Planning Committee Report – 2019-2021

Thank you, Mr Mayor. Good evening Members and residents.

For the record my name is Councillor John Dennis. I hold the position as Chairman of Planning on Hedon Council as well as being one of the two Ward Members for SWH on the East Riding of Yorkshire Council at Beverley.

I am not however part of the ERYC 's Planning Committee, which was a decision made in 2011, by the Leader and the Cabinet. This decision was made when I first went to County Hall, and reflected my long involvement with the property profession during my career as a Chartered Surveyor. I will, it seems, never be allowed anywhere near planning. Too much potential for 'conflict of interest' claims. I have always respected that decision.

Because of the Covid rules that were applicable back then we didn't actually hold our Annual Meeting in April 2020. By necessity therefore, as Chair of Planning, I've been asked to broach subjects which relate to 2019/20 period, as well as the current year.

Before the onset of the Coronavirus pandemic we were receiving, from the East Riding planning officers, copies of the usual applications for conservatories, extensions, both single and two storey, additional windows and other mundane issues on which we were requested to submit our opinions as a Town Council, prior to the decisions. These decisions would have been made usually by the officers in accordance with established strategies. Sometimes by the Eastern Area Planning Sub-Committee

Applications of this type have always tended to be non-contentious, unless we were presented with copies of complaints from neighbours, which was hardly ever.

Felling, crown-lifting and general trimming of trees have also come our way on a regular basis, but in accordance with established procedures, these have been referred, unless there were serious concerns, to the ERYC Trees Officer. His technical knowledge of tree issues is far superior to ours.

It has been noticeable that, following the onset of the pandemic, and people spending more time at home, these minor applications seem to have continued apace, as residents have had time to carry out home improvements and sort out their gardens.

Because of our two Conservation Areas, we have also had to consider applications in those localities too. The complicated rules and regulations appertaining to these areas and also the many listed buildings situated there, have led us to seek advice from the ERYC Conservation Officer whenever the need has arisen.

Strangely, the old Post Office, which was sold to a property investor in 2019 (I declare my interest because my firm acted in the sale) caused much wringing of hands. Some residents think they are entitled to a full-scale post office as a right, but, please note, this was a private business and the postmaster wanted to retire, as did his staff. The Post Office Authority didn't close it down.

Royal Mail Ltd did actually remove the post box, apparently as requested by the new freeholder. Actually, I am baffled by the decision. I would have thought it would have been an asset to the new operator, leaving it where it was and bringing a much-increased footfall to his front window. Anyway, a new location has been identified and is being checked already.

Anyway, to give him his due, the previous postmaster made his premises available for a full year to anyone who would reopen a post office. However, in the full year from April 2018 until April 2019, we only had 2 enquiries. Residents' needs are obviously changing and the requirement for a full-scale post office is a thing of the past. In the last the six years of operation, it was never financially successful, even though it seemed busy.

Whilst the lack of a post office in the location attracted much local interest, the decision to relocate and scale down was made by market forces.

As far as the planning applications for the empty building are concerned, we should note that the old post office isn't actually a listed building, as it has only existed for a few decades, reputedly of 1950's origin.

It is however, slap bang in the 'heart' of the Conservation Area and as such, received much attention by the ERYC Conservation Officer and Planners at County Hall, and this Committee in Hedon.

The first formal application came in about a year later and this was for a scheme involving the demolition of the existing building, It had, for the record, always been in quite good condition, and not 'derelict' as had been claimed,

The plan was to rebuild it, bringing the front building line forward a few feet and it was to be of two storey design rather than the existing single storey configuration, to allow for two upper apartments with separate rear accesses.

In general terms we wouldn't normally have resisted the provision of a couple of first floor apartments. Goodness knows we need them. Also, a single storey building never really fitted into our Market Place with its many two and three storey Georgian properties.

However, the scheme inevitably involved accepting a raised roof-line which would have affected the setting and the aspect, which we had come to enjoy, over to our Grade One listed building, St Augustine's Church. There would have been a negative impact on our Conversation Area.

Further, separating the building from Nutmugs was also unpopular. Support for the older building was being removed.

This committee therefore unanimously recommended refusal and our comments were sympathised with by the Conservation Officer and the planners who refused it also.

However, the application came back, twice, if not three times more, with minor amendments, but it was never considered as satisfactory by us and by the East

Riding Planning Committee. So, it was rejected, again and again. For a change, the system worked in our favour.

Anyway, the property, in its present form, has apparently now attracted a potential taker wishing to use it as a retail unit. Except for a Change of Use certificate from ERYC Planners, it does not involve significant change of appearance and we will have a fine new shopping unit in the centre of Town.

We hope it succeeds and becomes a credit to Hedon and it is interesting to note, there are more to follow.

Talking about Hedon's Central area, and the changes in shopping habits. These are constantly evolving and have done so since I first came to Hedon in 1967.

Our central area was much different back then, and it will continue to adapt to changing needs.

In my early years in the town, I can recall we only had one fish and chip shop and no other takeaway outlet.

I can recall the makeup of our shopping centre was considerably different. For instance, do you recall our bike shop? Here's a photo I came across at home. It's now the Casbah takeaway, near the junction of St Augustine's Gate with New Road.

We also had a repair shop for TV and minor electrical items. It was run by a Mr Wally Everingham and it was a place you could safely take your dodgy kettle to, and be reassured, you'd never see it again!

Wally retired eventually and his shop became part of the Betting Office.

Where Heron stands now, there used to be Cohens Men's Outfitters. This changed around 1980 and it became Bamfords TV shop which lasted a few years. Then Heron came along to offer their daily shopping experience.

My shop was previously a high-quality gifts and paintings outlet. Before that it was Miss Beadle's sweet shop and among other things a chemist shop.

There was even a small shop called 'Out of Africa' selling artifacts and pictures. It really needed to be somewhere like Beverley to succeed and soon closed its door in Hedon.

Where Greenprint is now, used to be an antiques emporium and where Dove House is located used to be John Davison's bathroom store. Before that, word has it, back in the 40's and 50's, it housed the Town's Post Office before it moved to Market Place

There have, by the way, been as many as six estate agents in the town, now only three remain. I bet Jack Larard never anticipated the changes when he opened the first one in 1968

As you will agree, changes in our shopping habits have been significant and continue to be so. Changes are caused, among other reasons, by an increasing

population, by some shops no longer being seen as necessary and especially in this last year by the rise in the 'on-line' offering.

Another minor planning point which continues to influence who comes to the town to open a business, is that the ERYC Planning Office has never granted 'exclusivity' to anyone. So long as general Conservation and Planning rules are being followed, the planning approvals are likely to be successful.

If 'exclusivity' was part of their policy we'd all happily carry out our businesses without any thought of competing for trade and reducing prices and fees. I'm sure you'd agree that would make the shopping experience much more expensive.

I have spent some time doing research on the present state of the central area, as there were a few scathing postings appearing on Social Media. I take great pleasure in scotching these rumours.

The report which I'm pleased to bring to you, has surprised me to say the least, and is one of great encouragement.

OK, some units have been closed purely due to lockdown rules but some are reopening right now. Of the others, only a very few are likely to be closed for long. Some shopkeepers are planning re-opening cautiously, and I can't say I blame them.

Larards are seemingly running their operation from their base in West Hull and don't, as yet, show any signs of reopening. Maybe this will become available.

My business on the other hand, has remained open throughout the covid pandemic but PPE and other steps such as Hand Sanitiser and screens are being used to protect the staff and clients alike. Clients are asked to make appointments if they need to see us nowadays and we don't intend to change the arrangements anytime soon. Other shopkeepers are taking similar steps to suit their trading style.

Anyway, I took the opportunity to walk the full length of the town from Souttergate to New Road, notebook in hand; pen at the ready.

The intention was to list all the future, newly opened or relocated businesses and assess the viability of our shopping centre. The results were surprising.

I thought there might be eight or ten new businesses. I actually noted, that in the central area including Watmough's Arcade, over the past few years, there are around twenty-five new or relocated businesses either now open, or about to open. A number have actually opened during covid.

My survey shows that Hedon is vibrant still, even despite Covid restrictions. I'd go even further and say that, subject to the impact of ending the furlough scheme, our town centre is looking fit and healthy and looks forward to enjoying good trading conditions for the foreseeable future.

Maybe the closure of Hammonds, Debenhams, smaller shops closing in Jameson Street, King Edward Street and Whitefriargate has impacted on Hull's viability. The Prospect Centre and Princes Quay might give the impression that Hull's' central area

is struggling, but if this survey is anything to go by, not Hedon's. A Ghost Town, we are not.

The Yorkshire Energy Park

The insidious industrial creep of industry into our Ward is giving us increasingly more cause for concern. Our buffer zone is under threat, more so now than ever in my 54 years of being a resident of Hedon.

We always knew that the airport field was in the ownership of Hull City Council. They bought it doubtless as cheap pasture land for the developing air industry in around 1929. That was over 90 years ago. The proposed airfield plan fizzled out after the Amy Johnson era, as far as Hedon's Aerodrome was concerned. Ever since, a succession of Hull City Councils has been keen to see a financial return on their investment. Various schemes, including a Golf Course, supported by 450 houses and later, the Park and Ride idea, were all rejected by this Council and the ERYC.

Then in 2013 (I've still got the original Hull Daily Mail) the idea of developing the western end of the site for industry was mooted.

In March 2014 the concept of the Yorkshire Energy Park was published in the local paper. 700 Jobs claimed the Mail.

Since then, the jobs number has continued to rise, 1,000 had been mentioned, then 2,000, then 5,000 and eventually 10,000, was quoted? But it eventually settled back at 4,480.

Whichever, the local jobs market, as quoted to me by the Employment people at East Riding, was showing no more than 250 people claiming any form of employment benefits in our Ward. So, where this massive influx was coming from, we can only guess. The traffic impacts, among other considerations, were also alarming.

Anyway, the fact is, that, two and a half years later, in November 2019 the application, for a scheme, much reduced in size, following our opposition, eventually came forward to the ERYC's Strategic Planning Committee. The decision was made to approve in very contentious circumstances. Despite this land's status being that it was:-

A) Not Allocated for any use but agricultural in the local Plan, only adopted in 2016

B) Recommended for refusal by the ERYC's case officer,

C) Went against the Authority's policies of safeguarding Hedon's identity, and also of None Coalition of Communities

D) Had received a 96.5% rejection in a full-scale referendum only a few years previously. I know the figures well because I was appointed chairman of the cross-party steering group and saw it through to a very compelling result. No summer holiday that year!

After six years of opposition, it all came to nothing and the Committee passed the application, by 6 votes to 5. H ow close can you get? The Strategic Planning Committee did us no favours in this instance.

The fanciful 'jobs created' figure was obviously regarded by the members of the committee as more compelling than traffic, than resident curlews and, than the identities of our Communities.

We have come to accept it. The land has permission, fact. However, it is in Outline only, and every building will need its own planning permission in detail, as does the infrastructure. The council will continue to scrutinise every application in the greatest of detail.

It took the ERYC planning team 13 months to issue the Outline Planning certificate which eventually contained 82 separate conditions.

The planning certificate was eventually issued in December 2020, at a time when major business decisions were bound to be affected by the Covid emergency.

How keen are these so-called interested parties to see a large investment going to this scheme east of Hull, when survival is higher in the minds of many company executives at the present time.

Does the developer still have the same appetite for investing further massive amounts of capital in expensive infrastructure, I can envisage £2 to £3,000,000 having already been spent to get to this point. How much more is to be risked?

Springtime is here. The developers announced in the autumn of 2020 that we should expect to see some action this Spring. Nothing appears to have happened so far. Let's watch this space.

<u>Humberside International Enterprise Park. (The ABP land)</u>
This site is situated on the opposite side of the A1033. It runs from Saltend Chemicals Park all the way to the edge of the Preston South community, next to Hedon. The southernmost boundary is over towards Paull and this land is everything in between the communities. Another case of buffer zones under threat.

However, the difference is that all the local Parish Councils, including Hedon, have acknowledged that the Local Plan status is 'Allocated for Industry'. It always was considered as the development area for the future.

Actually, what with the Local Plan status, what with a large part being classed by the Government years ago as an Enterprise Park and the whole area recently being nominated as the land destined to be the Freeport for this part of the Humber we have been hit by the proverbial Triple Whammy. 453 acres worth!

Outright objection was never going to work. Some form of industrial use is inevitable.

Cllrs Sue Steel, Mike Bryan, when he was alive, and I attended the ABP public meetings at Paull and Hedon and whilst there, undertook a survey of the points worrying residents of our area. We had a good turnout at both meetings and members of the public from as far afield as Patrington and Hull were in attendance.

When we looked at the results of the survey the Joint Impact of the traffic driving to and from these two major sites was by far the greatest concern of all. Over 50% of residents responding gave increased traffic along the Hedon Road and the A1033 to the Kingstown Roundabout as their greatest worry.

Other concerns were, increased floodrisk, the need for screening strips and wildlife habitat. Of course, the project has a considerable impact on Paull village too.

The ERYC Strategic Planning Committee were faced with a dilemma. Passing or Refusing the application in its present form needed a formal decision. However, with the Triple Whammy hanging over their heads, they were finally influenced by Officers' recommendations to approve subject to Conditions. ABP would be likely to appeal any refusal direct to the Government's Inspector. He would doubtless approve it, but would not place anywhere near as many conditions on the decision as the ERYC Officers. In other words, the local planners would lose control of the scheme and be faced with the prospect of picking up both sides' court and legal fees - probably millions.

The conditions recommended by the Case Officer numbered more than 80, whereas we would be lucky to get 10 out of the Inspector.

The decision was made, therefore, to approve, subject to the many conditions requested by the opponents, and recommended by the Case Officer. When it eventually comes out, the certificate might contain even more.

So, the upshot is that this Ward, being next to the Dockland Estate will have to accept its extension eastwards. I personally don't expect much action for years. The land has actually been 'available' for development for 60 or more years already.

Without any infrastructure in place, it hasn't happened yet. Maybe there will be a major investment in infrastructure, but it doesn't mean that industrialists will follow quickly. They only have to look at Castle Street which is destined to be in turmoil for years, and the present traffic chaos on Hedon Road, to turn round and go nearer the motorway system.

However, Planning, in all its guises, continues as always.

Thank you for your attention.

Cllr John Dennis
Planning Committee Chairman