

EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL COMMITTEE MINUTES

Committee: Joint Meeting of Development Management Chairmen & Vice-Chairmen **Date:** Monday, 17 September 2018

Place: Committee Room 1, Civic Offices, High Street, Epping **Time:** 7.00 - 8.05 pm

Members Present: Councillors B Sandler (Chairman), D Dorrell, P Keska, A Patel, J Philip, B Rolfe, D Sunger and E Webster

Other Councillors: Councillors

Apologies:

Officers Present: S Hill (Service Director (Governance & Member Services)), N Richardson (Service Director (Planning Services)) and A Hendry (Senior Democratic Services Officer)

1. Minutes of Previous Meeting

RESOLVED:

That the notes of the previous meeting, held on 25 September 2017 be agreed as a true and accurate record.

2. Matters Arising

Minute 3: Matters Arising

The Service Director, Governance and Members Services reported that the Planning Code of Practice had gone to the November 2017 Council meeting for approval.

He also reported that the Planning Protocol training had been undertaken successfully.

Minute 5: Review of Planning Procedures

a) The meeting was informed that work had been paused on renewing the AV infrastructure in the Council Chamber because of the uncertainty of the building's status under Historical England. Officers were now looking at progressing the updating of the screens and other facilities in the Council Chamber, now that the listed parts of the building had been identified.

The meeting discussed various improvements, one being the installation of a better, up-to-date projector. Another problem connected to the old fashioned projector was the need to turn the lights up and down in order to make out what was projected on the screen.

b) Members also thought the sound system was not as good as it could be, especially for people with hearing aids. Mr Hill suggested that it could be that people

tended to fiddle with the control settings; he would have a word with facilities management about this. Councillor Webster said that there were certain areas where she just could not hear. Councillor Sander said that it also depended on the people speaking, they had to be clear and precise and project their voice.

c) Another item brought up by Councillor Patel was the bad wi-fi service in the Council Chamber and the poor quality of the officers equipment to connect to the service. At a recent meeting a Principal Planning Officer could not access historical records on an application and had to rely on members accessing the records on their tablets. S Hill commented that it was not necessarily the infrastructure that was at fault, but noted that there were connection problems in some spots within the building. Mr Richardson added that that application should have been deferred as the officer should not have relied on information from members.

Action:

S Hill to liaise with Facilities about Sound and Wi-Fi issues in the chamber.

3. Planning Process Review

The Service Director, Governance and Members Services informed the meeting a letter had been sent to all clerks of Town and Parish councils which explained the recent changes to the planning officer delegations and Parish council representations, a copy of which was tabled.

There had been some confusion on the term “non councillor resident” which he had addressed at the last Local Council Liaisons meeting. He had also confirmed that they could not have a blanket speaker registration and would have to register to speak on each individual item as usual. Also, on initial consideration of an application they should confirm in writing to the planning officer that they wished to speak. Planning officers could write to potential objectors and the parish council informing them how to register to speak at the relevant meeting. As always they should not just inform the planning officer but also Democratic Services.

Ward members should call-in an application in writing within four weeks of that application appearing on the list.

Mr Hill noted that we were in the early stages of this new system and would appreciate any help members could give in holding to these new procedures.

The letter also had an explanation on enforcement action. Members could ask for enforcement action to be taken when they had refused retrospective applications. If this action was not taken then the appropriate officer should come back to that committee and explain why they did not pursue it. Members then had the opportunity to question the officer. This was on trial for a year and would then be reviewed.

Members noted that these new procedures would not enable a local council to just object and have it go to a sub-committee automatically; if they thought it was that important they would have to follow it up and speak at the sub-committee meeting. This should happen regardless whether an objector had registered to speak; the local council should follow through their objections.

Mr Richardson advised that local councils should get used to looking at agendas and looking out for objections that they had made with no other objectors listed.

Councillor Philip made a plea that planning officers try and cluster parish council's applications together so it was not spread out over an agenda. Mr Richardson said that they could do this.

Councillor Sandler asked that the more important application were put to the front of the agenda so that they could be dealt with first.

Councillor Patel asked if a notification system could be set up for when an agenda comes out. Mr Hill replied that all they had to do was to contact Democratic Services who would arrange an email notification.

Councillor Sunger asked about a decision that had been made by planning officers before it went to Chigwell Parish Council. Mr Richardson said that once a decision had been issued then they could not rescind it – but he admitted that this should not have happened and it would not happen again.

Mr Hill noted that there would be a further review of the area sub-committees. This had been discussed at the Constitution Working Group; however, before they further consider any changes they will see how these new alterations have worked out. Councillor Dorrell agreed that it would be sensible to revisit it again after a year to see how it had worked.

4. Security at Planning Meetings

The Service Director, Governance and Members Services informed the meeting that the Portfolio Holder had financed a security guard for the planning meetings. He asked the meeting how they thought this was working.

Councillor Sandler liked the idea of a security guard in the public gallery. There had been no problems so far.

Councillor Patel recounted an incident recently where there was constant muttering coming from a couple in the public gallery- could the Chairman have asked them to leave? Mr Hill said that he had only to give one warning and after that if it still persisted he could ask them to leave. Councillor Patel also related another incident when a member of the public had come over to the planning officer and tried to intimidate him. Councillor Sandler wondered if the Security Guard should be stationed downstairs. If based downstairs he could be sent upstairs intermittently.

Action:

Mr Hill said to liaise with the Democratic Services Manager to arrange roving patrols by the security guard.

5. Review of Planning Procedures

Site Visits

The Service Director, Governance and Members Services asked the members present if they were happy with the way the agenda item on site visits was working.

Councillor Sandler noted that recent site visits were scheduled for weekday mornings which made it hard for members to attend. They used to be on Saturdays that was more appropriate.

Councillor Dorrell asked if members could have earlier notifications of any proposed site visits as at a recent meeting they had a lot of people there only to be told that the application had been deferred for a site visit. Mr Richardson said that if asked for earlier a visit could have been organised. Councillor Webster said that they only get the agenda a few days earlier and at the meeting we did apologise to the people there and they seemed relieved that they did not have to wait.

Mr Hill reminded the meeting that they should only have a site visit when there was a substantive benefit to the determination of the planning application.

Councillor Philip said that it was more satisfactory to have this at the beginning of the meeting and not have them sit there for three hours and then have an application deferred for a site visit.

Councillor Sandler said that he would like any problems brought up before the meeting and even if possible before an agenda went out. This would be something to put into the next training programme and explained then.

Local Plan

Mr Hill reported that Local Plan reports will now go to the Local Plan Cabinet Committee which would mean that there would be a separation of masterplanning and planning application determination processes.

Councillor Philip said that if they were looking at something that affected a member's ward then they would be invited to the Cabinet Committee meeting.

Mr Hill noted that a report would be going to the next Cabinet meeting in October on the governance issues around the Local Plan.

6. Any Other Business

Mr Richardson informed the meeting that there were now Quality Review Panels reviewing large scale applications on a design capacity. They were reviewing these applications at a public forum, with a record of the meeting being reported to the next meeting.

Councillor Dorrell asked how was it possible to stop the meeting being hijacked by one political group. He was told that it was down to the Chairman to control the meeting and deal with problems as they arose.

Mr Richardson noted that there had only been two meetings held so far where ward councillors could speak and ask questions.

7. Date of Next Meeting

The meeting noted that 18th March 2019 was the next scheduled meeting date.

CHAIRMAN