

Meeting	Planning & Highways Committee
Date	16 th February 2021
Report Title	Future of Planning Meetings
Agenda Reference	14
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Background

A meeting with the Chair, Vice Chair, Clerk and Deputy Clerk was recently held to discuss the merits of continuing with planning meetings as Central Government is likely to propose greater relaxation of permitted development rights. With this in mind, and comments already unacknowledged, the authors consider if there any future for the Planning & Highways Committee?

There are several areas of Planning & Highways that would not fall into the new approach from Central Government and need further consideration/ local knowledge/ a central point for collating comments from constituents, for example:

- Enforcement Issues
- Footpath/Cycling/Highways Issues

Will the changes to future planning legislation mean that a Planning & Highways Committee is still required?

As a statutory consultee, it is understood that the Parish Council will be notified of the applications from the local authority, it is then up to the Parish Council to decide the best course of action – to comment or whether to refrain from commenting on each application.

It was considered that many hours of administration time with agenda preparation (for instance this month's in excess of 7 hours) downloading the plans, attending meetings and minutes and follows up (usually in excess of 3 hours). Then there is the Councillors' time to review, conduct (safe) site visits etc – all when the comments submitted to the planning authority are often ignored -the whole process seems to be a futile exercise.

Some parish councils give their officers delegated authority to review and make comments on applications without the need to call them into a Parish Council Planning & Highways meeting. However, if items are contentious, or they could benefit from local knowledge and/or require more information, a couple of



Councillors could be contacted, or an ad hoc Planning & Highways Committee meeting could be called or the application could be an item for the Full Council to consider.

Future meetings and further discussions

This month upon sending the Planning & Highways Committee agenda, the Clerk will assign the planning application to a Councillor to fully review and present comments to the meeting. The Councillors assigned will be within proximity to the property for a full site visit to be conducted, documents to be reviewed and the case to be presented at Planning & Highways. This will enable Councillors to be able to fully discuss concerns and encourage newer members of the Committee to be involved in the discussions.

Proposed Next Steps

The future of Planning & Highways Committee will be discussed on the 16th with a view to implementing any further changes in the new Council year, from May 2021. By which time, the Parish Council should have a steer from Central Government and Swindon Borough Council on the future of Planning policies. If controls remain in place there would be some merit for the Committee to stay in place.

Response from SBC regarding Permitted Development Rights

There is an ever-growing list of categories of permitted development rights, some of which (most) trigger a requirement for the need to seek the prior approval of the LPA before the works / uses can proceed. In most of the cases there is a requirement to consult the Parishes.

The notable exceptions are Householder development including the larger (6/8M) extensions. Only the adjoining neighbours can be consulted on those submissions (not parishes) and only the comments of an adjoining neighbour can be taken into account. If no neighbour objects within the given 21 day period then the approval is deemed to be given. The LPA cannot object in that circumstance.

I think that nearly all other categories of prior approval do require the parishes to be consulted. That said, in all prior Approval cases there are very strict and limited criteria about what can be taken into account in giving or refusing approval.

Again there is a default that in the event that the period for a decision passes without a decision being made, the default is that approval is deemed to be given. I am not aware of a 'layman's guide' to the complex world of prior approvals that we can refer a parish to for assistance.

In cases where the works are 'permitted development' (i.e. where no prior approval is required (e.g. smaller house extensions and alterations) then there is no requirement to notify or seek the approval of the LPA, the works can just be carried out.