

Parish Council Report: October 2014

Conservation and Planning

Issues about planning occupy a great deal of the time of the Parish Council and 2014 has turned out to be no exception. The proposed development west of Dutton Brook was one such but often the most intractable are those concerning 'conservation' and listed building consent.

Before any consideration of the issues it is worth posing to consider the comments of a Government Planning Inspector made some two years ago during a planning appeal.

'Ribchester is an attractive village with Roman and pre-Roman antecedents. Church Street, at the village heart, leads down to the bank of the River Ribble and is characterised by terraces of modest houses. Typically they are built of stone with slate roofs and although some have been marred by the incorporation of unsuitable modern features they still form a harmonious and attractive whole. While, in the older part of Church Street, dormer windows and some roof lights are untypical of the roofscape the character of Church Street has still not been seriously eroded.'

Much of this change can be laid at the lack of a coherent management plan for the Conservation Area that has been apparent for some time. Over the years in Ribchester, the conservation concept has often been honoured in the breach rather than enforced. As a consequence there has been a steady loss of architectural detail on properties, one of the principal weaknesses of the conservation area recognized in the 2006 Conservation Appraisal by the Conservation Studio.

The Parish Council supports the principle of the conservation area. It firmly believes that it should be protected or indeed enhanced. But in so doing acknowledges that this laudable ambition brings with it an issue of general concern –the lack of general guidance. It seems reasonable for property owners to have available a document that sets out the reasons why we have a Conservation Area, what it is meant to achieve and how the Borough Council seeks to protect it. Without such advice owners can be left very much in the dark and may, possibly through ignorance of the 'rules', ignore restrictions on development. New owners are particularly vulnerable to this, as they may well have moved to the area unaware of its history.

The Parish Council has pressed for this for some time, while seeking to avoid provoking an over reaction by the Borough Council. Gentle guidance for the future is perhaps what is required. The report by the Conservation Studio in 2006 could have provided a platform and might yet be able to do so. Adopting – and more importantly- publishing guidance would assist owners to avoid issues that regularly come to the fore.

A plan of the Conservation Area together with published advice from the 'Conservation Appraisal' can be found on the Borough Council website:

www.ribblevalley.gov.uk/info/200359/conservation_and_listed_buildings

Breaches of Planning Control

The Parish Council is often asked "what requires planning permission" and, as a natural consequence, what is considered a breach of planning control.

The Borough Council comments that 'Decisions on planning matters are often a matter of fact and degree' and offers the following as examples of what might be classed as a breach of control:

- Carrying out building or engineering works or the change of use of land or a building without planning permission.
- Carrying out development not in accordance with a planning permission. This can be either failure to follow approved plans or failure to comply with conditions attached to the permission.
- Carrying out works (internal or external) to a listed building without listed building consent.
- The display of a sign or advertisement which requires consent, without advertising consent.
- The unauthorised felling of a tree or carrying out works to a tree protected by a tree Preservation Order or which is within a Conservation Area.
- The unauthorised demolition of a building in certain circumstances in a conservation area without conservation area consent.

On the other side of the coin the following activities would not normally be classed as breaches of control:

- On street parking (a matter under the Highway Acts).
- Operating a business from home where residential use remains the primary use, no staffs are employed there and visitors are kept to a minimum.
- Stationing a solitary caravan within the grounds of a dwelling, provided that its use is ancillary to the dwelling (it is stored).
- Clearing land of undergrowth, bushes and tress, provided they are not protected by a tree Preservation Order, are not in a Conservation Area or protected by a planning condition.