CAVERSFIELD PARISH COUNCIL

Protocol on pre-application meetings for planning developments - draft

Guidance for Councillors and developers
Caversfield Parish Council recognises that pre-application discussions play an important role in many planning applications and welcomes the desire of developers (whether for large or small projects) to consult both the Council and the public more widely. However, the Council is also aware of the importance of public perception in planning and the critical need to avoid any appearance that the Council is conducting secretive negotiations or colluding with developers.

Pre-determination
In all meetings with developers, members are reminded of the critical importance of not pre-determining their position on any future application, as this could require them to take no part in the discussion. It is noted, however, that expressing a pre-disposition, for example of either 'welcome in principle' or 'concerns', is permissible.

Individual members' discussions
Individual members may be approached by developers for informal discussions of possible future applications. Whilst it is left to the individual judgement of members whether to take part in such discussions, based on the nature and likely level of controversy of the application, they are advised:

i. to carefully consider the public perception of such meetings;
ii. to avoid any appearance of collusion in applications likely to cause controversy;
iii. to avoid accepting hospitality in connection with such meetings;
iv. to advise the Chairman, and where possible the Council, of such meetings.

Members must not purport to be representing the Council at such meetings, unless expressly authorised to do so by the Council.

Members must declare any discussions with developers, at the next available meeting and at any subsequent meetings when the planning application is discussed.

Pre application briefings
The Council is, in general, willing to hold meetings with developers prior to public consultation on the following two conditions:

i. full public consultation is either already scheduled or firmly planned;
ii. the meeting is open to the public to attend and has been reasonably advertised.

The policy of the Council is not to hold private meetings with developers unless there is a necessary and compelling reason that could be justified to the public (for example a strong commercial sensitivity, where a developer wishes to receive an initial steer before deciding whether to progress).

Pre application public consultations

The Council strongly encourages developers to carry out full public consultation before submitting plans for major developments, on the following basis:

i. an accessible and convenient venue;
ii. sufficient publicity to likely interested parties, in good time;
iii. appropriate timings to allow as wide a range of people as possible to attend;
iv. a genuinely open mind and willingness to adapt plans in response to feedback.

In general members are advised not to attend separate private briefings as part of public consultation, but instead to attend with the public.

This policy was considered and adopted at a meeting on 19 July 2023 (Minute reference 19/7/23 10. b. iii.) to be reviewed in two years or sooner should legislation dictate.