

Report by the Clerk

Planning policy and procedure

1. Purpose

To set out our current policy and suggest how this could be improved with the intention that councillors are aware of applications that affect their area and both councillors and the public understand how individual applications are to be dealt with.

2. Current Policy

Our current policy is set out in full in standing orders, essentially it is as follows :

2.1 The Clerk records on the electronic log the particulars of every planning application notified to the Council, i.e. date received; applicant; address to which it relates; summary of the application; Councillor delegated to.

2.2 The Clerk refers applications received in hard copy from WDDC to the Councillor in the appropriate area within 2 working days of receipt.

2.3 Planning applications will be initially looked at by three Councillors (at least one from the ward of the application and at least one from another ward).

2.4 Minor planning applications, e.g. for alterations to existing dwellings that do not materially affect the nature of the dwelling, with no objections from Councillors or neighbours would, following the site visit, be delegated to the Clerk to reply to West Dorset District Council and reported at the following Council meeting.

2.5 For larger applications, or those with objections from councillors or neighbours, where the consultation deadline permits the site visit recommendation is reported to the next full Council meeting for decision.

2.6 Where there are issues of particular local interest, multiple objections or contention, a meeting of the Planning Committee may be called by the Chair. The Chair may also call an extraordinary meeting of the Council if the nature of a planning application requires consideration before the next ordinary meeting of the Council.

2.7 The Planning log is posted on the website (usually updated when there is a new application) together with details of our processes (as above).

3. Suggested Changes

3.1 At point 2.2 above, the Clerk will also email all councillors to advise that the application has been sent to the delegated councillor. At the same time should the Clerk believe that the application should be "escalated" from the normal process he will suggest this to the Chair.

3.2 If the application is one that involves construction of a new building or material changes to infrastructure, e.g. roads (a major application) then following the site visit it will normally be reported to full council for decision.

3.3 Where there are objections from councillors or neighbours to a minor application, the Clerk should be made aware of these at the earliest opportunity. Subject to a response not having been submitted under normal delegated process such applications will also be reported to full council for decision. Provided that there is sufficient time to give notice to any persons wishing to speak including the applicant, i.e. around 5 calendar days prior to the meeting.

3.4 Where there are applications that are covered by 3.2 and 3.3 above but the timescale for response is before the next full council meeting, provided the Chair and Clerk are in agreement, a request will be made to the Planning Authority to extend the consultation deadlines to enable the full council or a planning committee to consider the application. If this is not agreed by WDDC then the normal process must be followed.

4. Comments

The above changes should sharpen the process, but it is hard to cover every eventuality, so early identification of applications that may raise issues is key and the Chair's discretion is important.. We should enable the public to input into our responses wherever possible and councillors should be able to explain to the public why processes are in place and how they have been applied.