

# REPORT TO PLANNING AND LICENSING COMMITTEE

## PLANNING REFORM WORKING PAPER: PLANNING COMMITTEES



**Report Reference** PL-24-04  
**Meeting Date** 16<sup>th</sup> December 2024  
**Agenda Item** 8  
**Prepared by** Town Clerk

### 1.0 BACKGROUND

The Government has a commitment to increasing the rate of house building and will be introducing a Planning and Infrastructure Bill to deliver planning reform. On 9<sup>th</sup> December, the government published a working paper “Planning Reform Working Paper: Planning Committees” designed to inform policy development.

The paper invites views on models for a national system of delegation, which the government has committed to introduce to support better decision making in the planning system. The paper can be read in full here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/planning-reform-working-paper-planning-committees/planning-reform-working-paper-planning-committees>

This relates to committees of planning authorities i.e. Cheshire East Council and does not affect the Town Council’s committee and how it operates.

The paper outlines options to increase delegation to planning officers and invites views on smaller targeted committees for strategic development and introducing mandatory training for committee members.

### 2.0 NATIONAL SCHEME OF DELEGATION

The Government wants to establish a national scheme of delegation to “provide a standardised, consistent approach to delegation of decisions in all local planning authorities recognising where sites have already had democratic approval through the local plan process”. There are three options outlined:

Option	Overview
1	<b>Delegation where an application complies with the development plan</b> which would require delegation to officers where an application for planning permission complies with the development plan. This would apply to all types of consent (outline, reserved matters etc)
2	<b>Delegation as default with exceptions for departures from the development plan</b> which would operate by exception – that all applications should be delegated to officers unless specific circumstances apply, namely that it is a departure from the local plan or that the application has been submitted by the planning authority, its members or officers.
3	<b>Delegation as default with a prescriptive list of exceptions</b> which would require all

applications to be delegated to officers except with a national list of applications that would be determined by committee such as development of a non-allocated site, departure from the local/neighbourhood plan, green belt development or subject to over a specified number of objections.

### 3.0 CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

The consultation asks the following questions. Draft answers to the questions are provided to facilitate discussion at the meeting.

- a) Do you think this package of reforms would help to improve decision making by planning committees?

*No. Whilst the proposals may speed up planning decisions, it will lead to poor quality planning and reduce public confidence in the planning system.*

*The Town Council's experience of major planning applications is that the committee process ensures there is cooperation between developers and communities from developing initial proposals through to securing full consent. The scrutiny provided by planning committees ensures matters are discussed and addressed and the public can see decisions being made openly.*

*Development has a lasting impact on communities, and it is right that locally elected councillors determine the detail of what is approved. It is with this proper oversight that local matters can be fully addressed. The current system of increasing levels of detail as applications progress from "rough" allocations in a local plan through to the detail of design and open space provision in reserve matters applications is right but it cannot be that the only opportunity for local political determination is at the "rough" stage.*

*The determination of planning applications is not an exact science. In all applications there exists a balance of merits and demerits and a judgment must be made as to the weight to apply to these. Applications are rarely in total compliance with all policies of a development plan. Unless planning policies are to be considered inflexible and prescriptive (which will stifle the system) there will always be a need for judgment, and it is right that for significant development that decisions are made by locally elected councillors.*

- b) Do you have views on which of the options we have set out in regards to national schemes of delegation would be most effective? Are there any aspects which could be improved?

*The Town Council does not believe that there should be national intervention into the mechanism through which local planning authorities determine planning applications.*

*However, of the three options presented option three (delegation with a prescriptive list of exceptions) is the most workable of the three options.*

- c) We could take a hybrid approach to any of the options listed. Do you think, for instance, we should introduce a size threshold for applications to go to committees, or delegate all reserved matters applications?

*Whilst the principle of development will have been established under an outline application, the reserve matters application is an important step in determining the impact a development will have on the current and future community, there should not be a presumption that these do not benefit from local councillor scrutiny.*

*If one of these options is introduced, it should be accompanied by a third party right of appeal to enable communities to appeal decisions to the Planning Inspectorate where they feel officers have incorrectly applied local policy.*

- d) Are there advantages in giving further consideration to a model based on objections?

*Yes. Whilst one would not wish to have a system that incentivised campaigns to reach a prescribed threshold the system could instead be class based. For example, requiring referral to committee when objections are received from:*

- a) the ward member(s) for the area in which the development is proposed OR*
- b) the relevant parish council OR*
- c) the Neighbourhood Forum covering the area in which the development is proposed OR*
- d) a statutory consultee (i.e. Historic England, Victorian Society etc)*

*A qualification could be made in respect of B and C to stipulate that it can only be exercised by a parish council or Neighbourhood Forum which has prepared or is in the advanced process of preparing a Neighbourhood Plan for the area.*

- e) Do you agree that targeted planning committees for strategic development could facilitate better decision making?

The Town Council has no comment on this question.

- f) Do you have a view on the size of these targeted committees?

The Town Council has no comment on this question.

- g) How should we define strategic developments

The Town Council has no comment on this question.

- h) Do you think the approach to mandatory training is the right one?

Yes, it is right to require the members of planning committees to be suitably trained to undertake the role.

## **4.0 DECISION REQUIRED**

The committee should consider whether to respond to the working paper and agree a response to the questions.