

I object! . . . but I really don't know why

When you spend your life designing buildings and submitting planning applications, to get the required permission to build them, you tend to develop a thick skin to criticism and objection - it comes with the territory. I understand that we all have different tastes and just because I favour a certain style of design it doesn't mean I am right and those who dislike it are wrong. Actually that's not true; they are wrong, why can't they just agree with me? But I digress.

In my younger days I would joke about 'weighing' the file of objections rather than reading them. Nowadays there is no file to weigh but rather an online list of tiny, yellow folder icons which the local authority puts up to share with anyone who cares to log-on to view the planning application online.

Perhaps I am just getting older and more sensitive, or perhaps now that I take more time to read these rantings online, I have started to pay more attention to what it is these objectors have to say and to consider what motivates them.

In days gone by we received actual letters, written on paper and delivered by the postman (ask your Grandad). They would start (in spidery green ink handwriting normally) with some ramble about something completely unrelated to the application at hand, degenerate into a rant about the scheme itself, then throw in a little local gossip about a neighbour which, whilst completely irrelevant, always made the letter a lot more interesting. They would finally end in a wild flourish of scattered reflexive pronouns inviting 'myself' to inform 'themselves' of the outcome of my application. I miss those fun days.

In reviewing the latest objections to one of our schemes I was suddenly struck by the thought: when did we become so spiteful and myopic that we object to any new development, no matter how much it may be needed and how little it would actually affect us? When did we start to hate any proposed development almost before knowing what it is? I recently met a local objector to one of our schemes who complained about our proposed building. I pointed out that he wouldn't actually be able to see our proposed development from his house. He countered that if he were to leave his property via the back door, walk to the end of his garden, exit through a gate in the fence at the bottom of his garden, turn left and then walk a short way down the road then he would be able to see it! Good manners prevented me from pointing out that if he really wanted to be offended that much, he could turn right instead of left and he would then be able to gaze upon a drive-thru roadside hamburger takeaway establishment! My

point is, people seem to want to go out of their way (literally in his case) to be offended.

Let's look at the facts. We build two and three storey residential care homes for elderly people. We aren't attempting to secure planning consent for a noisy, smelly industrial plant, the by-product of which is harmful to small babies and cute, furry, family pets. We provide a service which is meeting a huge need. We make it so that our aged parents can maintain their dignity and don't have to share bedrooms and bathrooms with complete strangers in out-of-date, not fit for purpose, former seaside hotels masquerading as care homes.

But why is it that so many people object to any care home planning application which comes before them? We hear the same complaints trotted out time and again - "the sewers won't be able to cope"; "the traffic will be a nightmare"; "the building is too big".

One of my recent favourites was "we will be able to see the building from the main road". When did being able to see a building become a reasonable reason to refuse planning consent? I want people to be able to see our buildings so that staff, families and future residents know where they are. Why should we shamefully hide all new buildings in case a nervous villager catches a glimpse and is appalled by the very site of a new development daring to blot his particular landscape? (Actually I can think of a few newly-designed care homes which might be improved by being hidden but that is just my own spiteful prejudice coming out).



NorthStar director **DANNY SHARPE** takes a whimsical look at NIMBY attitudes to new developments.

As you may have gathered by now, I have little time for NIMBYs. Even the local authority social services commissioners are at best lukewarm when it comes to welcoming new care home development - I was rather sulkily told that the local team 'wouldn't object' to a new scheme we are developing. 'Wouldn't object?!' how about 'would welcome with open arms - is there anything we can do to help?'

A nation we need to build a lot more care homes and standards are definitely improving but unless we stand up to the NIMBYs and shame the small-minded objectors into thinking about what it is they are actually objecting to, we will fail in our task. Just because you have a right to object doesn't mean you have to object: you could always be brave and write a letter of support. I, for one, would probably frame it if you did.

My final thought on the matter is this: where do these people think they are going to go when they need 24-hour nursing care? They will no doubt get their pens out, fill them up with green ink and start a letter to their local MP demanding to know why they are being forced to share a room with a total stranger and why the Government can't do something about the lack of good 21st Century care accommodation. **CT**

Construction completed at luxury Sutton facility

Development company Hamberley has completed the latest luxury care home in a pipeline of 10 for Gracewell Healthcare.

The care home in Sutton, Greater London was completed in early November at a cost of more than £10m.

These new buildings are part of a programme of turnkey developments that Hamberley are building exclusively for Gracewell following its sale to Sunrise Senior Living and US health care real estate firm Welltower in 2014.

The high-end 83-bed care home in Sutton, on the site of a former factory, will provide 83 ensuite premium rooms for the local community.

Hamberley director Tim Street said the completion of the Sutton development marked the end of a busy year for the firm.

"This has been an exceptionally active year

for Hamberley with a constant pipeline of new luxury care home developments being delivered for Gracewell," said Mr Street.

"In 2017 we will complete these projects and continue working with other leading providers and real estate investors to build more high quality healthcare facilities."

Mr Street said Hamberley was continuing to look for other development opportunities in the Greater London area.

The new Sutton home will combine boutique hotel interior design with leading-edge dementia and specialist care facilities and services with an emphasis on style, warmth, homely experience and intimacy.

Facilities include a luxurious hair and beauty spa, a nail bar, café, a library and residents will have WiFi access throughout the home.