



Leicester
City Council

**MINUTE
EXTRACT**

Minutes of the Meeting of the
STRATEGIC PLANNING AND REGENERATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Held: WEDNESDAY, 14 SEPTEMBER 2005 at 5.30pm

P R E S E N T :

Councillor A. Vincent- Chair
Councillor Kitterick- Labour Spokesperson
Councillor Porter-Conservative Spokesperson

Councillor Henry
Councillor Smith (for Cllr. Renold)

Councillor Thomas
Councillor Waddington

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22. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members are asked to declare any interests they may have in the business on the agenda, and/or indicate that Section 106 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 applies to them.

There were no declarations.

29. STATEMENT OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN THE PLANNING PROCESS

The Service Director, Environment submitted a report giving the Committee an opportunity to make comments on the Pre-Submission Draft Statement of Community Involvement before the preparation of a final Submission Draft.

The Head of Development Plans circulated a summary of the responses which had been received from the consultation process on the Statement. He noted in particular that the police had concerns about planning applications, available on the internet being a terrorist / crime risk. He also noted that the Government Office for the East Midlands had commended the Statement.

The Head of Development Plans enquired whether the Committee wished to consider the final version of Submission Draft of the Statement. Committee Members confirmed this was the case.

A Member commented consultation on planning matters had been poor in some cases in the past. It was however felt that the consultation that had taken place on the Biffa plant at Bursom Business Park was an example of where it had been done well. The Head of Development Plans said that it was the aim

of the Government to make developers responsible for their own consultation on major planning applications.

A member of the Committee made a number of points. Firstly he felt that members of the public were mostly interested in developments in a half mile radius of their own dwelling. On this basis he felt that it was difficult to explain to the public about the local plan being the 'law book' for planning matters across the city. This was especially difficult when it came to the boundaries for policy areas. He gave the example of where difficulties had been faced with boundaries of a Houses of Multiple Occupation policy area.

He also felt that it was important to get the views of local residents at an early stage, particularly with regard to major planning applications. He felt that by the time residents were notified of a planning application by site notices or letter, it was likely that the application was more or less guaranteed to go ahead regardless of the views of residents.

He also queried the lengths which the Council should go to be reasonable in assisting Councillors and Members of the public with enquiries on planning matters. He felt that, in his experience, the Council only provided the minimum level of assistance that it was required to do.

He didn't agree with the Police concerns regarding planning applications being available on the internet. He conceded that there were some sensitive buildings which should remain private. However he felt that as planning applications were currently available to the public anyway this wasn't really a concern.

With regard to Council consultation, he commented that whilst area committees could have a role to play, he felt that they wouldn't reach a wide cross section of people from an area. He also noted that some applications could cross the boundary of two area committees. The Head of Development Plans felt that Area Committees could provide useful sub-Council level discussion with local communities. He, did however, welcome suggestions from Councillors how this could be done more effectively.

Another member of the Committee requested that consideration be given to when consultation periods were held. He felt that there had been too many examples of where consultation had been carried out over holiday periods.

He also asked for the views of the officer about how closer involvement of the public would work. The Head of Development Plans commented that the ideal would be for greater ownership of plans by local communities and consultation being undertaken at an earlier stage. He did however state that this didn't mean making alterations as soon as people said they didn't like something, but to listen and respond was the best way forward. He also said that there were difficulties with regard to funding consultation as additional budgets had not been identified for this work.

Another member of the Committee commented with regard to the consultation responses. He expressed concerns that those responding who wished to be

consulted on planning matters could have unrealistic expectations about their influence. He felt that the views of special interest groups should be taken cautiously as they could often conflict with the view of the general public. He also felt that such consultations could hinder the government's aims of making the planning process quicker and more transparent. The Head of Development Plans agreed that the government aim was for a quicker and more transparent planning system, he wasn't sure that this could be achieved. He did feel that single issue groups could provide a useful input in to planning matters but agreed that they shouldn't unbalance planning decisions.

He also felt that the employment land issue was a problem. He felt that communities welcomed development on underused employment land which was currently being resisted by the Council. The Head of Development Plans noted that a study was currently being undertaken for the future employment land needs of the city.

A query was raised over who paid for consultation exercises. It was noted by one member of the committee that they had to pay for a hall to hold a public meeting in their ward about a planning application. The Head of Development Plans commented that consultation on major planning applications could be paid for largely by developers, as was the aim of the Government. He felt that the ideal should be that consultation starts at a very early stage where local issues could be overcome.

A query was made about how conservation areas were declared and who decided what area they would cover. The Head of Development plans said they were designated by the Council after consultation, potentially with every resident of the area. The basis of the consultation would be in the Statement of Community Involvement.

RESOLVED:

- (1) that the Committee receive the final Submission Draft of the Statement of Community Involvement; and
- (2) that the comments of the Committee be noted.