



East Cambridgeshire District Council

Minutes of a Meeting of the Planning Committee

Held at The Grange, Nutholt Lane, Ely, CB7 4EE at 2:00pm on
Wednesday 2 July 2025

Present:

Cllr Christine Colbert
Cllr Lavinia Edwards
Cllr Martin Goodearl (Vice-Chair)
Cllr Keith Horgan (substitute)
Cllr Julia Huffer (substitute)
Cllr Bill Hunt (Chair)
Cllr James Lay
Cllr Alan Sharp
Cllr Ross Trent (not in attendance for items 8 & 9)

Officers:

Patrick Adams – Senior Democratic Services Officer
Maggie Camp – Director Legal
Selina Raj Divakar – Planning Team Leader
Kevin Drane – Trees Officer
Rachael Forbes – Planning Officer
Jasmine Moffat – Planning Assistant
David Morren – Strategic Planning and Development Management Manager
Muhammad Saleem – Interim Team Leader

In attendance:

Angie Curtis – Applicant
Lucy Wells – Chair of Lode Parish Council
David Wright – Applicant

ECDC Comms

7. Apologies and substitutions

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Chika Akinwale, Cllr Christine Ambrose Smith, Cllr Mark Goldsack, Cllr John Trapp and Cllr Christine Whelan. Cllr Keith Horgan attended as a substitute for Cllr Goldsack. Cllr Julia Huffer attended as a substitute for Cllr Ambrose Smith.

8. Declarations of interest

Cllr Christine Colbert declared a prejudicial interest in agenda items 8 and 9, 24/00436/FUL and 25/00437/LBC regarding 13 St Marys Street, Ely. However, the Director Legal explained that Cllr Colbert had received a dispensation and so she could remain in the chamber for these items, participate in the debate and vote.

Cllr Ross Trent declared a prejudicial interest in agenda items 8 and 9. He left the meeting when these items were discussed. He did not participate in the debate and did not vote.

9. Minutes

The Minutes of the meetings held on 4 June 2025 were agreed as a correct record.

10. Chair's announcements

There were no Chair's announcements.

11. 25/00317/FUL – 16 Green Bank Road, Swaffham Bulbeck

Jasmine Moffat, Planning Assistant, presented a report (AA29, previously circulated) recommending retrospective approval for the erection of an annexe at 16 Green Bank Road, Swaffham Bulbeck. She requested that the Committee agree to add an extra condition to remove the fence within six months and remove permitted development rights to prevent any future fences from being erected. The Committee agreed to this.

The Senior Democratic Services Officer read out the following statement from Sophie Singleton, Vice Chair of Swaffham Bulbeck Parish Council:

"The main house has for a long time been used as a rental property. To the best of my knowledge, the applicant has never lived there. It has been used as an Airbnb in recent years, with the neighbours complaining of disturbances.

"I believe that the original application 22/00178/CLP to erect an office and woodstore for the main house was passed because, post-COVID, having outdoor space and an office was part of the new world.

"From the outset, the building was not used as permitted. Converted into a self-contained studio dwelling in contravention of planning permission, it includes cooking facilities, a bedroom and a washroom, and had a young person living in it. This person was subsequently removed by enforcement.

"There is every reason to believe that the building will continue to be used as a separate rental property in contravention of the original and current applications. It is not an office or woodstore or other outbuilding for the main property; it is designed to be used as, and has already been used as, a studio

residence. Not only is this in contravention of planning permission, it raises significant concerns regarding building and fire regulations.

“Furthermore, this application would not meet its requirements under the Swaffham Bulbeck Neighbourhood Plan and granting it would set a precedent for all garden sheds to be converted into dwellings, bypassing regulations regarding permitted and safe developments.

“I therefore ask the Planning Committee to refuse this application and enforce the existing regulations, or demand that the building be removed.”

The Senior Democratic Services Officer read out the following statement from ward member Cllr John Trapp:

“I have grave concerns about this planning application, and the consequences of it being approved, not only because it is within my village and ward, but also because of the broader consequences that may arise from such approval.

“Having looked at the original approval, 22/00178/CLP, and the current plans, I have these observations:

“The 2022 plans were not enacted properly; those plans showed two separate rooms, one labelled ‘Office’ and the other ‘Store’; the 2022 plans showed two double doors that gave access to the two rooms, and there was no interconnection between the two rooms. There was also a window on the left side wall. The 2025 application has the existing plan (one notes that two different existing plans had been submitted, and that neither of them resemble the one approved in 2022 that should have been the starting point) showing something quite different; a storeroom tacked onto the lefthand side, not on the 2022 plans as approved, as well as a very different façade to that approved. What had been approved in 2022 was not what was subsequently built.

“The 2022 approval was based on ‘Class E – buildings etc incidental to the enjoyment of a dwellinghouse’, not a dwelling house per se.

“It is not clear whether the existing insulation meets the requirements of current building regulations. Based on the 2022 plans the walls were 300mm thick all round. It would be surprising that a store and office would have been built with insulation of the standard that would be required for a dwelling unless it was designed to be a separate dwelling from the outset. The same might be the case for the foundations; are they of the required design and depth to satisfy current building regulations?

“It is clear that this was built as a separate dwelling with its own bathroom and kitchen, designed as such from the outset to contravene planning regulation. The planning application says ‘annex’, but this is not the case here. Would not an office and store be more appropriate to be built as an extension rather than a separate building away from the main house, and accessed independently?

“Its continued existence will always be suspect; imposing a condition that this building is only to be subsidiary to the main house is difficult to enforce, as subsidiarity may be tenuously defined. For example, what degree of ‘cousinship’ of a future occupant would be acceptable as being ‘subsidiary’? This will cause future problems for enforcement, as has already been done when it was occupied illegally.

“Permission for this development may result in the flouting of planning regulation by others in the District citing this application, should it be approved, as a precedent.

“Retrospective planning applications should be judged not on what has been built so far, but on whether it would have been accepted at the planning stage. To my mind, approval of a separate dwelling on this site would not have been approved had it been submitted in 2022. What we have here is a ratchet effect; start with an approvable planning application, build something different, and then when rumbled, put in a retrospective planning application.

“I would urge you to consider rejecting this application that has, from the outset in 2022, been designed to be something different to its stated aim, and to request that the building be made to conform to what had been approved in 22/00178/CLP.”

Members were invited to ask questions to the officer.

In reply to Cllr Julia Huffer, the Strategic Planning and Development Management Manager replied that the 2022 application was for a certificate of lawfulness, as the annex did not require planning permission due to its size. He noted that the annex was approximately 15cm larger than expected. The planning regulations stated that the building had to be linked to the main occupancy and could not be rented out or occupied separately.

In reply to Cllr James Lay, the Strategic Planning and Development Management Manager explained that removing the fence was sufficient to link the annex to the main property and blocking front access to the annex was unnecessary.

It was presumed that the annex did not have a separate connection for utilities. This was not considered to be a planning matter.

The Committee moved into debate.

Concern was expressed regarding the fact that this was a retrospective application, but members supported the recommendation, with the conditions, as amended.

Cllr Julia Huffer proposed and Cllr Keith Horgan seconded the amended recommendation in the report. A vote was taken and

It was unanimously resolved:

to approve planning application 25/00317/FUL, subject to the conditions set out in Appendix 1 with delegated powers given to the Strategic Planning & Development Management Manger to agree the wording to include removal of the fence within six months and to remove permitted development rights in respect to future erection of fences.

12. 25/00371/FUL – Water Lane, Kirtling

Rachael Forbes, Planning Officer, presented this report, AA30 already circulated, on a proposal to build a purpose built wildlife veterinary hospital, including residential facilities. She explained that three additional comments had been received, two against the application and one in favour, since the agenda had been published. All three of these individuals had already commented on the applications and their views had been taken into account when drawing up the recommendation.

The Senior Democratic Services Officer read out a statement from objector Simon Gooderham:

“We are submitting this statement as local residents and immediate neighbours to the proposed development on land off Water Lane in Kirtling. We strongly object to this application, and we urge you to refuse it.

“The properties directly affected by the site are the true neighbours and those who will be most impacted. Those residents most impacted by the proposal were not included in the village consultation undertaken by the applicant and we have all outlined serious concerns from noise, visual harm, traffic impact, and inappropriate development which is contrary to local and national planning policy in this location.

“A quick glance at the planning portal gives the impression of overwhelming neighbour support. However, the vast majority of the 100 or so supporting letters come from individuals with no connection to the area—many live far outside the village - Bury St Edmunds, Ely, Soham, Woodbridge, and even London. These are not genuine neighbour responses and give a deeply misleading impression of local support. They should not be given the same weight as those of immediate residents.

“This is not a vote of no confidence in the applicant’s care for wildlife—that is not in question. It is a planning decision about whether this agricultural field in open countryside is the right place for a multi-container wildlife hospital, permanent manager’s accommodation, staff housing, and all that comes with

it: vehicle movements, industrial batteries, noise, lighting, and a risk of creeping development.

“The site lies outside Kirtling village development envelope, on Grade 2 agricultural land, and is therefore in conflict with East Cambridgeshire’s Local Plan. There is no agricultural justification, no proven local need, and no exception criteria are met. It threatens to set a dangerous precedent for rural residential expansion.

“Already, containers and a portacabin have appeared on site without the correct permissions. The visual damage is immediate and obvious. Further research has uncovered the applicant speaking publicly about long-term ambitions to add log cabins for terminally ill patients, as well as events and training facilities. This raises serious concerns about the true scale and future trajectory of the proposal. Once residential use is granted, the door is opened, and it may not be easily closed again.

“In addition, the site is immediately adjacent to a known badger sett, a legally protected habitat. Noise, light, and construction pose significant ecological risks to a protected species, and the proposed development and associated use is incompatible with its proximity to the badger sett. These issues have not been addressed by the application.

“Our Parish Council has unanimously objected on a number of grounds including impact on local residents and inappropriate development in an open countryside location.

“There is already a fully equipped, respected hedgehog hospital operating at Shepreth Wildlife Park, just 25 miles away.

“The absence of a transport assessment, despite clear intensification on narrow access roads, renders the application incomplete and adds to its inappropriateness for this location. County highways have objected to the proposal.

“To conclude: This is an emotive application, but planning must be guided by policy, not sentiment. This development would cause irreversible harm to the local environment, set a damaging precedent, and is contrary to all local and national planning policy. We urge you to refuse the application in full.”

The Senior Democratic Services Officer read out a statement from objector Christopher Walker:

“I had intended to attend the Planning Committee meeting tomorrow but due to unforeseen circumstances I am now not able to. I will be following the Planning Committee meeting on the link provided on the Council’s website.

“Further to my letter of 19 May 2025, I have since read the Planning Statement submitted by the applicant and note that at paragraph 1.5 it is stated that:

‘The case officer explained the baseline view is that it would be unacceptable as development and a new house in the countryside but also acknowledged its incredibly unique and exceptional circumstances had no fit in current planning policies. It would therefore be seen as exceptional.’

“Planning laws and policies are put in place to ensure that the environment and the character of towns, villages and the countryside are protected. There are no doubt many circumstances in which an applicant seeking planning permission would argue that their proposed development should be seen as exceptional, particularly when it includes constructing residential accommodation in a location where planning permission would not otherwise be granted. This proposed development cannot truly be viewed as exceptional. The Planning Statement should be properly weighed against current planning laws and policies.

“Several supporters of this application have referred to the provision of educational activities. This would significantly increase vehicular traffic to and from the proposed site. If the hedgehog hospital referred to in this application is to move from its current location in Ousden to Water Lane most of the additional vehicular traffic will approach the site via Malting End. The minor roads around the proposed site, particularly Malting End and Woodditton Road, are not able to cater for a significant increase in vehicular traffic as evidenced by the erosion of the verges and the edges of the tarmacked surfaces. Vehicles are often required to pull on to the verge as there are not designated passing places.

“If this application is granted it is highly unlikely that the proposed site will return to agricultural use. It is difficult to imagine what use would be made of the structures on site, other than the residential accommodation, in the event that the hedgehog/wildlife hospital were to close; this is not a fanciful possibility given what has been said about other wildlife care facilities. At some stage the applicant would need to hand over responsibility for running the hospital to someone else. Presumably this would, in view of what has been said about the need for residential accommodation, require additional permanent residential accommodation to be provided.

I would be grateful if this letter could be considered when the Council determines whether to grant the application, and to be kept informed of any further developments.”

Angie Curtis, applicant made the following statement:

“Sue Stublely wanted to be here, but she has had an influx of animals which need her attention to survive.

“We understand that this application has challenged the Planning Officers as it is so unusual and incomparable to other developments.

“Contrary to opinions expressed within the reports, this veterinary wildlife animal hospital plan is well thought out and supported by wildlife experts, including highly regarded local vet, Dick White and the South Essex veterinary wildlife hospital. The NPPF and the Local Development Plan make virtually no mention of the impact that people have on wildlife.

“From road casualties to loss of habitat, the indigenous wild animals with whom we share this District are losing the battle to survive against human incursion.

“That is why the Suffolk Hedgehog Hospital has continued to grow in the types and numbers of animals it helps – especially as other rescue centres continue to close. The hospital has taken over every part of Sue’s life and home. Every year she takes in over 1,000 animals. Alongside hedgehogs; this year, Sue has treated a leveret, badger cub, fox cubs, ducks and ducklings, baby birds including a blue tit, a starling and a dunnock, baby rabbits, a stoat and an owl – and has taken in a buzzard today.

“Shepreth only takes Hedgehogs and is 29 miles away. Wildlife hospitals are even more distant. Smaller rescue centres refer their most serious cases to Sue and rely on her expertise to guide their care.

“The revised ecology report changed its opinion from ‘no objection’ to a variety of arguments why this site is unsuitable. With the greatest of respect, we would argue that this opinion is wrong. The site is perfect for its planned purpose. The arrangement of the buildings is designed to enable the animals to be treated appropriately, healed and prepared for release. Predators and prey will not be close. Hedgehogs are never released in this type of location – most are returned to the location where they were found to continue their lives in a familiar environment, or returned to a release site which will meet their needs. The badger’s sett will not be disturbed and confirms the suitability of the site.

“The rye grass grown on the field is a farmed crop. Sue met with an officer and explained her plan to rewild the field with plants for a hay meadow to give better biodiversity. The entire field was not included in the application as we understood the pre-application advice to be that a smaller site would be more likely to meet the approval of the Council. We took it as a given that the entire field would provide context for the development.

“The Highways concerns were not significant at the early stages. It almost feels as if the reports have been created to justify the recommendation to refuse.

“The containers were wrongly installed on site, with no ill-intent, but a desperate need to accept gifts which would help the charity build the hospital most cost effectively. The alternative was to lose them. They will be clad to blend into the site and is intended to minimise the undeniable visual impact. In terms of scale, the barn is no more nor less intrusive than other agricultural buildings found locally. The hospital uses less than 5% of the field. The static

caravan will allow Sue to provide round the clock care during the build. The build will be more environmentally friendly requiring less construction materials and groundworks than other options.

“Sometimes, a Council has to stand up for the things that really matter. There is nowhere in East Cambs District that provides the support to vets and the high level of care to animals that this hospital will deliver if built. Without it, there is the undeniable risk that Sue will be forced to close her doors and move away. There has been nowhere else in this area suitable for her in a property search that has taken years. This field is not ideal – but it is the closest to ideal that Sue has been able to find in her extensive search.

“Planning policy is in a state of flux. It is our hope that increased flexibility could ultimately give us the permissions we need.

“Sue understands the needs of wild animals. Her track record and the endorsements from other wildlife organisations and experts for her work prove that.

“East Cambs District Council should show that it has the interests of all its residents at its heart by granting this application. Our residents survey overwhelmingly supported the hospital. The Council’s initiative to support hedgehogs and wildlife is one of its most popular. It would be ironic if this same Council chooses to refuse these precious creatures the vital lifesaving support they need.

“I have to ask you to accept that sometimes, a policy cannot cover all of the unique requirements of those most in need of its care and protection – the wildlife, including hedgehogs, that it professes to support.”

Members of the Committee were invited to ask questions to Angie Curtis, who made the following responses:

- The mobile homes on the site were only temporary, whilst the main building was constructed.
- The hospital will be built out of converted portable cabins.
- To care for the animals, somebody would have to be on the site permanently.
- The plan was to have three staff members working in shifts on the site.
- It was hoped that groups such as the Guides and Brownies would be able to visit the site, but it would be a hospital and not a visitors centre.
- The site would be self-sufficient with a bore hole for water and wind turbines and solar panels for electricity.
- The mains would be available as a back-up.
- Sue had 17 years of experience of treating animals, but she did not have any medical qualifications.
- A vet would be employed at the hospital to carry out operations.
- The drawing up of the application had been a difficult process with a lack of time and a lack of support from consultants employed to assist in the process.

- The applicants were prepared to amend the application to address any points of concern from officers or the Committee.

The Senior Democratic Services Officer read out the following statement from a neighbour, Karen Grey:

“Today I am writing to you to in full support of Sue Stubbley of Suffolk Hedgehog Hospital to be granted planning permission to open a Wildlife Hospital at Water Lane, Kirtling.

“We personally believe that a Wildlife Hospital in the area is long overdue. We as a family have travelled hundreds of miles over the years in search of places to take injured wildlife so that they may receive the best love, care and expertise to enable them the best chance possible to be helped and hopefully go on to enjoy the rest of their lives.

“What has become apparent in my quest to find help, is that wonderful places such as the one proposed are so few and far between, (hence the need to travel so far to find help). Obviously when an animal is sick or injured long car journeys can cause them so much added stress which impacts on their chances of recovery.

“The proposed Wildlife Hospital would be such an amazing asset for our wildlife. Sadly in this day and age humans are responsible for so much of their suffering. It was only a very short time ago that I took a poor little hedgehog to Sue that had lost a foot! Highly likely the result of some irresponsible person not checking an area before strimming! Just imagine the amount of suffering and pain this poor little hog went through. What I am trying to say here is that we as humans should be trying to help them as much as we possibly can and giving permission for this Wildlife Hospital is one way of doing exactly that.

“Last, but certainly by no means least, Sue and her team are absolutely amazing! The work that they do can never be underestimated, and they have helped me on more than one occasion with injured hedgehogs, but now the time has come that they need to expand on what they are able to currently offer. They are in such desperate need of more space and larger facilities as demand for their help is so extremely high. I sincerely hope that permission will be granted as I personally believe that dedication like theirs should be encouraged every step of the way.”

The Planning Officer made the following additional comments:

- The ecologist had written in support but had then raised objections after visiting the site.
- The applicant had been advised that the application was unacceptable in principle.
- Residential accommodation was proposed within the hospital, including a kitchen, living room, dining room, master bedroom and bathroom.

- The Council's adopted negotiation protocol stated that when an application was substantially substandard it should be refused without negotiation.
- Amendments to this application could not be made without the whole application being redone.
- The available planning records indicated no buildings ever being on site, which was designated as for agricultural use.

The Committee moved on to debate.

Cllr Julia Huffer proposed that the application be deferred to allow the applicants to address officers' concerns and resubmit an amended application. Cllr Christine Colbert seconded this recommendation, as she believed in the project and recognised the local need for an animal hospital. She suggested that a decision be deferred for three months.

Angie Curtis stated that she would welcome a deferral to allow the application to be amended to address the Council's concerns. It was noted that if the application was deferred a new consultation period would also be required.

Cllr Alan Sharp, though supportive of deferral, expressed concern that there could be some insurmountable problems for this application that could not be addressed by deferring a decision for three months. Cllr Keith Horgan also doubted whether the planning issues could be resolved by deferring the decision and expressed concerns about the viability of the operation. Cllr James Lay explained that he was opposed to the application as it was outside the development envelope of the village. Cllr Keith Horgan proposed the recommendation in the report to refuse the application. Cllr James Lay seconded this recommendation.

The Chair ruled that as the recommendation to defer the item had been proposed first, the Committee would vote on this before the recommendation to refuse. A vote was taken and with 6 votes in favour, 2 against and 1 abstention the Committee agreed that

It was resolved:

to defer planning application 25/00371/FUL, for three months with a consultation period to take place following the submission of additional information and prior to the application being taken back to Planning Committee.

13. 25/00407/TPO – Lode Road, Lode

Kevin Drane, Trees Officer, presented this report, AA31 already circulated, on an application to remove two horse chestnut trees due to tree related soil shrinkage. He explained the potential cost implications for the Council, should the application to remove the trees be refused.

The Senior Democratic Services Officer read out a statement from the applicant, Mr Michael Lawson:

“We are the arboriculturists commissioned to make the planning application for consent to fell the two Horse Chestnut trees the subject of the application. We understand that a decision will be made by the Planning Committee, and we would respectfully ask that this statement be read to the Committee.

“My name is Michael Lawson, and I am Chief Executive of the supporting arboricultural consultancy, a Chartered Biologist, Chartered Surveyor and Member of the Academy of Experts. I have given evidence in all the Courts on both criminal and civil matters relating to trees and have been an appointed Single Joint Expert to the Technology Court in London on matters of trees, subsidence and liability. I have 35 years’ experience of tree related subsidence cases and have written multiple peer reviewed papers on the subject.

“I have reviewed all of the evidence supporting this application and I would stress that the timing and pattern of movement, the view of a professional engineer, the soil types being plastic and cohesive clays, the presence of roots of Horse Chestnut, all confirm that this is a tree related subsidence and that the Horse Chestnut are the substantial and effective cause of movement.

“At only 7m from the property the trees are well within their known zones of influence, and the pattern of movement means they are undoubtedly causal in the movements witnessed.

“The close proximity means that a pruning remedy would have been to request a 80-90% of leaf area, Horse Chestnut responds very badly to heavy pruning and this level of tissue removal would likely have killed these mature trees.

“The close proximity means a root barrier could not be safely and effectively inserted down to 3m+ only a few metres from the trees.

“The Council are able to conditionally require replacement trees, and we would welcome this with species to be agreed.

“Should the Council refuse consent then the public purse would be liable to a claim in compensation for all costs including and not limited to full engineering underpinning.

“Any engineered scheme would be very costly and the CO2e required in concrete, steel and delivery and other movements outweigh any advantage from the trees.

“Should approval be given we will automatically be replacing the lost trees as part of our own global tree replacement planting scheme backed by insurers.

“We respectfully ask the Members to support this application and grant consent to fell the two trees.”

Lucy Wells, Chair of Lode Parish Council, gave the following statement:

“Lode Parish Council strongly objects to the decision that these trees be removed and asks that this decision be reconsidered. Whilst Lode Parish Council is sympathetic to the homeowner of 46 Lode Road and the concerns over shrinkage to their home’s foundations, we have a number of comments and questions to relay to the Committee.

“Lode has recently seen a substantial loss of significant trees, which has had a detrimental impact on the village environment in numerous ways. A large maple near the entrance of the village was mistakenly removed a few years ago. The mature hedgerow opposite the horse chestnut trees in question was removed with planning permission recently, in bird nesting season, as was another large hedge, again with planning permission, including at least three sycamores, holly and many other species around the chapel, again in nesting season.

“The two horse chestnut trees are on the main road into the village and so are known, though perhaps taken for granted, by all residents. They are very large and well formed and will be noticeable in their absence. We understand that they are each probably over 100 years old. They no doubt provide habitat for a number of species; their carbon capture potential has already been well documented by Trees Officer Kevin Drane. They also provide much needed shade for several houses nearby, as well as pedestrians and cyclists. They are a long standing feature of that corner of the village and their removal would reduce the aesthetic appeal of the village.

“The trees were in situ decades before the house affected was built. As will be the case for several other trees situated near houses in the village. We are concerned that the felling of these trees will create a precedent for an easy agreement of felling applications in the future. We would like to understand what other actions could be considered in advance or instead of a decision to fell and ask ECDC to at the very least consider a stepwise solution rather than an immediate decision to fell these two trees. Is, for example, the house under immediate threat? We understand that the rate of subsidence has been monitored from 2023. What do those results actually tell us? How fast is the problem developing? Could the situation be monitored for a few more years? If the concern for ECDC is litigation further down the line, could that not be mitigated for now by works carried out on the house?

“We understand from reports that removal of these trees is not guaranteed to solve the problem for the homeowner. Indeed, removing them in this case could exacerbate some of the issues caused by our recent weather changes i.e. further warming or flooding, which is a particular problem on that corner of the village. What mitigation measures are ECDC prepared to make when it comes to preserving large trees? Is there any other work that can be carried out on the trees, which might reduce their moisture uptake? Is it, or will it be necessary to fell both trees? They are situated at different distances from the problem area of the property.

“If felling is inevitable at some stage in the future, we would like to ask ECDC to consider succession planting of trees now in order to plan for the potential

felling many years into the future. Indeed, are there any other trees in the village where there are potential or identifiable issues for which succession planting could be put in place now? The Parish Council would welcome such an audit.

“We all have to live and exist in partnership with the environment. With climate change being a real issue, the removal of these trees would seem a short term and detrimental measure, when works on the house could potentially be carried out to enable the house and trees to exist alongside each other. This is a less wooded county than some. So each large tree could be considered more valuable than in other areas. Lode Parish Council hopes that by considering our concerns and questions you might look favourably on keeping these very old, large, handsome shade and life giving trees. Giving them the opportunity to contribute to the health of the village for a hundred more years to come.”

The Senior Democratic Services Officer read out the following statement from ward member Cllr John Trapp:

“Having looked at the site with Parish Council members, it does seem a pity to me that such an elegant and stately tree, in a dominating location, should be felled. A number of residents have made similar comments in their replies.

“It seems ironic that trees that have existed well before the building of a house adjacent to them should be felled because they may cause problems to the new arrival. It is not the current owner’s fault that this has happened; it is the fault of anyone who was instrumental in the building of this house so close to a well-established tree. I can accept that the planting of a tree subsequent to the building of the house may be a reason for its removal if it is detrimental to the long-term stability of the house, but not if the tree was the first arrival.

“A similar situation has arisen in Cambridge City, and the Council decided to retain the tree.

“Future planning applications should be advised that the possible damage from long-established trees should be considered at the planning stage, and planning be refused on the grounds of possible loss of the trees.”

The Committee was invited to ask questions to the Trees Officer, who responded as follows:

- An independent assessment had shown that the damage to the property was consistent with tree related subsidence.
- This independent report had recommended the removal of both trees.
- The damage had not been visible to members on their site visit.
- In the view of the insurance company, if the Council refused to remove the trees it would be liable for any remedial works.
- The trees would have been approximately 10% smaller when the home had been built.
- Builders would have had to cut through tree roots when laying the foundations for the home and constructing the driveway.

The Committee moved on to debate.

Cllr Julia Huffer supported the officer recommendation to refuse permission to fell the two trees. She suggested that the insurance company was liable for any damage to the home by trees that would have been there when the insurance policy was agreed and were not on land owned by the Council. She hoped that the Council would fight any claim made against it by the insurance company. Cllr Christine Colbert stated that in 1976 many homes were underpinned as a result of the drought, but this did more harm when the drought ended. Cllr Alan Sharp asserted that if the Committee agreed to the recommendation in the report it should fight any claims made by the insurance company against the Council for the damage, as the trees were there when the home was built and the insurance policy was agreed. Cllr Martin Goodearl agreed that the homeowner had a contract with the insurer, who was now liable for the costs.

Cllr Keith Horgan stated that according to a professional independent opinion, the two trees in question were damaging a home and the Council would be liable for any future damage if the application was refused, which officers estimated as being between £90,000 and £130,000. Cllr James Lay feared that the Council would be liable for any additional costs of future damage if it did not remove the trees.

Cllr Christine Colbert considered the merits of only removing the tree nearest the property.

Cllr Julia Huffer proposed and Cllr Alan Sharp seconded the recommendation in the report. A vote was taken and with 7 votes in favour, 2 against and 0 abstentions the Committee agreed

It was resolved:

to refuse planning application 25/00407/TPO, for the reasons laid out in the report.

Cllr Ross Trent left the meeting for the following two items.

14. 25/00436/FUL – 13 St Marys Street, Ely

The Planning Team Leader presented this report, AA32 already circulated,

The applicant David Wright, gave the following statement:

“Firstly, I would like to apologise for the retrospective application. We were under the misapprehension that the building was already Class E, an error on our part.

“The Old Dispensary is a historic building near the centre of Ely, which was used for many years as a community facility where local groups could meet. At one time it was the only such place. Now there are many alternatives – I found 15 and there are no doubt more. For the past 5 years usage had been declining. It became uneconomic to run, and essential maintenance was not affordable.

“In its last year (year ending April 2023), income was £5,000 and expenditure £18,000. The Charities Commission agreed to the building being sold at auction. I understand that the proceeds will be used to help local charities.

“When we bought the building, it was in poor condition, with water ingress which risked damage to the front of the building, with mould and wet wood inside. Heating and electrical systems had been inspected and were deemed unsafe. We have carried out maintenance, rewiring where necessary and replaced the failing heating system with a modern efficient unit. We have made no change to external appearance (other than replacing broken window glass with sound panes).

“We have ensured our plans will not alter the nature of the building, and the internal changes to make it suitable for a secure office will be reversible should some other use be needed in future. Indeed, we believe we have saved the building in its present form; some other bidders wanted to convert it into housing.

“Having an office for our local MP with meeting space in the centre of Ely provides a community benefit. We note the example of the previous MP, who also had an office in the centre of Ely.

“The building is accessible to people with disabilities, and we will retain this. We have discussed opening hours with the planning officers, and have no objection to the conditions proposed.”

The Committee were invited to ask David Wright questions and he replied as follows:

- Parking was not permitted in front of the building, vehicles could load and unload.
- No alteration of parking arrangements were included in the planning application.
- Car parking was available across the road from the building.

The Committee were invited to ask questions of officers, who replied as follows:

- Two applications were required, one to address listed building consent and one for the works.
- No parking permission was granted for the property and no change to parking was being sought in the application.

Cllr Martin Goodearl proposed and Cllr James Lay seconded the recommendation in the report. The Committee unanimously agreed

It was resolved:

to approve planning application 25/00436/FUL, subject to the conditions set out in Appendix 1.

15. 25/00437/LBC – 13 St Marys Street, Ely

The Planning Team Leader presented this report, AA33 already circulated. David Wright said that he had nothing extra to add to his original statement.

The Committee were invited to ask David Wright questions and he replied as follows:

- Parliamentary security would assess the building and add any security measure that they saw fit.
- If the security measures required any further alterations to the building, a planning application would be submitted to the Council.

Cllr Keith Horgan proposed and Cllr Julia Huffer seconded the recommendation in the report. A vote was taken and the Committee unanimously agreed

It was resolved:

to approve planning application 25/00437/LBC, subject to the conditions set out in Appendix 1.

16. Planning performance report – May 2025

Cllr Ross Trent rejoined the meeting.

David Morren, Strategic Planning and Development Management Manager, presented a report (AA34, previously circulated) summarising the performance of the Planning Department in May 2025. He was pleased to report that the planning improvement project had recently been audited and there had been a 51% reduction in the number times a request had been made for an extension of time when processing an application, compared to this time last year. It was noted that there was limited data available from other local authorities on this issue, making comparisons with other councils difficult.

It was resolved unanimously:

That the Planning Performance Report for May 2025 be noted.

The meeting concluded at 5:23 pm.

Chair.....

Date.....