

## **Code of Practice**

### **‘Significant’ Planning Applications and Member Public Briefings**

(Revised July 2013)

#### **Introduction**

This code of practice should be read in conjunction with the separate code of practice on Member Engagement in Pre Application Enquiries. Whilst that is intended to enable member involvement in the early stages of development proposals, this code of practice facilitates additional community and Council member involvement during the application processing stage. This approach applies to applications defined as 'significant', e.g. those relating to strategic development allocations, large-scale town centre redevelopment schemes, or unusually complex and, perhaps, very large scale schemes with district-wide implications. In respect of these applications, it is the Council's policy to seek further engagement with local communities and interested groups prior to the application being considered by the Planning Committee. Such engagement will be achieved through Council member briefings which are held in public and where questions are taken and public representations permitted.

This note describes the procedural principles for these 'significant' major applications.

#### **Procedures**

The decision to hold a member public briefing will be taken by the Council's Director of Environment and/or Assistant Director of Development Management and Building Control during processing of the application. The briefing will be held in public with the objective of briefing the Council's elected members about the planning issues raised by the application. The briefing will explain the nature of the proposals, the key planning policies, identify key planning considerations and areas of concern.

The applicant will be invited to present and explain his proposals and officers will report the planning considerations which have been identified. It is important that community groups and interest groups, as appropriate, are invited to attend, and given the opportunity to ask questions. Local residents and other interested people and those making representations can also attend and ask questions, and these can be invited either individually or by means of newspaper advertisement, or other appropriate publicity. Although the objective is not for a general exchange of views by all parties, it is important that elected members can identify any strongly-held opinions. Key consultee bodies may also be invited to attend, depending on the issues identified.

Elected members will have an opportunity to raise questions and issues, but will not express their opinion and should avoid reaching any conclusion or final assessment as to merit which should only be done at the Planning Committee meeting when all the facts and issues have been identified. Members need to be aware of probity considerations: 'An objective consideration of material facts at the Planning Committee is the correct place for members to make their views, based on an impartial

consideration of the evidence presented at the time. Expressing a view outside this arena comprises a prejudicial interest and debars a member from involvement in the determination process.' (Local Government Association).

The briefing should be held sufficiently early in the process to allow for the proposals to be amended and, if necessary, for a further round of publicity and consultations prior to consideration by the Planning Committee.

The briefing will be held in public and minutes will be prepared. The minutes will normally be presented to the Planning Committee when the application is determined.