

Planning Committee

Monday, 11th October, 2021

SPECIAL HYBRID MEETING OF THE PLANNING COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor Carson (Chairperson);
Councillors Brooks, Matt Collins,
Garrett, Hussey, Hutchinson, Maskey,
McCullough, Murphy and O'Hara.

In attendance: Ms. K. Bentley, Director of Planning and Building Control;
Mr. K. Sutherland, Planning Manager (Policy);
Mr. D. O'Kane, Principal Planning officer;
Ms. N. Largey, Divisional Solicitor;
Ms. C. Donnelly, Democratic Services Officer; and
Mrs. L. McLornan, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

Apologies for inability to attend were reported from Councillors Groogan, Hanvey, McMullan and Whyte.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were recorded.

Restricted Items

The information contained in the reports associated with the following three items is restricted in accordance with Part 1 of Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

Resolved – That the Committee agrees to exclude the members of the Press and public from the meeting during discussion of these items as, due to the nature of the items, there would be a disclosure of exempt information as described in Section 42(4) and Section 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

Local Development Plan (LDP) Update

The Director of Planning and Building Control advised the Committee that, on 29th September, the Planning Appeals Commissions (PAC) had informed the Council that it had completed the Report into the findings of the Independent Examination for the Belfast LDP draft Plan Strategy. In the notification the PAC had confirmed that the report had been forwarded to the Department for Infrastructure and that the release of that report was solely a matter for the Department.

The Planning Manager reminded the Committee that the Independent Examination (IE) had been held in two sessions, with the initial stages being convened for the two weeks between the 16th and 27th November 2020, with the concluding sessions from the 18th January to 8th March 2021. He explained that the sessions were

convened around 25 Topic Areas and that the PAC had further divided the topics into a series of over 500 questions which addressed the issues raised through both the representations and the considerations of the Commission. He provided that Committee with the issues which had been identified and an assessment in relation to their potential implications.

The Committee was advised that there was a need to set out the process and actions necessary for the Council to complete the potential adoption of the draft Plan Strategy. The Planning Manager reported that, whilst the DfI would send a Direction to the Council in respect of the plan adoption, it would not cover the Committee consideration and the work required to complete the associated reports. He added that the work and arrangements needed to bring forward the required SPG and the issue of the potential direction and the scope to reduce the potential for further delay in the LDP process were the subject of the subsequent items on the agenda.

The Members were advised that the Council would be required to modify both the timetable for the Local Development Plan and the Statement of Community Involvement to reflect the changes in guidance and the impacts of the delayed IE process on the overall development of the LDP. The Planning Manager explained that the proposal would be to follow the processes used in the development of the draft Plan Strategy, with the detailed issues being considered by the Planning Committee in advance of the final adoption documents being submitted to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee prior to final adoption by the Council.

The Committee noted the contents of the report and the appendices, which provided an update in respect of the current position for the draft Plan Strategy stage of the ongoing Local Development Plan process.

Supplementary Planning Guidance Update

The Principal Planning officer provided the Committee with an update on the preparation of Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) in advance of public consultation.

He outlined that SPG represented non-statutory planning guidance which supported and illustrated by example policies included in the current planning policy framework including regional policy. The Members were advised that SPG must be read in conjunction with the LDP and the Strategic Planning Policy Statement (SPPS) but, unlike the LDP, they were not subject to the same scrutiny in terms of the statutory process. They were primarily designed to help members of the public, developers and planners to understand the intent of the policy and how it might be interpreted.

He advised that they were a useful mechanism for providing clarity and could be amended or updated through normal Council policy processes and were more adept to reflect changes in circumstances, for example, new design techniques or new policy products that emerged from central government. The Committee was advised that the SPGs had been prepared over the last two years in conjunction with Government Departments and Agencies, as well as a number of representatives from professional bodies. The approach had helped to raise awareness amongst those bodies, to alleviate and address their concerns and to ensure that the Council was abreast of the latest issues.

The Committee:

- noted the update on the latest version of the Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) documents and the summary of their content, their current status and links to the latest version of the documents (available on modern.gov);
- agreed the content of the SPGs, subject to any minor amendments considered necessary upon receipt of the Planning Appeals Commission (PAC) report from the Independent Examination; and
- agreed that public consultation upon the SPGs could be commenced upon receipt of the PAC report. If significant changes were required to any SPG on foot of the PAC report those SPG would be brought back to the Committee for its approval before going out for consultation.

DfI Response to Comments on DPPN11

The Planning Manager provided the Committee with the Department for Infrastructure's (DfI) response in respect of Development Planning Practice Note 11.

He highlighted that the guidance suggested that the Planning Appeal Commission's report would not be issued to any council in advance of a Direction being issued, thus not affording the Council advanced consideration of the outcomes or issues arising from the Independent Examination. He outlined a number of potential actions or initiatives which could be taken in order to support the progression of the plan in a timely and efficient manner.

After discussion the Committee agreed to the next steps, as outlined within the report, which sought to progress the continued work towards the development and adoption of an up to date Local Development Plan for Belfast.

Chairperson