

MINUTES OF THE PLANNING COMMITTEE
Monday, 15th March 2004 at 7.00 pm

PRESENT: Councillor Cribbin (Chair), Councillor Harrod (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Chavda, Freeson, Kabir, Kansagra, McGovern, H M Patel and Singh.

Apologies for absence were received from

1. Declarations of Personal and Prejudicial Interests

No declarations were made at this meeting

2. Review of Planning Code of Practice

The Standards Committee at its meeting on 21st October 2003 considered this report and agreed the recommendations contained therein which report was now before the Planning Committee.

In her introduction, the Borough Solicitor clarified that the report was for Members to note (not to agree) and make suggestions for further improvements. She therefore corrected the recommendations accordingly. In the main, Members were to note the need for clarity for both personal and prejudicial interests especially with regard to approaches by interested parties. Political groups were to take care to ensure that all wards contained a councillor who was not a Member of the Planning Committee. The report also recommended a review by Legal and Democratic Services and Planning Services of the use of and effectiveness of Committee pre-meetings due to current attendance patterns. She added that when voting on an application Members were strongly reminded to exercise personal rather than political judgements. Finally, the Borough Solicitor asked Members to consider further improvements to the clarity of the committee meeting process that would enable the public and non-members to understand and have confidence in the decision-making process adding that the Guide to Proceedings produced by the Democratic Services Manager and distributed to the public attending the meetings had been a major plank in ensuring confidence and understanding of the process.

Members welcomed the report and made the following points

- a) Consideration be given to organising a training session designed to assist Members in their understanding of personal and prejudicial interests
- b) When voting on applications, members should use personal judgements based on planning grounds rather than party political judgements
- c) The minutes of the meetings should clarify where applicable, that a member had been contacted by an interested party about an application and that the member had referred the matter to officers

- d) The Code should state that the purpose of Members' briefing/pre-meeting is to acquaint them with the contents of the supplementary information by the Head of Area Planning, after the publication of the main report but prior to the meeting
- e) Members of the Committee should be given extra allowance to take into account the duration of Planning Committee meetings and the commitment required by the 3-weekly site visits
- f) Future reviews should look into ways by which consultations with the public can be strengthened
- g) Declarations that all Members of the Committee received correspondence about any application from interested parties where applicable, should be recorded in the minutes
- h) There was not sufficient time between the receipt of reports and site visits to enable Members to adhere to a 5-day notice of a request for site visit.

In responding to some of the issues raised above, the Borough Solicitor said that although she had recently organised a training session and written to all Members about personal and prejudicial interests, she would be happy to organise another one. Despite the requirement for a 5-day notice to request a site visit, Members could also request site visits on the night of the meeting subject to sound planning reasons for such requests. On the issue of contacts with the public, she advised members to keep a minimum of contact, refer all approaches to officers and declare them at meetings.

The Director of Planning added that consultation on planning applications was outside the scope of the review and therefore this had not been addressed in the report. He reminded Members that supplementary planning guidance was recently revised and agreed by Committee on consultation.

The Head of Area Planning also updated the information in appendix b of the report by confirming that of the 3 overturned recommendations that had been appealed, the Council's case had not been sustained on appeal in any of them.

RESOLVED:-

that the following recommendations made in the Planning Code of Practice: Independent Review for the period June 2002 to May 2003 be noted:-

- (i) that the definitions for both Personal and Prejudicial interests at committee meetings should be clarified, especially with regard to declaration of approaches by interested parties. Within the meeting itself, such declarations should be accurately categorised by the minute taker and the minutes should reflect this

categorisation. For the benefit of Committee members, clarification should be addressed within the Member Development Programme;

- (ii) that Political groups should be reminded that, when appointing alternates, care should be taken to ensure that all Wards will contain a Councillor who is not a Member of the Planning Committee;
- (iii) that there should be a review of the use of, and effectiveness of, Committee pre-meetings due to current attendance patterns. The review should be jointly managed by Democratic Services, Legal Services, the Planning Service and political group representatives;
- (iv) that Committee members should be strongly reminded that, when voting on application approval/refusal, personal judgements should be used not political judgements;
- (v) that further improvements to the clarity of the committee meeting process should be considered. This will enable members of the public and non-committee members in attendance to understand and have confidence in the decision-making process.

3. Consultation Draft Planning Policy Statement 6 (PPS6): Planning for Town Centres – Council’s Responses

The Government had recently carried out consultation on their proposals for reviewing current Planning Policy Guidance 6 (PPG6) on Town Centres. The draft set out the Government’s broad policy objectives relevant to planning for town centres in England, and its proposed planning policies that will help deliver these objectives to sustain and enhance the role of town centres for the benefit of all.

The draft is part of an ongoing review of Government Guidance and the production of Policy Statements, which are part of the process of ushering in a new planning regime; due to come into effect this summer after the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Bill receives Royal Assent. The report before the Committee provided a summary of the Draft PPS being consulted upon and Committee sought approval for the proposed response on behalf of the Council.

The Policy Team Manager drew Members attention to the Council’s responses and the likely implications of the proposals in draft PPS6. He added that the Council particularly welcome the emphasis on rebalancing the network of centres so that it was not overly dominated by the largest centres, giving an even distribution of facilities and meeting people’s everyday needs at a local level. He asked for the deletion of “(see Para 8.20 above – competition bullet point)” in the Council’s response paragraph 8.24

RESOLVED:-

that the responses set out in paragraphs 8.18 – 8.27 as amended be agreed as Brent Council's formal response to the Government consultation.

4. The London Plan

The Committee received a plan informing them of the publication of The London Plan, the Mayor of London's statutory Spatial Development Strategy for Greater London outlining its key policies and detailing its principal implications for the Borough.

The Policy Team Manager stated that the Council considered the Mayor's policies for the comprehensive regeneration of the Wembley area to be unnecessarily restrictive for retail development associated with the area adjacent to the new stadium and sought amendments. The Panel concurred with the Council's objections, deleted the relevant section of the Plan and modified the Wembley section of the Plan by recognising a substantial increase in the new housing provision.

Although Members welcomed the report, they requested a training session on the London Plan and relating it to the Council's Unitary Development Plan (UDP). The Director of Planning undertook to give a presentation for Members around June 2004.

RESOLVED:-

that the report and the need to consider The London Plan strategies and policies when determining relevant planning applications be noted

5. Any Other Urgent Business

None raised at this meeting

6. Date of Next Meeting

The next scheduled meeting of the Committee to consider planning applications only will take place on Wednesday, 31st March 2004 at 7.00 pm. The site visit will take place on the preceding Saturday, 27th March 2004 at 9.30 am.

The meeting ended at 8.20 p.m.

M CRIBBIN
Chair

