

Email from Little Abington Parish Council

Sent: 03 February 2020 10:59

Subject: RE: Items referred to Planning Committee

Dear Cllr Smith,

Thank you for your letter.

Little Abington Parish Council discussed this issue at its meeting on Monday, 27 January.

The Parish Council was concerned about the potential impact of the proposed change in protocol. It would like to be reassured that SCDC will consult with parish councils before making a change. As you may know there was some consultation before the current protocol was implemented.

The main reasons for LAPC's concerns are:

- the importance of openness and transparency in decision-making
- ensuring the views of the public are adequately represented by democratically elected representatives i.e parish councillors and local authority councillors
- concerns about decision making by officers who, although trained and qualified in planning matters and therefore well placed to advise local councillors, do not have an electoral mandate.

There was also some concern that objections to planning applications are removed from the current SCDC planning information system after a decision is made. This makes it difficult to track background information that was considered in the decision-making process i.e lack of transparency. This point was raised by another parish council at the meeting held last Friday to demonstrate the new planning system.

We understand that Cambridge City Council does not have parish councils. Perhaps this is the reason for the difference in decision-making processes.

We trust that you and the Planning Committee will consider these points and consult before implementing any changes in protocol.

Cc Local Cllrs Henry and John Batchelor

Kind regards

Kind Regards

Clerk, Little Abington Parish Council
Treasurer, Abington Recreation Ground Committee

Email from Willingham Parish Council

Date: 28 January 2020 at 09:17:46 GMT

Subject: Items referred to planning committee

Dear Bridget

Further to your letter dated 8th January 2020. The Council have asked me to write to you regarding the current and proposed system for planning approvals.

The Council have raised concerns numerous times to the planning department regarding the process and have asked that I bring their concerns to your attention.

When the system first changed the Council expressed its unhappiness with officers being able to make delegated planning decisions. They feel very strongly that planning decisions should be debated and decided upon by elected members and not individual officers.

In addition, given that there is no right of appeal if an application is approved by SCDC, in circumstances where the Council object to an application that an officer is minded to approve then the application should definitely go to the elected members committee for consideration. At this point Councillors then have the opportunity to attend and explain their objections to the full committee before a decision is made.

Kind regards

Clerk

Willingham Parish Council

Email from Cottenham Parish Council

Date: 10 January 2020 at 13:07:23 GMT

Subject: Referrals to Plannig Committee

Dear Bridget,

Thanks you for your "clarification" letter.

We were aware of concerns being increased about changes to the mechanism of referrals to Planning Committee and, while your timely letter appears to move towards a clearer position, the lack of transparency on the current position remains disturbing.

We understand the need for increased efficiency in use of Planning Committee time and the likelihood that almost all Householder applications can be delegated to Planning Officer team decision unless there are regulatory reasons that require referral.

However, some undeclared "mission creep" does seem to have happened following the merger of City/SCDC Planning services, change of political control or outsourcing of some planning activities.

We understood that the introduction a few years ago of a formal Parish Council "request to refer" on the planning response would be determined between the Chair (or Vice-Chair when Chair is unavailable) of the Planning Committee and the Director of Planning (not, as in your letter, a "planning manager") and, in all cases, the Parish Council would be advised directly of a non-referral decision and its planning basis (which notification may not always be happening). These changes, deliberate or inadvertent, have weakened local input, reduced transparency and diluted the democratic input into the planning process.

Please consult Parish Councils on the proposed referral process before any further decision on its implementation.

Best wishes

Chair
Cottenham Parish Council