

## **EPHING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL COMMITTEE MINUTES**

**Committee:** Meeting of the Development Management Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen      **Date:** 27 October 2015

**Place:** Committee Room 1, Civic Offices, High Street, Epping      **Time:** 7.30 - 8.35 pm

**Members Present:** B Sandler, S Jones, P Keska, A Mitchell and J Hart

**Other Councillors:** R Bassett and J Philip

**Apologies:** B Rolfe and Y Knight

**Officers Present:** N Richardson (Assistant Director (Development Management)), S Tautz (Democratic Services Manager), J Godden (Principal Planning Officer (Heritage, Enforcement & Landscaping)) and G J Woodhall (Senior Democratic Services Officer)

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### **1. ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN**

**Resolved:**

(1) That Councillor B Sandler be confirmed as Chairman for the municipal year 2015/16.

### **2. NOTES OF THE LAST MEETING**

**Resolved:**

(1) That the notes of the last meeting, held on 2 December 2014, be agreed as a true and accurate record.

### **3. MATTERS ARISING**

In respect of a potential alternative location in Loughton for Area Plans Sub-Committee South (minute 6 refers, Meeting of Development Control Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen 2 December 2014), Cllr Philip advised the Group that the requested report prepared by S Hill had not identified any significant saving for the Council from moving to an alternative location, and Members of the Sub-Committee had indicated that they were content with the current location at Roding Valley High School. Therefore, there were no plans to move the meetings of Area Plans Sub-Committee South at the current time.

**4. REVISION OF ARTICLE 10 - DISTRICT DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE AND AREA PLANS SUB-COMMITTEES**

S Tautz presented a report on the revision of Article 10 in the Constitution concerning the District Development Management Committee and Area Plans Sub-Committees.

S Tautz reminded the Group that a revised version of Article 10 was agreed by the Council in April 2015, and the views of the Group were sought on its initial operation. In addition, the Constitution Working Group had also reviewed the operation of minority references and was proposing some amendments to the current rules; the main change was that a minority reference could not be invoked until after a vote on the matter in hand had been taken, thus limiting the point in the debate that such a reference could be made.

In respect of the circulation of photographic and other such material received after the publication of the agenda, S Tautz stated that Democratic Services would provide the Members' publicly available contact details (i.e. email addresses) to applicants or objectors; if there were no publicly available email addresses available for a Member then Democratic Services would consider distributing the materials to that(those) Member(s). An article had been placed in the Council Bulletin explaining this to Members, following a recent incident whereby an objector had been informed by a Member of a Sub-Committee that Democratic Services would perform this task for them.

Cllr Bassett enquired as to whether any guidance could be provided for Members when they were approached by Developers to have meetings with and offer support for their applications. N Richardson stated that Officers were also approached by Developers, and Developers were encouraged by Officers to discuss their proposals with the Local Councils involved. In addition, the Council provided paid, pre-application discussions for Developers, and it would be useful if Members could get more involved in these as there would be Officers present at such meetings to recall the discussions. S Tautz added that Member involvement in the paid, pre-application discussions had been raised at the Governance Select Committee as well.

In relation to Site Visits, Cllr Jones felt that these operated in a much better fashion since the Guidance for Members for Site Visits had been published in the Constitution, and their distribution to applicants and objectors prior to a site visit also aided the process as well. Cllr Jones acknowledged that Sub-Committee East undertook more site visits than the other Sub-Committees, but felt that the majority of the site visits were necessary and helpful to the Sub-Committee. N Richardson commented that Planning Officers felt a site visit was, sometimes, agreed in order to defer a refusal for an application.

Cllr Philip informed the Group that the Constitution Working Group would be reviewing the Planning Protocol in due course.

**Resolved:**

- (1) That the operation of the revised Article 10 – District Development Management Committee and Area Plans Sub-Committees – be noted; and
- (2) That the proposed revisions by the Constitution Working Group to the operation of Minority References (Operational Standing Orders – Non Executive Bodies, Section 13 refers) be agreed.

**5. REVIEW OF PLANNING PROCEDURES**

The Group evaluated the proceedings of the Planning (Sub-)Committees held during the preceding six-month period and whether the procedure, policy and organisation of the Sub-Committees required review.

Cllr Philip highlighted that Sub-Committee East had to deal with 18 applications split over two meetings this month, of which only one was a householder application. It was also highlighted that there was a previous occasion when Sub-Committee East had adjourned its meeting at 10.00pm and a second date had been arranged, and that there had been a further occasion when Sub-Committee East had been split into two meetings due to the number of items on the agenda. N Richardson commented that there had been a backlog of planning applications for processing, hence the previous occasions when a large number of planning applications had come through to the Sub-Committee simultaneously, but this had been dealt with now. There was a possible imbalance between the East and West Sub-Committees, and perhaps consideration should be given to moving an area from Sub-Committee East to Sub-Committee West.

It was pointed out that Sub-Committee South usually had a considerable number of applications on each agenda, but N Richardson informed the Meeting that there was a higher proportion of householder applications considered by Sub-Committee South which were quicker to determine. Cllr Mitchell opined that the current Members of Sub-Committee West would not necessarily know too much about the wards in Sub-Committee East and this could possibly lead to more site visits being agreed in meetings. S Tautz added that the whole of a ward would have to be moved across.

The Group felt that the composition of the Sub-Committees should be left as they were for the time being, and the agenda for each meeting should be analysed as to whether a second meeting would be required to complete the business. S Tautz informed the Group that the Calendar of Meetings for 2016/17 was currently being drafted and would include a date each month to be kept free for Member Briefings and additional meetings. This was probably the best approach at the current time, with the situation being monitored for the time being and potentially reviewed in the future.

**Resolved:**

(1) That the number of items on each agenda for a Planning (Sub-)Committee be monitored for the foreseeable future and extra meetings arranged where necessary.

**6. REVIEW OF CURRENT AND FUTURE TRAINING NEEDS**

The Group considered the current and future training needs for the Members tasked with discharging the Council's Planning function.

N Richardson stated that the same training for Planning tended to be held each year, and that all the training relevant to Planning – Development Management and Enforcement – had been held on one particular day in recent years. J Godden opined that it would be valuable if more inexperienced Members and more Local Councillors attended the sessions. Cllr Philip suggested that the Planning training sessions could be recorded using the webcasting equipment for Councillors to watch later if they could not attend on the day. In addition, questions could be submitted in advance and a database of 'Frequently Asked Questions' could be built up. N Richardson added that the slides from the training sessions could also be distributed. Cllr Jones

commented that the Parish Clerks could be reminded that all of their members should keep their Planning training up to date.

Cllr Bassett advised the Group that Planning Policy, Rules and Guidelines were often revised after the annual Member training sessions, and that perhaps there should be a six-monthly update briefing for all Members. The Group felt that this was an excellent idea; N Richardson could perform a short video briefing to update Members each month, which could potentially involve a joint briefing with Planning Policy Officers on Local Plan issues on occasion. This would then build up into a very useful video library for future reference by Members.

**Resolved:**

(1) That the concept of a monthly Member video briefing by the Assistant Director of Governance (Development Management) on updates to Planning Policy, Guidelines and Rules – possibly in conjunction with further updates from Planning Policy Officers on Local Plan issues – be investigated further for implementation in 2016/17.

**7. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

Cllr Sandler informed the Group of complaints from Local Councils about the quality of the plans being submitted for planning applications, and requested that each application be checked more thoroughly in future before they were accepted by the Council. N Richardson stated that Officers were regularly reminded of the Validation Checklist to be followed when a new application was received, especially new Officers to the Council as a drawing of the street scene was not a requirement at other local planning authorities. It was also emphasised that Councillors should not expect to see measurements on plans as they were scale drawings. J Godden added that if a set of submitted plans passed the checklist then it was difficult to subsequently refer them back to the architect for amendment, and Local Councils should also utilise the same measuring tool for submitted plans as used by the District Council Planning Officers.

Cllr Jones enquired as to whether any feedback had been sought from the Local Councils over the use of the new planning system. N Richardson stated that the issue had been discussed at meetings of the Local Councils Liaison Committee in the past, but would discuss the matter with the Service Business Manager for Development Management.

Cllr Hart requested information on the procedure for the notification of planning applications to neighbouring properties. N Richardson stated that the Council would write to all of the immediate neighbours. If the application was for a rear extension then the Council might not write to the neighbours opposite, only the side and rear neighbours, but the Council would always write to the neighbours adjacent on either side of the property concerned and would erect a yellow site notice if necessary.

N Richardson commented that the presentations for each application considered at a (Sub-)Committee seemed to be relying heavily on photographs, both of the site and aerial shots showing the surrounding area. It could take two days for the Officers to prepare their presentations for Sub-Committee East and South. J Godden added that different Planning Officers took varying numbers of photographs of each site, and that sometimes photographs were more useful than the submitted plans.

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N Richardson also stated that the advice to Planning Case Officers was to visit the site concerned as soon as possible after the receipt of a planning application, and Members were encouraged to speak to the Planning Case Officers listed in the agenda prior to planning meetings if they had any queries.

**CHAIRMAN**