

**PLANNING COMMITTEE WORKING GROUP held at ZOOM on
WEDNESDAY, 2 MARCH 2022 at 2.00 pm**

Present: Councillor S Merifield (Chair)

Councillors R Freeman, M Lemon, J Loughlin and R Pavitt

Officers in attendance: N Brown (Development Manager), B Ferguson (Democratic Services Manager), A Lindsell (Democratic Services Officer), A Lockhart (Legal Manager) and J Walsh (Interim Planning Transformation Lead)

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no apologies for absence or declarations of interest.

2 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 17 February 2022 were approved as accurate.

3 CHANGES TO THE CONSIDERATION OF MAJOR PLANNING APPLICATIONS AND CONSULTATIONS ON MAJOR APPLICATIONS SUBMITTED DIRECTLY TO THE PLANNING INSPECTORATE.

The Development Manager presented the report on the consideration of major planning applications and consultations submitted directly to the Planning Inspectorate.

In response to the Designation Notice from the Secretary of State for Levelling Up Housing and Communities he asked Members to consider options to accommodate the anticipated increase in major applications being reported to Planning Committee, alongside the twenty one day consultation of major applications submitted directly to the Planning Inspectorate (PINS), in which case the Local Planning Authority would merely be a statutory consultee.

He went on to explain that the situation was moving dynamically and that the current suggested options were;

- The creation of a Sub-Committee of the Planning Committee and retain the current frequency of Planning Committee meetings.
- The creation of a Sub-Committee of the Planning Committee and to change the frequency of Planning Committee meetings to every three weeks.

- The implementation of an additional Planning Committee Meeting two weeks after the scheduled monthly Planning Committee Meeting from May onwards. These meetings would be called Reserve Planning Committee Meetings and would only be utilised when necessary.
- To change the frequency of Planning Committee to fortnightly.

Members discussed;

- Concerns over Sub-Committees where far fewer Members would make decisions.
- Whether Members could now represent residents as they were no longer the decision maker.
- Where the money that would have gone to Uttlesford District Council (UDC) in planning fees now goes.
- The value and conversely pitfalls of including Substitutes in the pool of Members to be included.
- The need to move forward and work through the Designation.

The Development Manager confirmed;

- That PINS would liaise with the majority of county related statutory consultees directly. UDC would continue to manage the consultation with Parish Councils and other local groups, although all responses would be submitted directly to PINS.
- That UDC are working alongside PINS and maintain a good relationship.
- The planning fees previously received by UDC would now be directed to PINS, who are an agency separate to the government department that designated UDC.
- It was not envisaged that many applications would be submitted directly to PINS, with none currently identified or submitted

The Planning Transformation Lead confirmed;

- The Designation process was a sanction for poor performance and designed to be a deterrent and there is expensive for the Local Authority.
- There would be a Parish Forum scheduled 29 March 2022 where the discussion topics would be Enforcement and Designation. Parish Councils could be directed to this forum where there would be a Q&A session.
- UDC would be designated for a minimum of 12 months, and that PINS assessment of UDC comments would in all probability inform any wider decision about how long designation might last. To bring UDC out of designation The Department for Levelling Up Housing and Communities would have to be satisfied with the quality of comments from UDC on applications being determined by PINS and confident that UDC understood how to apply current planning policy.
- Two weekly cycles are not unusual in other authorities. A new rhythm could be quickly achieved and work would be completed more efficiently and in a more streamlined manner

The Legal Manager confirmed that the Designation created an unusual situation regarding probity and agreed to investigate further and feedback to Members.

He noted that the consultation fed back to PINS would still give weight to cohesive planning objections over non-planning related comments.

The Chair proposed to recommend Option Three to the Governance, Audit and Performance Committee (GAP). Councillor Freeman seconded the proposal.

AGREED to recommend to the GAP Committee the introduction of an additional Planning Committee Meeting two weeks after the scheduled monthly Planning Committee Meeting from May onwards. These meetings would be called Reserve Planning Committee Meetings and would only be utilised when necessary.

The Development Manager confirmed his intention to inform the Planning Committee that the Planning Committee Working Group would make this recommendation to GAP.

The Planning Transformation Lead suggested that Members consider;

- The logistics of site visits and briefings in relation to the proposed changes.
- Site visits only to be undertaken during the morning.
- Viewing a video of sites rather than visiting sites recommended for refusal.

The Development Manager acknowledged that agendas have been larger currently but were likely to be shorter following the introduction of the proposed changes to the scheme of delegation.

The Chair suggested the reintroduction of the coach for site visits to save time and be more environmentally friendly.

The Development Manager confirmed that under the current Covid restrictions Officers were not currently permitted to share a car, so a coach would not be possible for the March site visits.

The Democratic Services Manager indicated he would raise the issue with the CEO and see if the coach arrangements can be reinstated moving forward.

The Chair confirmed that the March Planning Committee meeting would run over two days, 16 and 17 March 2022. She proposed the following timetable if Covid restrictions permit;

10:00am - 1:00pm including a 15 minute coffee break

1:00 – 2:00pm break for lunch

2:00 - 5:00pm including a 15 minute coffee break (extended to 5:30pm

only if this would secure completion of the meeting)

Officers would present reports hybridly and doors would remain open.

Members discussed;

- The importance of breaks for Officers and Members.
- Whether provision of lunch should be reinstated when so much time would be spent in the chamber.
- The need for training sessions on how to be more efficient within meetings.

FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS

- Report recommending changes to the protocol for public speaking
- Report recommending the introduction of mandatory Training
- Arrangements to visit an exemplar Planning Committee
- The next round of training recommended by the Planning Advisory service

The Democratic Services Officer reminded Members and Officers that the Planning Enforcement Training scheduled for 3 March 2022 at 7pm would be delivered through Teams. The link has already been circulated.

The Planning Transformation Lead requested that the PCWG meeting scheduled for 31 March 2022 be brought forward to 23 March 2022. This was agreed

The meeting ended at 15:12.