application, addressing it to 'Owner/Occupier'. Please note we cannot send correspondence to alternative addresses. We include a brief description of the application and which officer is dealing with it. The letter includes an invitation to view the detailed application at our offices or online, and a date by which we should receive written comments. We also give each local town and parish council a weekly list of new applications. Planning applications are public documents and anyone can ask to see one.

Sometimes we place a yellow notice on or near the site to publicise the application. If we believe it needs more publicity we will also put an advertisement in the Public Notices section of the local newspaper. Many of the local newspapers also choose to include stories about large or controversial planning applications in their editorial sections.

Applications can also be viewed on our website www.eppingforestdc.gov.uk/iplan

All planning applications can be viewed at the Civic Offices in Epping. Some local Town and Parish Councils also hold plans.

How do I comment?

Your objections or support for a planning application should be made to the Council in writing. We will accept your comments as late as possible but you are advised to try to reach us within the deadline set in our letters and notices to guarantee consideration of your views.

When we receive your letter, we are more likely to acknowledge receipt if you provide us with an email address. This email address will be used to let you know the next stage. Your comments or objections are not confidential. They form part of the public record when we consider the application and can be seen by the applicant.

You may also be able to speak directly to councillors at a plans meeting - see 'Who makes the decision' below for details.

Comments can be submitted electronically by going to our website

www.eppingforestdc.gov.uk/iplan

By law, we can only take your objections into account if they address relevant planning considerations. Relevant considerations include:

- Is the new building or proposed use appropriate to the area?
- Is the appearance of the new building satisfactory?
- Will the development cause pollution, noise, flooding or other environmental problems?
- Will there be loss of light to important rooms?
- Will the development overlook and create loss of privacy?
- Will the building appear bulky, overbearing or out of scale with neighbouring properties?
- Is road safety or public footpaths adversely affected?

In other words, will the development make the area a less pleasant place in which to live or work. Loss of value to your property, motives or circumstances of the applicant, or any impact upon private rights, covenants or matters covered by other legislation are not relevant planning considerations. Generally, we are not able to enter into correspondence about the issues you raise.

Who makes the decision?

The greater proportion of planning applications are decided by our planning officers. Only the most significant or controversial proposals are submitted to councillors on our planning committees plus those councillors call to committee as special cases. If your comments are on an application due to go to a planning committee we will do our best to let you know the date and venue of the meeting. There is a right for three speakers to put their cases directly to planning committees, one for the applicant, one for the objectors and one for the local parish or town council. You will need to let us know by 4pm at the latest on the day before the meeting if you wish to speak. A leaflet - Your Voice Your Choice - gives more information on speaking at meetings.

However the application is decided, we will notify everyone who wrote to us of the decision.

What about appeals?

If a planning application is granted approval, there is no right of appeal by objectors. However, if an application is refused, or if conditions are placed upon permission or the application is not considered within a certain timescale, the applicant can appeal. The decision is then taken out of the hands of the Council and given to a Government appointed Planning Inspector.

If we wrote to you or you made comments or an objection to an original planning application that then goes to appeal, we will write again to ask if you wish to make further comments to the Planning Inspector. However, there is an exception - due to changes in the Planning Act, we will write and inform you of a 'householder appeal' (extensions or outbuildings to dwellings), but you cannot make further comments. In all cases though, we will still send your original letter.

Who can I talk to?

You can see us by visiting the Planning Reception on the second floor of the Civic Offices in Epping. You can look at a planning application at any time between 9.00 and 13.00. Without an appointment, case officers to help and advise you are usually only available from 9am to 10.30am but a duty planning officer is available up to 1pm. Try to make your written comments clear and concise. Anonymous objections carry very little weight so please give your name and address.

You can also contact your local district councillor(s). Their contact details are available on the Council's website (www.eppingforestdc.gov.uk); by phoning 01992 464288 or from our Information

Centres. You are encouraged to copy any correspondence to your local Town or Parish Council. They do not decide the planning application but are a consultee. Your local council details are also available through our website or Information Centres.

How to contact us?

You can either telephone, write or email us, marking any letters for the attention of the relevant case officer and quoting the application number (often prefixed EPF).



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