# September Newsletter

# In the Summertime

Unless it is unavoidable, NHDC meetings are not held during school holidays. This is to make it easier those with school age children to stand as councillors. Although full council meetings are not held in the holidays, the work of the officers continues regardless, as planning applications continue to be submitted, and rubbish certainly needs to be collected. Because of strict deadlines on the time the Disrict is allowed to take to process planning applications, the Planning Control Committee does meet in August.

# Planning Code of Conduct

An updated Code of Conduct for Councillors is being developed. A draft was reviewed by the Standards Committee on 12th August. This makes it clear that it is essential for members to avoid any suggestion of bias in respect of local planning applications. Although I am not a member of the Planning Control Committee, some decisions may be decided by a full Council Meeting, and so it is most important that I leave my mind open and do not side with any of the parties for or against any application. I know this sounds like a 'cop out', but to publicly align myself with developer or objectors would bar me from participating in any council decision making about the application.

# Three Houses Lane Solar Farm

The Secretary of State has accepted our submissions and decided to "Call In" the Solar application for his consideration. In practice the review is delegated to a planning inspector who will hold a planning enquiry into the matter. Representations will be made by many of the interested parties. The situation is analogous to that of the application at Swangleys Lane. It is expected that the decision on the latter will be very significant for the Three Houses Lane application. All the affected parish councils are involved in the process.

# Conversion of redundant agriculural buildings to residential use

There have been a number of cases of barns being converted to residential use in the parish.  
The new rules on this mean that it is virtually impossible for the District, as Planning Authority, to block these developments on the Green Belt. This has resulted in a number of applications which have generated considerable concern. I have passed on these concerns to NHDC Planning Control. Unfortunately, the Council has no alternative but to decide planning applications on the basis of current legislation, which, in these cases, has allowed some developments to go ahead which previously would not have been permitted.

# Neighbourhood Plan

I have had one additional offer of help towards producing a Neighbourhood Plan. Pirton is still in the process of producing its Plan, having started the process on 23rd of May 2013. Fortunately there is a fairly comprehensive record of how the plan has progressed, complete with minutes of the 19 meetings of the Steering Committee that have so far been held.

Pirton is a much smaller village than Knebworth, and is not comparable in a number of other respects. However, it is fairly close and is the furthest advanced of the local parishes in pursuing the objective of producing a neighbourhood plan. There remain problems however in that it will not be possible to finalise a Knebworth Plan until the Local Plan is adopted. Under the relevant legislation it is a requirement that our plan must not conflict with the Local Plan.