

Event description

On the afternoon of Thursday the 21st of May I received a text message from IPC chair Nick Bradley, this being a message forwarded by him to me from an Ide resident, who was raising concerns about a large steel structure being erected at 'Stevens Farm' next to the A30 interchange at the end of Ide Village Road.

I visited the location later that day, where I could see that the steel skeleton of a new building was indeed now in place.

The next morning, Friday the 22nd of May, I visited the Teignbridge District Council planning portal to revisit a recent application that the Ide Parish Council had commented on to Teignbridge District Council, this being application ref. 19/10947- 'Addition of a grain store to existing barn'. My first thoughts had been that the new structure was that which had been proposed in application 19/10947, although this seemed unlikely to me as the new structure did not accord with my recollection of the proposed size of the additional grain store, and indeed my subsequent inspection of the plans for 19/10947 confirmed my thoughts that the new structure was not that proposed in 19/10947 but was something other.

I then did a search for all planning applications related to the location in question, and found 19/01946 'Erection Of Agricultural Building'. Looking at this application on the Teignbridge DC planning portal I could see that this was indeed the application that had proposed the new structure now visible, and that Teignbridge District Council had granted planning permission for it on 21st November 2019.

I was surprised to discover that there had been a planning application, as I had no recollection of the Parish Council being asked to comment upon it. Indeed, there was no 'Parish-Town Council's Comments' document from Ide PC within the planning portal documents area for this application.

I searched for 19/01946 within my Ide Parish Council emails in box (I make a point of never deleting any documents received from my parish council inbox) and found only one instance of this reference number, this being the Teignbridge DC's 'Copy of Planning Decision Notice to Parish' for 19/01946 which had been forwarded to me by our Parish Clerk Mel Liversage. I would've seen this, but had mistakenly assumed it was the decision notice for 19/10947 as it was the same site, and I had not been expecting decision notices for any other applications for development on this site.

There was no 'Planning Application Consultation' for 19/01946 for this application in my inbox. Planning Application Consultation requests are formal requests by Teignbridge DC for the comments of the Parish Council on any planning application sited within a parish. These notices arrive with our Parish Clerk, who forwards them to me, and upon receipt of them I then put the wheels in motion to convene the council's planning committee for discussion of any application thus received.

I rang the planning department at Teignbridge and spoke with 'Planning Support Assistant' Vicky Oakley, to ask if she could determine whether a 'Planning Application Consultation' request for 19/01946 had been sent out to our parish. Ms Oakley said that the planning system software indicated that it had been sent out.

Having ascertained this, I then emailed chair Nick Bradley, letting him know what the situation was; either the email had gone astray, or perhaps our Parish Clerk Mel had not seen it or acted upon it.

Nick Bradley said that he and Mel Liversage had a planned appraisal meeting fixed on 27th May, when they would seek to establish what had occurred. At this meeting on 27th May Mel and Nick reviewed emails coming into the Parish Clerk's inbox in October 2019, and found that there had indeed been a 'Planning Application Consultation' notification from Teignbridge about application 19/01946.

Notes from appraisal meeting: We discussed a recent significant event which came to light last week. A resident enquired about a large building being erected on Stevens Farm by Alphington Junction. On enquiry by PB, it emerged that this building was an agricultural barn, and planning permission had been granted on 21st November 2019. Teignbridge DC's validation date for the application was 18th October 2019, and notice of the application had been sent to Mel, but she had not sent it on to PB for discussion at the Planning Committee. This was one of two similar applications to arrive, one week apart, for the same site, the other one for a grain store. Mel had been on holiday in Norfolk then Spain when the email alerts came in. She forwarded the grain store application on, but not the agricultural barn. It received planning consent with no objections. PB had received the decisions for both applications, but at the time had taken them as referring to the same building, and thought no more.

NCAB had discussed this with PB and Mel before this appraisal. We agreed that there were several extenuating circumstances to account for the mistake. It was always likely that an agricultural barn was going to be approved by TDC whatever IPC said.

Learning points:

- Holiday periods are higher risk for missing correspondence
- Relying on one person to field all planning emails is risky
- Emails are easy to overlook.

Actions planned

The possibility of asking the Planning Department at Teignbridge to set up an automatic carbon copy (cc) of any new application notices to Ide Parish Council Planning Committee Chair Pete Bishop's email address was explored, but whilst Teignbridge District Council said this was possible they could not promise 100% reliability.

Therefore, it was agreed that a better option to be explored should be the setting up of automatic forwarding within Mel's parish council email inbox of any emails sent to her by Planning at

Teignbridge DC that give notice of applications that we are asked to formally comment upon. These emails feature the words 'Planning Application Consultation' within the subject line, and arrive from the specific email address of planning@teignbridge.gov.uk so we would hope we can use these two specific identifiers to set up a forwarding filter or mechanism. The process of setting up such a forwarding filter or mechanism within Mel's email would best be effected by Pete and Mel meeting up and taking a look at the options available via the laptop Mel uses for her Parish Clerk's work, but the current CV19 social distancing guidelines have thus far made such meeting difficult.

In the interim Mel will manually forward the weekly all-inclusive bulletin of new applications received for the whole of the Teignbridge DC area, in which any new applications within the parish of Ide will first appear.

The Teignbridge Planning webpages also offer the option to view an interactive map of an area, where the sites of current applications are cross-hatched in red. Pete will set up a weekly Outlook Calendar alert, giving a reminder to him to inspect this map once a week.

However, it is the case that not all applications that appear in the weekly bulletin, or appear in red on the map, will be applications that lead to a statutory request for our comments from the local planning authority; some, for instance may be 'permitted development' notices, or certain 'discharge of conditions' upon a planning application. Pete spoke with Teignbridge District Council Planning Department regarding this, asking which categories of applications will or won't trigger a 'planning application consultation' email to us, and was advised to email Planning in sufficient detail regarding the matter for them to clarify things for our guidance.