

PLANNING FORUM

Minutes of the meeting held on Monday 26 September 2005 at the Town Hall, Royal Leamington Spa at 7.00 p.m.

PRESENT: Councillors: Ashford, Butler, Caborn, Mrs Compton, Davis, Evans, Gill, and Mrs Sawdon.

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Kinson

Representatives of Town and Parish Councils and other organisations

Kenilworth Town Council – Trevor Martin
Kenilworth Society – Joanna Illingworth
Ramblers Association – Steven Wallsgrove
Bishops Tachbrook Parish Council – Sean Deely
Baginton Parish Council – Roger Fawcett
Shrewley Parish Council – Ros Johnson and Rob Wesbury
WALC – Alan Moore

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

2. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR

Councillor Davis was appointed as the Chair of the Forum for the ensuing year.

3. APPOINTMENT OF VICE CHAIR

Councillor Ashford was appointed as the Vice Chair of the Forum for the ensuing year.

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

5. NOTES

The notes of the meeting held on Wednesday 9 February 2005 were accepted.

6. MATTERS ARISING

There were no matters arising.

7. REVIEW OF PLANNING DECISION MAKING PROCESS

John Edwards summarised to the Forum members a number of planned changes to the decision making process on planning applications and requested the Forums views.

At the meeting of the Planning Committee on 3 August 2005, the Committee agreed a number of changes to the decision making process, relating to the scheme of delegation, public speaking rights and committee site inspection.

Members also resolved to consult with the Planning Forum on these changes and consider their views before they were forwarded to full Council.

Planning Committee had previously agreed an extension to the delegation scheme in December 2004 but at the stage of full Council in January 2005, there were significant concerns from District Councillors about a perceived loss of rights of Parish/Town Councils in particular. Full Council therefore required the matter to be referred back to the Planning Committee.

The full report considered by the Planning Committee in August 2005 was attached as an appendix to the report to the Forum and included its own appendices relating to the main elements of the decision making process. The key issues underlying the scope of the review were summarised in the report to the Forum.

Delegation

Operational Issues

Government advice was that 90% of planning decisions could be delegated to officers, leaving elected Councillors to focus on major or controversial cases where there was significant public interest. Currently at Warwick District, some 80% of planning decisions were taken under delegated powers but this still meant that a large number of cases are referred to Planning Committee. In numerical terms, this meant 357 reports were prepared for the 11 meetings held so far this year, with all those meetings extending onto at least a second night in order to complete the agenda, with one meeting extending over four nights and two meetings only able to be concluded on the second night by having an earlier start. The changes agreed by Planning Committee should assist in reducing the length of agendas by removing those cases where their inclusion on the agenda has not resulted in a decision different to the officer recommendation. Other advantages would be reduction in agenda preparation and improved handling times on those applications held up waiting for committee consideration.

Quality of Decision Issues

Planning Committee agreed that the extended delegation arrangements set out in Appendix A to the 3 August 2005 Committee report was the preferred alternative. This would remove the provision whereby applications where a local council had objected and the officer recommendation was to grant permission were automatically referred to committee, and would mean ward Councillors would act as a "filter" in such cases and have an input into whether those cases should be forwarded to committee for decision. This was seen as enhancing the role of ward Councillors in the decision making process whilst still recognising the significance of local councils' views. In all such cases, the case officer would be required to specifically inform the ward Councillor of the receipt of a Parish/Town Council objection to enable the ward Councillor to scrutinize the case.

Appendix B of the 3 August 2005 Planning Committee report sets out a more restricted extension of the delegation arrangements which would allow the overriding of Parish/Town Council views in the specific circumstances set out in the Appendix.

In relation to neighbour representations, the current arrangements would be unchanged – i.e. if 5 or more neighbours object and the recommendation was to grant – then committee referral would be required.

Public Speaking Arrangements

This had proved very popular and had represented a significant enhancement to the rights of the various parties involved in the Development Control process. The arrangements would continue but with an extension of rights to allow applicants/agents/supporters to address the Committee where an application is being recommended for refusal, irrespective of whether an objector is speaking. Appendix C of the 3 August 2005 Planning Committee report contains the revised Public Speaking arrangements.

Committee Site Inspection process

The main change introduced in April 2004 at the stage of introduction of Public Speaking Rights was that the right to address the committee at site inspections was replaced by a general right to address the committee on any planning application in the council chamber, not just those cases where committee site inspections took place. Arising out the review was a move towards a more “proactive” approach by which a committee site inspection on a particular application would take place in advance of the committee meeting itself enabling the timescales for handling such cases to be improved. This also had the benefit of reducing deferments at the meeting which result in members of the public having to turn up three weeks later to address the committee again after the site inspection had taken place.

Trevor Martin expressed the view of Kenilworth Town Council. They welcomed the site visit plans and also felt that to determine which applications should be visited before the Committee meeting would prove very useful and time saving. Kenilworth Town Council were not happy about the delegation proposals.

It was confirmed that this proposals would be coming to the Planning Committee on 11 October 2005 before being heard by full Council.

It was clarified that Parish Councils could request that a Ward Councillor call in an application to be heard by the Planning Committee.

8. PEDESTRIAN ACCESS TO HARBURY LANE PLAYING FIELDS

Sean Deely from Bishops Tachbrook Parish Council introduced this item.

John Archer updated the Forum. A feasibility study for creating a cycle route from Warwick Gates to Harbury Lane playing fields had been carried out.

The next stage would be for the proposal to be addressed through the Council's Service Plan process in order for a bid for resources to be made. If succeeded in becoming a scheme that the Council corporately wished to pursue, further detailed work would be undertaken, including consultation with interested parties.

9. CYCLE AND PEDESTRIAN ACCESS TO WARWICK TECHNOLOGY PARK FROM WARWICK, WARWICK GATES AND BISHOPS TACHBROOK

Sean Deely from Bishops Tachbrook Parish Council introduced this item for improving access to Warwick Technology Park from Warwick, Warwick Gates and Bishops Tachbrook. It was felt that in times when health and environmental issues were paramount and given the size of Warwick Gates

having a cycle / pedestrian route would seem sensible and help to reduce traffic from Warwick Gates / Bishops Tachbrook to the Technology Park.

John Archer informed the Forum that Warwick County Council have indicated that a cycle route from Warwick Gates to the Technology Park and from Warwick to the Technology Park was to be implemented. Construction is to take place during 06/07 financial year. Designs are currently being worked on. The County Council would be invited to present on their policy and proposals in respect of cycle route provision to the next meeting of the Planning Forum.

10. **NEXT MEETING**

It was noted that the next meeting of the Forum would be held on Thursday 16 February 2006 at the Town Hall, Royal Leamington Spa at 7 pm.

(The meeting closed at 8 pm)