

The high cost of NIMBYs

HOW much money have Haslemere NIMBYs (Not In My Back Yard) cost other residents in the past year with refused planning applications consistently being overturned at appeal? Each one of these overturned decisions results in thousands in legal fees that are paid for by Waverley residents.

Haslemere has one of the highest percentages of mortgage-free homeowners in the country, and a significantly older population than average, who have enjoyed huge gains in their wealth from property prices exploding in the area over recent decades. These are the people who then devote their time in retirement to preventing a single additional home being built in the town.

Cllr David Dullaway made it on to the Haslemere Town Council in 2019, which gives him a vote on planning matters in the town. However, should the town council not vote the 'correct way', his wife, Sonja Dullaway has given herself the position as head of planning for the Haslemere Society and will submit the objection themselves.

If the name 'Haslemere Society' gives off a whiff of officiality to you, then do not be mistaken – this is simply a group of individuals who have appointed themselves the 'protectors of Haslemere'.

No planning application is safe from their wrath, whether you are an individual, business or developer – if your application falls foul of them, they will pour immense amounts of time and effort into blocking you.

Just because you're not a developer does not mean you're safe from them – an extension to your home is just as likely to attract their watchful eye and have them publish your application across the internet for their followers to scrutinise and send in their own objections too.

Now you've got to deal with John Smith and 20 others who live five miles from you, spending their days trying to stop you from building your new garage. Such timely pursuits are the luxury of people such as Mr Dullaway, who lists his employment as 'none' but owns four different properties in Haslemere, as stated on his declaration of interests for the town council.

Their constant outrage to any type of development causes instances like the Red Court development now being permitted on green land because a five-year housing supply can't even be shown in the borough, so the Planning Inspectorate overturned the committee's refusal at appeal.

It is unclear how much the objectors to this development will care about this loss of green land though, as they were keenly offering up another piece of green land in Hindhead as an alternative for where houses could be delivered – the key difference between these sites seemingly being that the Hindhead one was a few miles further away from their own houses.

The Heights development in Hill Road is another recent embarrassing example of the council wasting thousands of our money on legal fees to pointlessly fight applications that clearly would be approved at appeal.

This location had even been allocated for development in the five-year housing supply by the council. But when permission was actually applied for, the Haslemere Society rallied their troops into pressuring the council to reject it with 135 objections.

The council's appointed legal team then had to sit through the entire appeal hearing and explain with a straight face why a site they themselves had allocated for development should now be refused.

In this instance, their objection wasn't to development on green land, as this was already a developed site in the development zone. Their concern now was

that the abandoned and dilapidated school building, which had undergone numerous alterations and extensions during its time, was the work of famed architect Herbert Hutchison.

If this name is not familiar to you, it is probably because in reality he was a builder/architect who built a number of houses in Haslemere in the 20th century, none of which have ever been acknowledged as being of architectural merit or are listed by Historic England (unlike over 100 Grade II listed buildings in the town). Not quite Haslemere's own Frank Lloyd Wright.

The objectors claimed that the loss of this school building would deal a great blow to the architectural heritage of the town – the Planning Inspectorate disagreed.

An irony that is lost on these prolific objectors is that the Heights school closed because of a lack of pupils – perhaps if there were a few more family houses in Haslemere then there could have been enough children to keep it open and prevent it being bulldozed and built over.

Like the former school, the high street in Haslemere has been struggling for years now, with what seems like half the businesses and buildings having closed, or been put up for sale.

The Haslemere NIMBYs will dedicate themselves to preventing new houses in the area but will see no correlation in why they now have to travel 15 miles to the nearest bank branch, or why no new shops have opened in years.

They will say that Haslemere can't possibly support any more people while watching the high street shut down because there aren't enough people to support the businesses.

These objectors can at least take comfort in knowing that if they successfully manage to strangle the life out of the town, they'll have created a place people no longer want to live and the applications for new houses in the area will surely stop.

They all accept that the UK needs more houses – just not near them.

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