

Annual Report of the Planning Committee



Chair's Foreword

Chair's introduction

As Chair of the Planning Committee it gives me great pleasure to provide the foreword for this annual report for 2021.

My role is to chair, lead and co-ordinate the activities of the Planning Committee and with the continued hard work and dedication of our planning officers, ably supported by the Members of the Committee, we have achieved continued success throughout the challenging times faced in 2021.

We have been able to build on changes to working practices that have improved the swiftness of dealing with applications to respond to customer needs as well as giving officers the freedom to engage, provide guidance and give every assistance to encourage new development within Sandwell.

This progress is largely down to increased delegated powers to officers to meet Government performance targets, coupled with a rolling programme of Member training regarding new planning regulations and related matters.

During 2021 we all unfortunately became too well aware of the continued challenges brought about by the pandemic. However, I am extremely pleased with how well working practices have been adapted which has enabled us to carry on. These changes, for example, have previously included the use of 'virtual' planning committee meetings and, coupled with the flexibility shown by colleagues to take account of the necessary restrictions placed upon us, has meant that the planning process has continued to perform well.

In 2022 the Planning Committee will continue to seek to add value to new development in Sandwell by ensuring the effective and efficient determination of planning applications in a fair, open and transparent manner.





Councillor Zahir Hussain - Chair of Planning Committee

Introduction to the Planning Committee

What is the role of the Committee

The Council establishes the Planning Committee each year to deal with matters relating to the Town and Country Planning Acts and related legislation, which mainly concerns the determination of planning applications.

The Committee is required to submit an Annual Report to Council each year detailing the work undertaken throughout the year. This report now provides an overview of the work of Planning Committee for 2021.

Who sits on the Committee

From January 2021 to May 2021 the following Members were appointed to the Planning Committee:-

Councillor Downing (Chair);

Councillor Hevican (Vice-Chair);

Councillors Ahmed, Allen, Chidley, Dhallu, S. Davies, Gill, P.M. Hughes, M. Hussain, I. Jones, Mabena, Millar, Piper, Rouf and Simms.



At its annual meeting in May 2021 the Council appointed the following Members to the Planning Committee:-

Councillor Z. Hussain (Chair);
 Councillor Webb (Vice-Chair);
 Councillors Allcock, Allen, Chapman, Chidley, Dhallu, Fenton, S. Gill, O. Jones, Kalari, Kaur, Millar, C.S. Padda, Rouf and K. Singh.

How does the work of the Committee Contribute to the Corporate Plan?

The granting of planning permission can contribute significantly to all of the key corporate aspirations listed below by, for example, providing new school and leisure facilities; allowing existing businesses to be extended in order to grow to meet demand; providing a range of accommodation to meet all housing needs; as well as seeking financial contributions from development where appropriate which can then be used to support community groups or enhance local facilities.

	Best start in life for children and young people
	People live well and age well
	Strong resilient communities
	Quality homes in thriving neighbourhoods
	A strong and inclusive economy
	A connected and accessible Sandwell



Committee Development Activity

The following training sessions were undertaken during 2021:-

February – Changes to permitted development rights

July – Introduction to Planning

August – The Development Plan

November – Houses in Multiple Occupation

Legislation Reference

The determination of planning applications is taken in accordance with the provisions of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) and associated legislation.

Committee Activity Overview

Work Programme Spotlight

During 2021, Planning Committee generally met on a monthly basis. Below is a breakdown of each Committee meeting in terms of numbers of applications determined and whether the decision at the particular Committee was in accordance with the officer's recommendation or not. It should be noted that Members, after considering the facts of a case, can decide to visit to see the application site for themselves or defer in order to seek further information.



Date of Committee	No of Applications On Agenda	Decision With Officer Recommendation	Decision Against Officer Recommendation	Application Withdrawn	Visit	Deferred
Jan	No Committee					
Feb	8	6	2	0	0	0
March	4	4	0	0	0	0
Apr	6	5	0	0	0	1
May	7	6	0	0	0	1
June	No Committee					
July	8	6	0	1	1	0
Aug	3	3	0	0	0	0
Sept	7	6	0	0	1	0
Oct	4	4	0	0	0	0
Nov	6	6	0	0	0	0
Dec	10	7	2	0	1	0
Total	63	53	4	1	2	2

Numbers of applications received and determined in 2021;

1262 planning applications received of which 1224 applications were determined.

Of the 1224 applications determined, 1164 (95%) were dealt with by officers using delegated powers.

Of those applications determined:-

1113 were approved (91%)

111 were refused permission (9%)

By way of comparison, figures for the previous year are listed below:-

Numbers of applications received and determined in 2020;

1067 planning applications received of which 953 applications were determined.

Of the 953 applications determined, 905 (95%) were dealt with by officers using delegated powers.



Of those applications determined:-

898 were approved (94%)

55 were refused permission (6%)

The figures above indicate that the overall number of planning applications received during 2021 increased significantly compared to those submitted in 2020 which reflects the national increase of around 25%. (These numbers are also affected by the fact that in 2013, the Government introduced a new 'Prior Approval' system which is intended to primarily allow householders greater scope above and beyond existing regulations to extend their properties. Before this date such extensions would have required a formal planning application to be submitted. These Prior Approvals do not appear in the formal figures for the numbers of applications dealt with but in essence, the process and the work required is the same as dealing with a full planning application. The Council received **248** such applications in 2021, compared to **219** in 2020).

The large percentage of applications approved in part reflects the openness of the service in encouraging developers and prospective applicants to engage in pre-application discussions. A charge for such discussions was introduced at Sandwell from September 2019 to offer a complete service to potential applicants and bring the Council in line with neighbouring authorities. This approach sends the message that the Council, despite the existing economic difficulties, is very much open for business and ready to facilitate development opportunities.

The positive outcome of the vast majority of planning applications submitted at Sandwell is also in part a reflection of where there are problems with a proposed scheme, officers will endeavour to negotiate workable solutions within the prescribed time scales.

In addition to the above planning applications, the Development Management section in 2021 also dealt with around 300 complaints regarding alleged breaches of planning control. (A similar number of investigations were carried out in 2020). Officers remain acutely aware of the fact that the credibility of the planning system as a whole rests on the ability to take timely and appropriate enforcement action.



A further 150 sites in 2021 were also investigated by officers as potentially requiring tidy up work using in the main powers available under Section 215 of the Town and County Planning Act 1990. This power allows the local planning authority to deal with privately owned land or buildings, the condition of which is adversely affecting the amenity of a particular area. (Again, this number of cases is similar to the numbers received in 2020). This area of work has grown in recent years on the back of the Council's own 'Grot Spots' programme. Officers continue to strive to build on the good work to date and the partnerships already created both within the Council and with outside bodies such as the Police and Fire Service.

Performance

The local planning authority is monitored closely by the Government regarding the time taken to determine planning applications. (Applicants have a right to appeal to the Planning Inspectorate if their application is not dealt within the prescribed time).

The Government targets are as follows:-

60% of major applications to be determined in 13 weeks

70% of minor applications to be determined in 8 weeks

80% of other applications to be determined in 8 weeks

("Major" developments are defined as applications for 10 or more dwellings; where the floor space of the proposal exceeds 1000 square metres or if the application site area exceeds 1 hectare.

"Minor" developments include schemes for less than 10 dwellings and where floor area is less than 1000 square metres.

"Others" includes changes of use and householder extensions).

The Planning service has consistently continued to exceed these performance targets throughout 2020 and 2021. The on-going commitment of all staff, coupled with the assistance of Planning Committee, has very much helped to achieve this;



2021

Major applications: 53; No. determined in 13 weeks: 48

Performance - 90.6%

Minor applications: 270; No. determined in 8 weeks: 224

Performance - 83.0%

Other applications: 901; No. determined in 8 weeks: 816

Performance - 90.6%

Again, by way of comparison, the figures for 2020 are as follows:-

2020

Major applications: 29; No. determined in 13 weeks: 28

Performance - 96.6%

Minor applications: 222; No. determined in 8 weeks: 196

Performance - 88.3%

Other applications: 702; No. determined in 8 weeks: 624

Performance - 88.9%

Case Studies

One notable focus area for the Committee in 2021 has been around the increased submission in the number of applications for changes of use to create Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs). Members have been acutely aware of the housing need that well-run HMOs can meet balanced against the anxiety that such changes of use can create within local communities. With colleagues from Private Sector Housing who license HMOs, a training session has been run for Committee members and as part of the current review of the Council's Development Plan, new policy and guidance will eventually be included for the first time.



Community Feedback

Speed of decision making is important but is just one aspect of the service provided. With each decision notice sent out, a customer satisfaction survey is attached. For 2021, 81% of applicants and/ or agents who responded were Very Satisfied or Fairly Satisfied with the overall service.

Looking Ahead

The Council will continue to strive to deal with planning applications in an effective and efficient manner. The continued support shown by Committee Members is invaluable in order for planning officers to continue to achieve the high performance and customer satisfaction levels that they have to date.

