

Extract of Development Control Committee Draft Minutes from 5 November 2007

**Cumnor Hill Conservation Area – Proposal by Cumnor Parish Council**

Councillors Matthew Barber, Roger Cox, Terry Cox, Richard Farrell, Richard Gibson, Jenny Hannaby, Angela Lawrence, Sue Marchant, Zoe Patrick, Terry Quinlan, Jerry Patterson, Margaret Turner and John Woodford had each declared a personal interest in this item and in accordance with Standing Order 34 they remained in the meeting during its consideration.

The Committee received and considered report 95/07 of the Section Head (Environmental Planning and Conservation) which advised that Cumnor Parish Council had requested this Council to consider designating part of Cumnor Hill and Third Acre Rise, Cumnor a Conservation Area. In considering the report the Committee had regard to the statements made earlier in the meeting by the members of the public.

The Committees' attention was drawn to the conclusions in the report which stated that it was agreed that whilst Cumnor Hill had a mature and spacious character, it was difficult to justify that it had a character which was of special architectural or historic interest. It was noted that the Officers considered that Vale Design Guide, as a Supplementary Planning Document was considered the more appropriate method for helping to control and guide development on Cumnor Hill and other suburbs in the Vale.

Further to the report the Officer highlighted that the key point for Members to consider was whether this was an area of special character or appearance. It was explained that a survey had been undertaken of the whole area and the surrounding street and using a check list based on the advice in "Conservation Area Appraisals" by English Heritage, the Officers had concluded that having regard to many considerations such as building; materials and their qualities; archaeology; styles; contributions; street-scape; heritage aspects; street materials etc there was nothing to say that this area was special compared to surrounding areas and other suburbs of Oxford.

The Officer reported that he had had regard to the comments of the Parish Council and commented that there was modern paraphernalia street furniture, concrete and kerbing and whilst they were pleasant they were not special. Reference was made to the proposed designated area and Members were shown photographs looking into and out of the area. The Officer reported that he had had difficulty in identifying any difference between the proposed area and the surrounding streets and that when compared to suburbs of similar age and style in and around Oxford and the main settlements of the Vale, these areas did not have features or characteristics that gave them special interest.

One of the local Members commented that he agreed with the Officer's conclusions but welcomed looking into the possibility of producing earlier informal advice which could be used in the interim for this area pending the Local Development Framework.

In response to a question raised the Committee was advised that the Conservation Officer had been the Vale's Conservation Officer for at least 25 years and had been involved in the creation of about 10 of the current conservation areas.

One Member expressed concern at the length of time it was going to take to produce some planning guidance in this area and suggested that whilst the recommendations set out in the report were acceptable, an additional recommendation should be considered, namely to have some supplementary planning guidance produced in the interim.

Another Member suggested that any interim guidance should be for the benefit of all areas of the Vale, not just Cumnor Hill.

In response to a question raised as to the weight of such a document, the Committee was advised that this would depend on the level of consultation which had been carried out. The Committee was advised that the preparation of such a document would require a significant time and resources.

One Member commented that he was not convinced that the Cumnor Area was significantly special although he had no objection to interim advice being drafted. However, he commented that in doing so residents could be restricted as to what they could do with their land and he asked whether this was reasonable and fair.

One Member asked the Committee whether it would be beneficial to ask the Executive to look into the possibility of some earlier guidance document being produced in the interim, before the production of the Local Development Framework.

By 15 votes to nil it was

*RESOLVED*

- (a) *that the Developmental Control Committee recommends the Executive to advise Cumnor Parish Council that a Conservation Area be not designated on the lower slopes of Cumnor Hill and Third Acre Rise;*
- (b) *that instead, efforts be concentrated on the Proposed Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document as the appropriate means of protecting areas of low density housing in the Vale such as Cumnor Hill; and*
- (c) *that the Executive be asked to look into the possibility of the production of some earlier document to provide guidance across the whole of the District for similar areas prior to the production of the Local Development Framework.*