



**CITY OF WESTMINSTER**

# MINUTES

## **Planning & City Development Committee**

### **MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS**

Minutes of a meeting of the **Planning & City Development Committee** Committee held on **Tuesday 30th June, 2020**, Please note that this will be a virtual meeting..

**Members Present:** Councillors Robert Rigby, Geoff Barraclough, David Boothroyd, Jim Glen, Elizabeth Hitchcock, Louise Hyams, Matt Noble, Tim Roca, James Spencer, Eoghain Murphy, Selina Short, Richard Elcho and Mark Shearer

**Also Present:** Councillor Matthew Green

#### **1 APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN**

- 1.1 The Committee Officer advised the Sub-Committee that the Leader of the Council had nominated Councillor Robert Rigby for the Chairman of the Planning & City Development Committee. The nomination was seconded by Councillor Jim Glen.

There being no other nominations it was

#### **RESOLVED**

That Councillor Robert Rigby be appointed as the Chairman for the Planning & City Development Committee.

#### **2 MEMBERSHIP**

- 2.1 Election of Deputy Chairman

- 2.2 The Chairmen proposed that Councillor Jim Glen be appointed as Deputy Chairman for the duration of the Meeting. There being no other nominations it was

#### **RESOLVED:**

That Councillor Jim Glen be appointed as Deputy Chairmen for the duration of the Meeting

### **3 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

- 3.1 Cllr David Boothroyd declared that he was Head of Research and Psephology for Thorncliffe, whose clients were companies applying for planning permission from various local authorities. No current schemes were in Westminster; if there were he would be precluded from working on them under the company's code of conduct.

### **4 MINUTES**

- 4.1 That the Minutes of the Planning and City Development Committee meeting held on 7 November 2020 be approved.

### **5 UPDATE ON THE PLANNING REVIEW**

- 5.1 The Committee received a report which provided an update on current work within the Planning Service with a focus on the implementation of the Planning Review Programme and recent changes as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, in particular the introduction of Remote Planning Committees.
- 5.2 The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 came into effect on Saturday 4 April 2020 and gave local authorities the power to hold remote committee meetings until May 2021. Remote Planning Sub-Committees have been held bi-weekly since 14 April 2020. Six Planning Sub-Committee meeting have now been successfully held remotely and streamed using Microsoft Teams up to 23rd June. The adoption of remote committees via the Microsoft 'teams' platform has allowed residents and stakeholders to listen-in to meetings and/or recordings of any virtual meeting via the Council website, ensuring openness and transparency is maintained during this period. Members were advised that the Public speaking was temporarily suspended at the first two remote committee meetings to ensure technology was fully tested and to allow guidelines and protocols to be put in place.
- 5.3 The Planning Service has adapted quickly to remote working, ensuring discussions and meetings continue with applicants and stakeholders through video calls with pre-application presentations, internal design reviews and other meetings all held online. While there has been a fall in application numbers, applications are continuing to be received and validated online.
- 5.4 Members were advised that Officers were reviewing processes which would enable physical site visits to resume and that safety measures would need to be in place prior to this occurring. The site managers and applicants would need to agree and cooperate with the proposed safety measures procedures. There are extensive Risk Assessments processes that have been put in place in other areas of the Service, this includes Building Control and Planning Enforcement. The Sub-Committee was advised that current digital tools used for site visits combined with physical visits would help to better demonstrate what sites were to look like and its development impacts. Members were

advised that Officers who were able to access the Borough would undertake site visits.

- 5.5 In response to questions from the Committee, Officers advised that the digital tools used for conducting virtual site visits and assessments could be incorporated in the presentations during the Sub-Committees. This process would ensure that the Members and all parties have an enhanced understanding of the application. The developers of planning schemes would be encouraged to use these digital tools when engaging with third parties about potential developments.
- 5.6 The Committee noted that there would be a continual drive to ensure that the planning decisions process were transparent and understood by all parties. There will be focus on improving public participation and in areas which external parties had poorly scored. This will include obtaining views on how these areas could be improved. Members noted that there would be residual dissatisfaction with the process for some parties following the decision of the Sub-Committee.
- 5.7 Officers advised that hybrid meetings which involved both Members joining virtually and being physically present at Committees were not permissible under the current legislation and that the Local Government Association had lobbied the Government to amend this. Members also commented on their desire to move back to some form of physical planning committee when possible but with the option to incorporate virtual elements. There were discussions regarding registered speakers being able to continue to make remote representations at Sub-Committees post Covid-19 and it was agreed that this would ensure full accessibility and participation.
- 5.8 The Committee was advised that a breakdown of external viewers of the virtual Sub-Committee would be provided at their next Meeting and that these individuals would likely to be Planning Agents, members of Amenity Societies and residents.
- 5.9 Members informed that residents had raised concerns about the public access system for making comments about planning applications. Officers advised that the Planning Service is working with the IT Service on these issues, being monitored. There are alternative ways to make representations and these are used by numerous parties. The Committee was advised that there had been an increase in the use of digital platforms by developers to engage with third parties and that a hybrid system which combines the mentioned and physical meetings was preferred.
- 5.10 Members were advised that there were some concerns with transparency with Planning Applications and noted that it was not uncommon for the Sub-Committee to make decisions which were contrary to Officers recommendations. The Sub-Committee was advised that Ward Councillors were permitted to 'Call In' decisions. Officers reminded the Committee that Applicant's Identities were not usually part of the planning process unless there were exceptional circumstances. These include Applications which have a confidential matter such as security issues. A Member commented that a

different process should be implemented for Applications which were viewed as being 'political sensitive'.

- 5.11 Members were reminded that they were required to adhere to the Code of Conduct and Planning Protocols. The Code of Conduct has recently been updated and the process for 'Call Ins' was retained. Members were advised that they were responsible for determining whether they should make any Declaration of Interests.
- 5.12 Members raised concerns regarding 'abusive and inappropriate' comments posted on portals in relation to controversial Planning Applications and queried if a filtering system could be put in place to monitor these posting and ensure that they are removed before appearing on the Councils digital platform. Officers are working with the IT Service to devise solutions to this issue aimed at preventing inappropriate postings on public access digital platforms.
- 5.13 The Chair commended Members and Officers for their work on the Sub-Committee and for processing Planning Applications during the Covid-19 Pandemic lockdown and requested that this be recorded.

#### **RESOLVED:**

- 1. The Committee noted the changes made to the Planning Sub-Committee process in response to the Planning Review and as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, including the successful recent introduction of Remote Committees, associated amendments to the public speaking procedure rules, and the ongoing work to enable earlier and more consistent pre-application engagement with local communities and Ward Members, including a greater focus on digital engagement.
- 2. That a breakdown of external viewers of the virtual Sub-Committee be provided at their next Meeting

## **6 CITY PLAN 2019 - 2040 UPDATE**

- 6.1 The Committee received an update on the draft City Plan following its submission to the Secretary of State in November 2019. This followed an informal consultation, a statutory 'Regulation 19' consultation, and approval by Full Council. Two independent Inspectors have been appointed by the Secretary of State to examine the Plan. Their role is to interrogate the policies and their evidence base to determine if the Plan is 'sound'. A sound plan must be positively prepared to meet the area's needs, evidence based and justified, effective, and consistent with national policy. The timetable for the examination is controlled by the Inspectors and it was envisaged that the Public Hearing will be conducted virtually and take place in Autumn 2020.
- 6.2 Members noted that prior to the Public Hearing, Inspectors will complete an information gathering phase and that it was practice asking local authorities

for further evidence on specific policies in the plan and this was done via the issuing of formal 'Matters, Issues and Questions (MIQs).

6.3 The Key questions noted from each Matter are as follows:-

- **Legal requirements:** How the policies mitigate and adapts to climate change?
- **Duty to co-operate:** Has the council co-operated with neighbouring boroughs on strategic planning matters e.g. transport, waste management
- **Spatial Strategy:** How has the council determined where growth should be directed to (i.e. the Opportunity Areas, Central Activities Zone, Housing Renewal Areas etc)?
- **Housing:** What is the evidence for the proposed housing target of 20,685 units over the 20 years life span of the Plan.
- **Economy & Employment:** Is the restriction on hot food takeaways within 200m of a school appropriate and is the approach to restricting new shisha premises evidence-based and justified?
- **Connections:** Are the parking standards in general conformity with the London Plan?
- **Environment:** Is it clear how carbon-offset payments are to be calculated and has the approach to air quality neutral developments been viability tested?
- **Design and Heritage:** Are tall buildings clearly defined?
- **Infrastructure, Implementation and Monitoring:** How has the need for new infrastructure been taken into account and what is the approach to reviewing the Plan?

6.4 The committee noted that an Environmental Supplementary Planning Document was being produced and would lay out how the Environmental Policies in the draft City Plan would be implemented.

#### **RESOLVED:**

That the contents of the report be noted.

## **7 PLANNING & CITY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE**

7.1 The Committee considered a report which provided information about the role and remit of the Planning & City Development Committee and their Work Programme and Training Schedule for the Municipal Year. Members were requested to forward topics which they wish to be included in their Work Programme and Training Schedule.

#### **RESOLVED:**

1. That the contents of the report be noted.
2. That the Committee forward Topics to be included in their Work Programme and Training Schedule.

The Meeting ended at 7.45 pm

**CHAIRMAN:** \_\_\_\_\_ **DATE** \_\_\_\_\_