

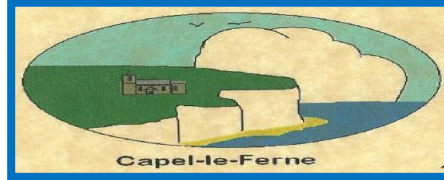
# CAPEL-LE-FERNE PARISH COUNCIL

Clerk to the Council

Maureen Leppard

Website:

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31<sup>st</sup> January 2017

Sue Chandler (Chairman of the Council) and  
Paul Watkins (Leader of the Council)

Dover District Council  
White Cliffs Business Park  
Dover  
Kent  
CT16 3PJ

Dear Councillors Chandler and Watkins

As Clerk to Capel-le-Ferne Parish Council I am writing, on behalf of Parish Councillors, to ask what processes Dover District Council have to check Planning Application comments posted on their website.

The Parish Council has been approached by a resident concerned about the comments posted against the Planning Application 16/01469. Rightly or wrongly, expressing concern about 11 responses posted on Wednesday, 25<sup>th</sup> January 2017.

The names given are not known residents of the village, so have advised, that anyone, whether resident or not, may respond to any application.

However this has not allayed concerns, particularly when the responses all would appear to use similar language but different fonts, with all 11 letters containing the same fundamental letter writing error.

These concerns have been magnified by the recent media coverage of a Planning Application made for Ash, where many letters were posted on the Dover District Council website in one day supporting the application.

This would obviously be a serious situation as the resultant affect, distorts the genuine views of local residents. The Parish Council, would like to reassure our Parishioners that Dover District Council take this very seriously and appropriate processes and procedures were in place to ensure democracy.

Due to the imminent closure of the consultation period, an urgent response would be appreciated.

Yours sincerely



Maureen Leppard

Clerk

Capel-le-Ferne Parish Council

*Copied to: Cllr. Hannant (Vice Chairman of the Council), Cllr. Conolly (Deputy Leader of the Council), Members of the Planning Committee, Adrian Fox (Policy and Projects Manager), Darren Bridgett (Case Officer) and Members of Dover District Council Management Team.*

**Proposed Development Land North of New Dover Road (B2011) – Quinn Estates**

Responses received to date on concerns expressed by Councillors and Residents on some of the response comments on Dover District Council website, following letter sent.

From: Cllr Peter Wallace, Planning Committee, Dover District Council

Though your letter is directed at senior members I thought I would give my perspective as a member of the planning committee.

Each piece of evidence is carefully and duly considered, and each carries its own weight. One letter from a resident writing that their neighbour is a neighbour from hell and burning waste on the land seven days a week, would obviously have different weight to ten template letters written by family and friends of an applicant. It is recorded in the agenda if the letters are from residents from the area or if anything appears to be a different about comments, so there is no need to worry that a campaign concocted by a developer would be seen as the views of local people. Councillors on the planning committee read the letters in advance and the officer will refer to them in the report too.

But more importantly letters are only one part of the decision making process - there is policy, site visits, public speakers at the meeting, a recommendation from the officer writing the report... countless things and letter writing only makes up a small part of that.

Capel-Le-Ferne is an area that we care about greatly and I did apply for my daughter to go to school there, so it is a place close to my heart. Hopefully this will all help to assure you that councillors use proper and due process on every application. Councillors, residents and officers from your council are always welcome to write to us about applications or speak at the meetings.

I know you are looking for response from others, but I hope this helps.

From Bill Gardner, Planning Committee, Dover District Council.

The letters of support are to say the least brief, but they don't seem to break any of the rules as to whether or not they should be counted. DDC has a couple of policies in place on this,

1) A petition signed by 10 or 100 or 1000 people only counts as 1 letter.

2) If a load of identical photocopied letters all with hand written addresses and signed by people arrive then again this is only counted as one letter.

These letters are all very short all say nearly the same thing, but do not count as just one letter, so this will mean that if the planning officers want to turn the application down under delegated powers then by DDC's rules there are enough contrary views, 6 being the magic number, so this application would have to go to the planning committee for consideration.

As opposition spokesman on the committee I have regular meetings with the chairman Fred Scales to discuss procedural matters but I don't think looking at this set of letters, and that's upgrading them to something they aren't, that this really is enough to change the rules.

Yes I think you are right to smell a rat, and I would seriously suggest that if the Parish Council is against the application when it considers it at its next meeting that it should instruct you as clerk to send out on the weekend before the committee meeting an email to all 10 Cllrs on the committee pointing out these concerns.

It is no good assuming that Cllrs will remember yesterday's email in 3 or 4 months' time, because Cllrs get bombarded with emails every day.

Your first email from yesterday morning is some 90 emails down my list already, and that doesn't include some 40 50 emails that went straight to junk!!!!

One issue that your email does raise and that is that we as DDC Cllrs badly need the input from Parish councils as our eyes and ears on the ground. Please do write to all of us when the application comes forward to us as a reminder to us all.

From Frederick Scales, Ward Councillor Capel & Hougham and Planning Committee, Dover District Council

I see you are getting replies from councillors. Please remember that they are not officers of the council and that they are passing on their own views and interpretations of the policies. I have noted a couple of small errors in their replies. You have however clearly raised the PC's concerns about the application which may be useful later in the process.

The essence of the replies are correct in that this type of mass produced letter carries no weight at all in the decision making.

I hope that helps

Continued ...

Continued ... **Agenda Item 6b i**

**Proposed Development Land North of New Dover Road (B2011) – Quinn Estates**

Responses received to date on concerns expressed by Councillors and Residents on some of the response comments on Dover District Council website, following letter sent.

From Dave Robinson, Planning Delivery Manager, Dover District Council

Thank you for your recent letter to Cllr Watkins and Cllr Chandler regarding the way that we deal with public consultations in respect of planning applications. Please accept my apologies for the delay in responding.

The consultation period for a planning application is open to anyone to comment and the issues raised in those responses are taken into account when making a decision.

The number of consultation responses, whilst reflecting the level of support or objection to a particular application only dictates whether an application is referred to Planning Committee or not. A decision is made on the planning merits of a case - not by the number of consultations for and against. It isn't down to a number of 'votes'. Consequently, there is nothing within Planning Legislation that requires a response to be verified to check whether the named person actually made those comments.

However, given that public consultations are publicly available, if someone did use another person's name and address to submit a consultation there is every chance that would be discovered.

As you point out, consultations are not limited to the area affected by any proposed development. A developer could ask friends and family from far and wide to submit letters of support, but as stated earlier, the decision rests on the planning merits of the case.

This was clearly highlighted when this particular application went to Planning Committee. I hope that clarifies the position.

Last paragraph: It should have read "This will be clearly highlighted when this particular application goes before Planning Committee."

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