



**BEDFORD**  
BOROUGH COUNCIL

# Councillor Call-In Protocol Planning Committee

## 1. Introduction and Background

- a) Most planning applications are determined by Planning Officers in line with the Scheme of Delegation as set out in the Council's constitution.
- b) The Scheme of Delegation sets out when officers can determine applications and when they must refer matters to the Planning Committee. In Bedford Borough's case the Chief Officer of Planning and Infrastructure Development will not exercise their delegated authority where an application for **planning permission** which is not a householder application meets the criteria set out above.
- c) This delegation allows the Planning Committee to concentrate on those applications that have the biggest impact upon the Borough or are of relevant interest for public decision making and therefore ought to be scrutinised democratically within the public arena of a Committee Meeting.
- d) However, even when the delegation authorises officers to determine the application, Councillors may request a relevant application to be taken to Committee if they have made a valid request, in time, and have a reasonable and material planning ground upon which to make the request.
- e) Planning decisions are not based on an exact science and rely on informed judgement within a firm policy context. Officers involved in the processing and determination of planning applications must act in accordance with the Council's code of conduct and their professional code of conduct, primarily the Royal Town Planning Institute's Code of Professional Conduct. As a result, planning officer views, opinions and recommendations are developed with suitable training and experience and recommendations will be presented on the basis of their overriding obligation of professional independence, which may on occasion be at odds with the views, opinions or decision of individual councillors or Planning Committee members.
- f) Applications and development proposals vary in their complexity, and some are particularly contentious and generate considerable local interest. Opposing views are often strongly held by those involved and Councillors need to ensure that they do not favour any person, company, group or locality, nor put themselves in a position where they appear to do so.
- g) Ward councillors are likely to be approached by their electorate and asked to call-in an application on their behalf at times, sometimes on the basis that they consider they will receive a more favourable outcome from the Planning Committee than by way delegated officer decision.
- h) It is not the case that just because a member of the public requests a call-in that this should be actioned by Councillors.
- i) It is the responsibility of Councillors to consider whether there are sufficient planning reasons for disagreeing with an officer recommendation of approval that merit intervention of the Planning Committee.

- j) Councillors approached by their electorate should not call-in applications simply to appease their electorate if they do not feel the issues justify the Planning Committee's attention.
- k) If the issues raised do not appear to justify the attention of the Committee then it is the expectation that Ward Councillors will explain to their electorate that they cannot justify a call-in of the planning application.
- l) Only where Councillors feel the issues posed warrant a full democratic debate amongst the Planning Committee should they call-in the application.
- m) Councillors who feel that a call-in is warranted are required to call-in the planning application through a formal set procedure as outlined below. The Councillor calling-in the application is expected to attend the Planning Committee at which the application they referred is to be discussed to address the Committee and explain their views on the planning application and expand on their call-in reasons. By calling-in an application Councillors are indicating that they feel the issues are genuine and require debate at the Planning Committee.
- n) If a call-in is not made following the call-in procedures, the call-in will not be valid and the application will follow the usual routes set out in the Scheme of Delegations.

## **2. How to make a call-in**

- a) Councillors must use the online call-in request form. The form has fields that prompt the necessary information required in order to demonstrate that the call-in is made on legitimate planning grounds and provides all of the information that the planning service needs to in order to process a Councillor call-in efficiently and effectively and to maintain an auditable and transparent process.
- b) It is important that the form is filled in fully, stating the reasons for the call-in, including the material planning considerations that the Ward Councillor feels warrant scrutiny by the Planning Committee.
- c) The call-in form will be placed on the application file and will be accessible to view on the Council's website. Councillors should therefore ensure that a member of the public who has approached them to call-in an application is aware that any personal information they provide may be made public when it is incorporated into the call-in form. The Committee report will also give the name of the Councillor making the call-in and the reason for the call-in.
- d) Material considerations are many and extraordinarily varied. They include all the fundamental factors involved in land-use planning, such as:
  - The number, size, layout, siting, density, design and external appearance of buildings
  - The proposed means of access
  - Landscaping
  - Impact on the neighbourhood, and

- The availability of infrastructure

Examples of factors that may be taken into account as material considerations in the decision making process include but are not limited to:

- Planning history of the site
- Overshadowing
- Overlooking and loss of privacy
- Inadequate parking and servicing
- Overbearing nature of proposal
- Loss of trees
- Loss of ecological habitats
- Contamination by a previous use
- Effect on Listed Building(s) and Conservation Areas
- Access and highways safety
- Traffic generation
- Noise and disturbance from the scheme
- Disturbance from smells
- Public visual amenity
- Flood risk

Examples of factors that **cannot** normally be considered as material planning considerations are:

- Loss of value to an individual property
  - Loss of a private individual's view
  - Boundary disputes including encroachment of foundations or gutters
  - Private covenants or agreements
  - The applicant's personal conduct or history
  - The applicant's motives
  - Potential profit for the applicant or from the application
  - Private rights to light
  - Private rights of way
  - Damage to property
  - Loss of trade to individual competitors
  - Age, health, status, background and work patterns of the objector
  - Time taken to do the work
  - Noise and other forms of disturbance arising during and solely as a result of any building operations involved in the development
  - Building and structural techniques
  - Matters covered by other legislation and over which planning has no control
  - Alcohol or gaming licence
- e) Most if not every planning application will raise material planning issues, however, Councillors must as part of the call-in request state why the matters warrant scrutiny by the Planning Committee.
- f) As noted in Part 1(n) above, if a call-in is not made following the call-in procedures and on relevant material planning grounds the call-in will not

be valid and the application will follow the usual routes set out in the Scheme of Delegations.

- g) Validity of call-ins is determined by the service Manager of Development Management or a Development Management Team Leader delegated in their absence and may be declined, in consultation with the Chair of the Planning Committee, if it does not refer to relevant planning grounds or has been inappropriately made.
- h) All call-in requests must be made before the end of the public consultation period on the application, as stated on neighbour notification letters, site notices or newspaper adverts (as relevant) for it to be valid. Late requests will not be accepted (except in circumstances set out in paragraph i) to ensure that the application can be determined within the statutory determination period.
- i) If the public consultation period is extended, so shall the member call-in period to the same date.
- j) The date of the call-in will be the date that the call-in request form is received.

### **3. Pre-disposition, pre-determination and bias**

- a) Members of the Planning Committee need to avoid any appearance of bias or having predetermined their views before taking a decision on a planning application.
- b) Councillors must declare on the call-in form any relationship or actions on their part or impact the application may have on any of their interests declared in the register of interests which could be construed in the public's mind as being liable to bias, predetermination or having a closed mind.
- c) It is the obligation of Councillors to recognise where they have an interest in the application and members' attention is drawn to the Members Code of Conduct for Planning Matters which can be found in the Council's Constitution. Failure to declare an interest may put the decision taken by the Planning Committee at risk of a legal challenge.

### **4. Valid and invalid call-ins**

- a) Upon submitting a call-in form Councillors will receive an acknowledgement email.
- b) The Manager for Development Management or a Development Management Team Leader delegated in their absence will assess the call-in application and determine:
  - If the form has been completed correctly as far as reasonable;

- That the call-in has been made within the relevant timeframe as set out in this scheme of delegation, including any extensions;
  - That the call in is based on a relevant material planning consideration; and
  - That the call-in is valid in all other respects in line with the scheme of delegation.
- c) If the call-in does not fulfil the criteria above the Development Management department will email the Councillor advising that the call-in is not valid as soon as possible, stating the reason(s) why and – if the remaining time before the call-in and the email being received is less than 24-hours, an additional 24-hours will be given to facilitate the submission of a valid call-in. If no further call-in is received, the application will then follow the delegated route, unless a subsequent valid call-in is received within the relevant timeframe.
- d) If the call-in request is valid the Development Management department will confirm this by email.
- e) When a call-in is valid the application will be referred to the Planning Committee in due course. The Councillor requesting the call-in will be notified of the date in which the item will be taken to Committee and the Councillor is expected to attend or send a proxy Councillor to the Committee Meeting to explain their views on the planning application and expand upon their call-in reasons. By calling-in an application Councillors are indicating that they feel the issues are genuine and require debate at Committee, so they should be prepared to present their views in person.
- f) Note that the application will not always be referred to the Planning Committee immediately, e.g where the consultation is still current, where negotiation is ongoing or where further information may be sought.
- g) The application will be written up in accordance with the officer's workload and will be taken to the first Committee where the report can be published on the Agenda in accordance with the Council's timeframe for access to agendas and reports prior to a Committee meeting. This may result in a decision on an application falling outside of the statutory timeframe, which is not ideal; however, it ensures probity in decision making ensuring that call-ins are not a method of expediting an application through the planning system.
- h) The applicant, agent and any objectors will be advised that the application will be decided at Committee because it is the subject of a call-in.
- i) Officers, as a matter of routine, address and consider all relevant material planning considerations. Where during discussion, a Councillor asks a question or makes a comment or assertion that officers believe requires correction or clarification, the officer(s) will, with the Committee Chair's leave, answer or provide the necessary correction or clarification before the Committee votes on the officer's recommendation.

## 5. Parish and Town Council Consultation Responses

- a) Parish and Town Councils are often consulted during the course of a planning application and depending on the response provided to that consultation a planning application may have to be determined by the Planning Committee instead of by the planning officer under delegated powers. (Note this is not the case for **householder applications** though, which remain delegated to planning officers).
- b) In order for a Parish or Town Council response to trigger Planning Committee consideration of a non-householder planning application (as specified in the Scheme of Delegation) the Parish or Town Council is required before the expiry of the consultation period stated on the consultation letters to explicitly state whether they support or object to the application and the material planning considerations why they support or object to the application having regard to the material considerations advice provided in Part 2(d) of this Call-In Procedure Protocol.
- c) Parish and Town Councils should where possible submit their response using a similar form to that used by Borough Councillors in responding to Planning Applications.
- d) If a Parish or Town Council submits their response after the expiry date of the consultation period (and has not agreed in writing with the planning officer an extension of time to that consultation period) or does not explicitly state whether they support or object to a proposal or give material planning reasons why they have formed that view, their response will be regarded as commentary only and the application will be determined by the planning officer under delegated powers.