

**BRIDGNORTH TOWN COUNCIL
PLANNING COMMITTEE MEETING
TUESDAY 8TH SEPTEMBER 2020**

LJ/2020

1 September 2020

REPORT TO TOWN COUNCILLORS

AGENDA ITEM 9 – TOWN COUNCIL PROCESS FOR RESPONDING TO PLANNING APPLICATIONS

AIM

1. *To consider a process for responding to planning applications.*

BACKGROUND

2. 18th Feb 2020 – Town Council considers committee meetings and formats for civic year 2020/21 (Town Clerk report TC/36/1920 dated 10th February refers).
3. Town Clerk report paragraphs 9 through 14 describe a virtual planning meeting process with delegated powers (Extract at Enclosure 1).
4. Town Council Resolves to “*Defer any changes to the planning committee structure and organisation until the Planning Committee (and/ or the Clerk) had provided some additional options*”. Town Council minute 0421/1920 dated 18th February 2020 refers
5. Mar 2020 Lockdown begins and planning meetings replaced with delegated procedure (Enclosure 2).

DISCUSSION/ COMMENT

6. The Town Council has been using the delegated procedure since late March 2020 and the Town Council has responded effectively or considered a large number of planning applications in that time. It is considered a reasonable process in that it ensures that all councillors are informed of planning applications and comments can be provided in a timely fashion. The current system (of delegated powers) appears to working adequately and with reduced staffing effort.
7. An advantage of dealing with responses as applications comes in means that there is not a backlog of applications to consider and that responses can be sent when they are ready, furthermore comments and draft responses are constructed as they go and can be seen by all councillors. Holding physical meetings can lead to lengthy debates about precisely what should or has been said; it is difficult to construct a lengthy or detailed response off the cuff.

8. It is possible to hold planning committee meetings by video conference, much like Town Council meetings currently.

OPTIONS

9. To date there have been no other options documenting a process on how to responses to planning applications than the system currently operating. There appear to be 2 options for the immediate future:
 - a. Continue with the current 'delegated' system but incorporating the 'at least 2 meetings a year' philosophy
 - b. Hold video conference style monthly meetings (that revert to physical meetings when/ if Covid 19 guidance relaxes).

RECOMMENDATION(s)

10. It is recommended that the Planning Committee RESOLVES:

To recommend to the Full Town Council that the interim Covid-19 delegated powers process for responding to planning applications becomes the standard process, with the incorporation of at least 2 meetings a year (subject to the routine annual review).



Lee Jakeman
Town Clerk

ENCLOSURE 1 – EXTRACT OF TOWN CLERK REPORT (TC36/1920)

Planning Committee

9. *The planning committee currently operates in a reasonably standard model for local parishes; a list of all planning applications is received with a committee deciding how to compose a written response. At unitary authority level reports are written by staff (qualified in planning matters) and in the vast majority of cases they also have delegated authority to decide (with elected politicians presiding over the more contentious or complex planning applications). Planning decisions are made and challenged with due consideration for the NPPF.*

10. *Many planning applications are small and not particularly contentious and it is likely that many similar applications; for a loft conversion, a side extension or some tree works will have standard responses.*

11. *I note that many residents appear to be under the impression that the Town Council has some role in the decision making process, when it is merely a consultee that provides comment. That it might be a very objective consultee (as the 'neighbour of everyone' in the parish) can mean the Council provides valued comment to the decision makers when there are competing views.*

12. *It is already current practice of the committee to defer large scale planning applications to the Town Council.*

13. *The Council might want to consider having a virtual planning committee. This is where all members of the Council are committee members and at the beginning of each year it can agree to delegate planning application responses to an officer of the Council under some conditions including:*

a. That where the application received is not dissimilar to other applications the Council has considered previously, a similar response can be submitted – a consistent approach.

b. That each member of the Council is asked to provide comment. i. Where there is general agreement in responses received the officer is to submit a representative view.

ii. Where there are no responses from Councillors then a nil return is acceptable.

iii. Where there are differing responses the officer(s) in consultation with the Chair and/or Deputy Chair confirm a view based upon material planning considerations.

c. That where the application has little or no impact on its neighbours or the wider community (replacing fencing, tree works, new windows, simple works that only require a planning application by the nature of being in a conservation area) no response is necessary.

d. That the Chair of the planning committee has oversight of submissions made and may, where a large scale/novel or complex application is received submit the application to Full Town Council for consideration or convene an extraordinary meeting of the planning committee.

e. Publishing a set of Bridgnorth Town Council Planning principles which might include:

- Build on brown field before green*
- Ensure maintenance of/ enhancement of biodiversity*
- Maintain the character of the Town as a slowly evolving historical market town that understands the benefit of tourism*
- Encourage development that promotes sustainability*
- Support development that is energy efficient*

f. Another advantage to a delegated system might be that applications can be considered as they arrive and responded to on a continual rolling programme, as opposed to bulk consideration at committee meetings.

14. A second scheduled planning committee meeting could be held 4 or 5 months into the year to review decisions made and check whether the officers are responding as the Council had intended. If not, then firmer guidance can be given or regular planning meetings can be reintroduced.

END

ENCLOSURE 2 - BRIDGNORTH TOWN COUNCIL – COVID 19 – INTERIM DELEGATED
AUTHORITY PROCEDURE PLANNING APPLICATIONS

Planning application notified to Town Council via e-mail.

E-mail copied to planning clerks (Lynn and Ashley).

Ashley to update internal planning list z:\~committee & town council meetings\standing committees\planning\ planning agendas\planning agendas 2019-2020

Same notification (e-mail) forwarded to all councillors within 3 working days.

Planning Committee Town Councillors to comment to Ashley Kendrick including a nil return within 7 days of receipt of e-mail.

Save all comments to an application in one place (a word document with the e-mails cut and pasted or a folder on the Z: drive).

Lynn and Ashley to prepare a response (in the initial weeks Lynn to prepare comments)

If most of the planning committee have responded similarly then planning clerk to produce a form of words that captures consensus or use the best response.

Once the planning clerk has decided on the draft submission send a copy to the Chair or Deputy Chair of planning to say this is what I am about to submit – if I hear nothing back within 48 hours then I will submit.

Submit response via Shropshire Council's online planning portal.

Update internal planning list with submitted comment and mark off as completed.

If no responses are received within 7 days planning clerk to consider whether a response might be needed and discusses with the Town Clerk (we don't want to miss an opportunity to comment on a new hotel or a 200 home estate because David and Clive's broadband is down).

Planning clerks to review at least fortnightly the internal list to ensure that each application has had a response.

END