

**Draft Minutes of the Planning Committee Meeting held virtually (online)
via Zoom on Wednesday 3rd January 2021 at 7.00pm**

*Video-recordings of this meeting can be seen on Bruton Town Council's Youtube channel via these links:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8v5e-lOpi_4 and https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9VM9xT_6b2c*

Present: Councillors Abi Baker, Karen Baker, Brownlow, Jones, Robinson and Skinner

In the Chair: Councillor Jones

In attendance: County Councillor Anna Groskop
The Assistant Clerk
19 members of the public

1. Election of Chairman and welcome

It was **RESOLVED 6-0-0** [For-against-abstain] **to elect Councillor Jones to chair the meeting.**

2. Public Session

Councillor Jones explained that all in attendance who might want to speak about the Coombe Rise planning application (item 6i below) would be able to do so before it was discussed by Councillors. No one wanted to address the Committee on any other matter.

3. Declarations of Interest

No Committee member declared an interest in any agenda item.

4. Apologies for Absence

No apologies had been received.

5. Minutes of the previous meeting

It was **RESOLVED 6-0-0** that the minutes of the meeting held on 16th December 2021 be adopted as a true and accurate record.

6. Current planning applications

The following applications were considered and the Committee's recommendations will be reported to the Local Planning Authority (LPA) which is South Somerset District Council (SSDC), and to the full Town Council at its next meeting:

- i. 20/01229/FUL Land North Of Coombe Rise, Higher Tolbury, Bruton BA10 0DJ**
Construction of a treehouse for use as guest accommodation.
<https://publicaccess.southsomerset.gov.uk/online-applications/applicationDetails.do?activeTab=externalDocuments&keyVal=Q9LS8NOWIGVoo>
To consider modifications to tree planting, trimming and removal proposals in the application recommended for approval by Bruton Town Council on 16th June 2020.

Councillor Jones reminded the meeting that this application had been considered at an extraordinary meeting of Bruton Town Council on 16th June 2020, and after numerous submissions by members of the public and much consideration the Council had

recommended approval. Since that time there had been extensive consultations between the applicants and their agents, the County Ecologist of Somerset County Council (SCC), the Tree Officer of South Somerset District Council (SSDC), and Natural England. The purpose of the current meeting of the Planning Committee was to review the application in the light of these consultations and of revised versions of a Tree Survey, an Arboricultural Impact Assessment, a Woodland Management Strategy and a Bat Activity Survey which had been submitted by the applicants' agents.

Councillor Jones explained that before Councillors considered the application he would invite any members of the public who so wished to speak in this order:

1. Those objecting to the application
2. Those supporting the application
3. The applicants' agent and consultants

Among the points made by those objecting to the application were the following:

- Coombe Wood is designated by Natural England as a priority habitat, and as such should be protected from development.
- Relics of the ancient woodland which once covered the site can be found within the naturally regenerated woodland and these must be protected.
- Trees damaged by ash dieback should ideally be left *in situ* to provide deadwood and enhance biodiversity rather than being felled and removed.
- The proposed development including a large structure given over to domestic occupation would lead to the loss of wildlife habitat and tranquillity in a wood which is greatly valued as it is within easy walking distance of the town.
- The proposals are thoughtful and sensitive but if approved they would set a dangerous precedent by permitting development in woodland well outside Bruton's development area.
- If part of the wood is given over to residential use the legal protection afforded to natural woodland would be overruled by Building Regulations and Health and Safety legislation.
- Much of the proposed planting is apparently driven by the need to lessen the visual intrusion of the proposed development by screening it off from public view. Without the development there would be no need for such mitigation.
- The proposed development sits ill with the Town Council's Declaration of a Climate Emergency and SSDC's recognition of a Climate and Ecological Emergency.c
- The Town Council's previous decision to recommend approval was rushed because of a tight deadline, it was not in line with local opinion, and it should be reviewed in the light of information which became available subsequently.

Among the points made by those supporting the application were the following:

- The proposed planting scheme would enhance the quality and biodiversity of the woodland, reversing its visible deterioration over recent decades.
- The excellent credentials of the architect and landscape designer give good reason to have confidence in the quality of their work.
- The picture of ecological vandalism and catastrophe painted by a minority of activists is overblown and exaggerated and does not represent the views of most residents.
- *Coombe Wood's value as one of Bruton's recreational amenities has been enhanced by recent nearby developments at Coombe Farm and Pexey Burrow and the proposed development would have a similar positive impact*
- *Some people are naturally resistant to change, but in retrospect many would say that recent developments like Durslade Farm and Mill on the Brue have been to the benefit of the town. The same is likely to apply to the proposed development.*

- The many residents who enjoy walking through Coombe Wood most probably have a more damaging impact on its habitat than the proposed development would.

The applicants' agents and consultants made a number of points, some in response to questions from Councillors, including the following:

- Only nine trees are to be removed, all of C2 (poor) quality and two of them dead.
- Up to 90% of the existing ash trees are likely to be lost to dieback, so if the integrity of the wood is to be preserved a programme of active woodland management is essential. The proposed planting scheme is the first phase of such a programme.
- Without such active management it is likely that sycamore will replace ash as the dominant species through natural regeneration, and this would lead to a loss of habitat and biodiversity.
- In response to ash dieback the planting scheme seeks to increase the woodland's resilience and biodiversity by a wider mix of species, carefully selected to preserve as much of the existing habitat as possible.
- The scheme has been amended in response to extensive correspondence with the SCC County Ecologist and the SSDC Tree Officer whose concerns have been met.
- At the insistence of the Tree Officer the current planting scheme includes some non-native species although the applicants' arboricultural consultant shares the County Ecologist's preference for planting native species only. It should be possible for the two officers, the planners and the applicants to reach a consensus.
- One possible way of allaying concern about possible future development would be to apply for a Tree Preservation Order (TPO) to cover the whole woodland.
- Like most other planning applications in the Somerset Levels catchment area this application is waiting on advice from Natural England and our County and District Councils on how to mitigate the phosphate problem, but in the meantime the applicants wish to resolve and allay other concerns raised by this application.

Councillors discussed the application in the light of points made by the interested parties, agreeing that the arguments were very finely balanced and that this made a decision particularly difficult. Subsequent to the Council's recommending approval in June 2020 the application had been revised and further relevant information had become available, and given the importance of democratic accountability the Committee agreed that the matter should be referred back to the Full Council for further review.

It was RESOLVED 6-0-0 that the Committee make no observations on this application but refer it back to the Full Council, to be considered once the two Statutory Consultees most concerned with the tree planting scheme, the District Council Tree Officer and the County Council Ecologist, had provided the required information and finalised their recommendations.

ii. 21/00191/HOU 3 Cole Mead, Bruton, Somerset BA10 0DL

Proposed two storey extension to rear

<https://publicaccess.southsomerset.gov.uk/online-applications/applicationDetails.do?activeTab=summary&keyVal=QN6LHGOWMORoo>

Councillors noted that the application was straightforward and did not appear to involve any overlooking of neighbouring properties, and no objections had been received from neighbours.

It was RESOLVED 6-0-0 to recommend approval of the application.

iii. 20/03358/S73 Tolbury Farm, Tolbury Lane, Bruton, Somerset BA10 0DQ.

S73 application to vary Condition 2 of approval 20/00551/HOU (approved plans); reduction in size of the extension and changes to the appearance.

<https://publicaccess.southsomerset.gov.uk/online-applications/applicationDetails.do?activeTab=summary&keyVal=QK1H8ROWLSEoo>

Councillors noted that the §73 application involved reducing the size of the proposed extension and the use of more sympathetic materials, and that it could hardly be seen from the road.

It was RESOLVED 6-0-0 to recommend approval of the application.

7. Progress on previous planning applications

20/01542/HOU: 7 Patwell Street Bruton BA10 0EQ. Erection of double car port with storage facility above. **Application withdrawn.**

8. Bruton Conservation Area and the Climate Emergency

Councillors considered whether to ask the Local Planning Authority to review the Bruton Conservation Area Article 4(1) Direction dated 30th December 2010, and most particularly clauses 11-13 of Schedule 1, in the light of policy changes signalled by Bruton Town Council's Declaration of a 'Climate Emergency' on March 26th 2019 and SSDC's recognition of a 'Climate and Ecological Emergency' on May 21st 2019. Among points made were the following:

- The Council's Declaration of a Climate Emergency requires it to promote the greater use of solar panels.
- Bruton's roofscape forms an important element of its historic character which has been protected by its designation as the first Conservation Area (CA) in Somerset. Visible solar panels in the heart of Bruton would deface this roofscape.
- Sustainability in this sensitive area would be better served through alternatives like ground-source heating and improved insulation.
- In any case many SSDC staff have been redeployed to help with the vaccine roll-out programme so the Planning Department is unlikely to be in a position to carry out a CA review any time soon.
- The Planning White Paper proposes local design codes which may well give Town and Parish Councils a greater say in planning decisions. It would therefore make sense for the Council to revise its planning policy and press on with a Neighbourhood Plan, both of which should include measures to promote sustainability in energy.

It was RESOLVED 6-0-0 to defer consideration of this matter pending changes to the national planning system and to recommend that Council consider addressing such issues through the development a Neighbourhood Plan.

9. Committee meetings

Members discussed the most convenient time and day of the week to hold meetings.

It was RESOLVED 6-0-0 to hold future meetings at 7.30pm on Tuesdays if possible, or if not at 7.30pm on Wednesdays.

Patrick Pender-Cudlip
Assistant Clerk