



CHOBHAM PARISH COUNCIL

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Mrs J Rickard
Executive Head of Regulatory
Surrey Heath Borough Council
Knoll Road
Camberley
Surrey GU15 3HD

Via email: Jenny.Rickard@surreyheath.gov.uk

Dear Mrs Rickard

Changes to Planning Laws Affecting High Streets

I am writing on behalf of Chobham Parish Council to comment on amendments to permitted development rights that came into force on 25th May, and on reports that further legislation is being prepared to remove the need for landlords and retailers to seek consent to change the use of empty or poor performing retail units to certain other services.

The Parish Council generally supports the principle of legislation designed to invigorate High Streets and improve their flexibility. It advocates keeping buildings in use for the community, provided any changes of use make a positive contribution to the range of services, quality, attractiveness and accessibility of the High Street. There are, however, some concerns regarding the apparent move toward more blanket permitted development and how this may bring about decline and further challenges to Chobham's High Street rather than support vitality and activity.

The Parish looks to the Borough Council to help ensure the viability of the village High Street as far as possible under current or new laws. It urges that the following points and themes are taken into consideration where development principles for prior approval are being set, planning applications are being considered and consultation responses on relevant draft legislation are being submitted.

- Resist changes that would remove the chance for occupiers, neighbours and local people to have a say. These types of changes go against the principles of Localism.
- Object where possible to any future proposals for changes to general permitted development that would offer no control over whether the resulting use would be fit for its setting and the character of the area.

- Strongly resist the loss of ground floor, primary frontages to uses other than those compatible with the overall retail function of the High Street. Changes of use of primary units to residential is considered particularly harmful.
- Avoid persons with mobility challenges being disadvantaged from accessing everyday shops and services by the loss of ground floor retail units.
- Encourage a range of retail, office, service or residential use of the upper floors above ground floor commercial units provided ground floor and neighbouring uses are respected or enhanced.
- Recognise the differing challenges for small, rural High Streets with a limited number of units compared to those in towns. For example, the overall offering of a local High Street is critical to generating footfall and each loss of a retail unit represents a higher percentage erosion than within a town.
- Avoid creating any net loss of valued local employment opportunities.
- Resist changes to legislation which would be likely to undermine Conservation Area and listed building considerations.

The Parish Council also notes that potential new permitted development rights for commercial buildings to be demolished and replaced with homes, and for certain existing buildings to be extended upwards will be further considered by government. It is felt that the existing planning system is suitable for these types of development in order that all aspects of a proposal may be considered, and permitted development should be reserved for minor, straightforward changes.

If there are any areas where the Borough and Parish Councils can work together in respect of the matters raised, or if the Parish can engage or provide its local knowledge to help with any aspect of planning policy affecting its High Street please do not hesitate to let me know.

Yours sincerely



Ms C Cooper
Planning Administrator