

Planning in Poundstock.

It came as a bit of a shock to me some years ago when preparing plans for the car park at the Church Summerhouse to learn that church grounds carry no permitted development rights. Generally speaking, within certain constraints, you can do quite a bit of building work in your home without the need to seek planning permission. But things have become much tighter since local authorities started to charge for planning "services" and realised they could make a fast buck out of you and me. For instance, a bit a decking might need permission or even re-rendering the walls of your house.

Once upon a time, when we didn't talk of "the environment" it was taken for granted that new housing of the "Pack'em Close" type, whilst acceptable, represented the limit of how far it was deemed reasonable to go. Responsible planning authorities applied a restriction on further development by removing permitted development rights, meaning that any further additions or alterations had to receive planning consent. This still applies and can cause problems. On the other hand, as space becomes harder to find, standards have loosened up a bit. For instance, because central government wants everyone to use public transport they have dropped requirements for residential parking provision, which is a bit of a nonsense in narrow country roads where a bus is seldom seen! (By the way, I don't ascribe to the belief that waiting restrictions are needed to allow emergency services to go their way. In general, the clearer a road is, the faster people travel. I'd like to hear from anyone who has experience of a fire engine or ambulance unable to get to a scene.)

When it comes to objecting to proposals, new procedures are claimed to be in operation whereby the Council's "Case Officer" holds a site meeting to seek to reconcile opinions. Perhaps we've been unlucky, but despite expressing frequent concerns, our Parish Council has been unsuccessful, with the noted exception of the Black Rock substation which we were told will stay where it is, whatever is in the Parish Plan! However, there are about 20 "material considerations" which the planners are obliged to consider when viewing an application. These range from overshadowing (but not loss of view), loss of daylight or sunlight, highway issues, and amongst many others, light pollution. This was a new one on me but being an avid watcher of "Grand Designs", I always get annoyed at the vast areas of glass that everyone now seems to want in every room of the house (including bedroom and lavatory!). I had not thought of how much light spills out of these windows after dark and, in the countryside, that really can constitute pollution. Again, strangely, at a recent meeting, an officer appeared unaware of this criterion! Anyone who wants to know more is welcome to ask me.

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(Rupert was a Chartered Civil Engineer in local government charged with vetting planning applications from the highways aspect, presenting evidence at planning inquiries and preparing major highway schemes and town centre redevelopment proposals in another life.)