

REPORT TO BLOXHAM ANNUAL PARISH MEETING APRIL 26TH 2019

This past 12 months has possibly been the most trying, frustrating and time consuming period that we, as your district councillors have experienced and mostly due to problems which have arisen since the local garage in the village was taken over by the largest forecourt operator in the country, known as Motor Fuel Group (MFG)

As many of you know, this started way back in February 2018 when changes were made on the forecourt of the garage with the erection of a much larger, fully lit totem. Problems continued when in March a licence was applied for to sell alcohol 24 hours a day.

The Licencing Committee at Cherwell District Council granted this licence on 5th April , despite protests from district councillors and neighbouring residents of the garage.

Since that date, there has been a constant stream of problems caused by MFG making alterations to lighting and advertising with no previous planning permission. This has resulted in a string of retrospective planning applications, all of which have been turned down by the Planning Committee for various reasons, such as the lighting did not conform to standards set down by the Institute of Lighting Engineers.

MFG were asked on several occasions to submit a full lighting report from independent lighting consultants, due to huge lighting overspill affecting local residents. Despite many requests from the planning department, this lighting report was not forthcoming and so after four months of requests, the district council commissioned their own lighting report, which took place in October. This lighting report turned out to be very damaging for MFG as it reported that the lighting as far too bright, with too much lightspill onto surrounding properties.

Due to non compliance of MFG, they were issued with a Community Protection Warning by the Environmental Dept at Cherwell District Council. This was followed a few weeks later by a Community Protection Notice as they had not complied with the conditions in the warning. There is now a retrospective application in for the Londis lighting which stays on all night and lights up residents bedrooms. This will probably go to the planning committee in May. And so the saga goes on.....

In the meantime, local residents have suffered from the 24 hour opening of the garage, with deliveries during the night (this has now been given curfew times, not after 10.00pm and not before 7.00am), “games” of football on the forecourt at 4.00am, customers of the garage leaving engines running, banging car doors and general screaming and shouting.

All these problems have been reported to Cherwell and a lot of them to the police but it is a very slow process to get action on all of these problems and we fear that these problems may continue for some time yet.

Then came Bloxham School’s application for floodlighting at the Dewey Centre, when an application was submitted for huge floodlights on the hockey pitches at the rear of the Dewey Centre – in what is described as an intrinsically dark area and outside of the village boundary. This went to the Planning Committee at Cherwell District Council and permission was refused.

Bloxham School have now applied for planning permission for 5 high level floodlights and numerous low level lights on their car park at the Dewey Centre. They already had permission for low level lighting but had decided to put up two very tall lights, without permission and were told by the Enforcement Dept that they would need to apply for planning permission for these new lights – instead, their application was for even more tall floodlights which is going through planning at the moment. No-one disputes that some lighting is needed on the car park but the level of lighting must be suitable for the area.

There was then numerous problems with the new build on Queen Street, a lot of which were dealt with by the Enforcement Dept.

Recently, we have been sent notices about a consultation on speed limits on the A361 and we would urge residents to reply to this consultation via the OCC website. There are good points and bad in this consultation but unless it can all be policed properly it will have little or no effect on a lot of drivers who seem to treat the A361 as a bit of a racetrack.

All these problems have taken up an inordinate amount of councillors time and energy and still the rest of their work has to continue with investigating planning queries (and there are plenty of them), sorting out missed bin collections, reporting fly-tipping etc. etc.

The only good thing we can report at the moment is that we haven't had any more large housing development applications for the village and we are hoping it stays that way.

We are also hoping for a slightly quieter year in 2019/2020.

Cllrs. Chris Heath, Mike Bishop and Andrew McHugh