

In July 2013, Hunstanton's previous Town Clerk, Lisa Powell requested permission from the Borough to produce a Neighbourhood Plan covering the whole of the parish and that request was granted in March 2014. This series of articles was commenced later that year in order to bring planning issues to the attention of a wider audience. The production of the Hunstanton Neighbourhood Development Plan (HNDP) has proved to be quite a long complex process. We are now ready for it to be submitted again to the Borough who will send it on to an independent examiner and it might require a little modification before it can go to a referendum. It is hoped that the referendum can be held in May 2021 and if more than 50% of those voting agree, the plan can be 'made' and will become the key to what development can take place in the town.

The Planning Committee of the Borough Council considered two planning applications on 7 December that have significant implications for the town. The first application was to build 32 apartments along Southend Road and on the southern part of the car park. This site was identified on the Hunstanton Town Centre and Southern Seafront Masterplan of 2008 as being an Opportunity Site and envisaged building along Southend Road to provide active retail frontages at street level with residential units above with perhaps the loss of 20 car park spaces. The actual application 20/00811/FM to provide 32 apartments extended around the corner into Seagate and around into Beach Terrace Road and would involve the loss of 100 and possibly more car park spaces.

Although during office hours there are four buses each hour going toward King's Lynn, the provision of public transport for those wishing to go inland or along the coast is not good or for those needing to travel to or from work early in the morning or in the evening.

Recently applications have been permitted to build apartments on both the former Witley Press site and the former Kit Kat site providing only single parking spaces for each apartment on the basis that the sites are close to the town centre facilities and the town has good system of public transport. A similar contention was made for the Southend Road scheme. When judged by the standards recommended by the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the local policy Development Management Policy DM17, there was a shortfall of 22 spaces.

The 2008 Masterplan for regeneration was under pinned by five visions for the town: -

1. It should be an Active Town -expanding the existing water sports and activities offer;
2. A Local Town – meeting the needs of its residents with an expanded retail core;
3. A more attractive seaside destination -where visitors stay longer and spend more;
4. A town that respects its heritage whilst looking to the future;
5. An environmental town – making the most of the town's natural assets.

Objections were raised because the Borough's application to develop Southend Road does not fulfil any of the aspects of that vision and therefore cannot be considered as a part of the regeneration aspirations.

It does not expand the water sports or other activities;
It does not expand the retail core;
It does not make it a more attractive destination – unless you consider that obscuring the rear of the Azams building makes it qualify;
It does not respect the heritage- it seems ironic that the ground was part of the railway line that once connected Hunstanton with King's Lynn but sadly closed in 1969;
The provision of a few photovoltaic panels on some roofs only pays lip service to the environment.

Despite the Borough being in line to receive a large government grant in the scheme for the local authority accelerated construction (LAAC) and the planning officers support, the members of the planning committee took notice of the views of local businesses and decided not approve the application by 9 votes to 6.

The second application considered on 7 December 20/00817/FM was approved. It involves the loss of the bus station and re-provision of the library and public toilets and building 47 apartments also aided by the LAAC scheme.
There is a similar poor provision of parking spaces. Concern was expressed about the likely increase in congestion and pollution along St Edmund's Terrace and the danger to pedestrians and cyclists in that area where new bus stops are to be created.

As a direct result of losing the bus station, the bus routes will alter. Buses from King's Lynn that are not continuing along the coast will continue northwards from Southend Road, go along Le Strange Terrace before turning up to pass The Green and then turn right into St. Edmund's Terrace. During the summer the fairly constant stream of pedestrians crossing between Azams and the sea front to Cassies (now number 21) and the town, holds up the traffic flow and will delay the bus service. There is a need for the present Zebra crossing to be upgraded to a Pelican or Puffin to regulate the flow of both traffic and pedestrians and the developers should meet the cost of that.

It was judged by the planning officers that the HNBP was not at a sufficiently advanced stage for it to be a consideration in those two applications. Although the town council decided that the plan would focus on the type and quality of housing, the plan does contain policies that might have ameliorated these two schemes. Policy J1 requires each development proposal to demonstrate that it enhances the places in which people live their lives, work or visit, or it supports the sustainability of the town and its amenities. Policy K7 states that proposals not meeting parking standards will not be supported because Hunstanton is a very rural area being 16 miles from the nearest town and it currently has very limited public transport links. Policy K11 would restrict sale of the apartments to those people who wished to use them as their principal residence. Whilst Policy L6 states that development of car parking areas for other uses will not be supported unless a) it can be demonstrated that retention of car park spaces is not essential or b) alternative provision is made to ensure no overall loss of parking capacity in key areas for commerce or c) where is exceptional circumstances it can be clearly demonstrated that the development will be of significant social and/or economic benefit to the town.

The latest version 8.7.0 of the HNBP can be found on the web-sites of the Town Council and the Civic Society. www.hunstantontowncouncil.gov.uk/neighbourhood-plan.html
Or www.hunstantoncivicsociety.org.uk/latest%20news/neighbourhood%20planv8-7-0.pdf