

**ISLE OF ANGLESEY COUNTY COUNCIL**

<b>MEETING:</b>	<b>THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE</b>
<b>DATE:</b>	<b>14 December 2010</b>
<b>TITLE OF REPORT:</b>	<b>REVIW OF THE PLANNING MATTERS PROCEDURE RULES</b>
<b>REPORT BY:</b>	<b>LEGAL SERVICES MANAGER AND HEAD OF SERVICE (PLANNING AND PUBLIC PROTECTION)</b>
<b>PURPOSE OF REPORT:</b>	<b>TO CONSULT WITH THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE ON THE PROPOSED AMENDED RULES</b>

**1. Introduction**

- 1.1 The Council is the Local Planning Authority for its area and is charged with the statutory responsibility of deciding most planning applications made for development on the Island.
- 1.2 The Planning Matters Procedure Rules (“the Rules”) may be found at section 4.6 of the Council’s Constitution. The Rules aim to set out guidance to both elected members and officers when dealing with planning matters. The Rules do not aim to be a comprehensive or, indeed, a slavishly accurate guide to the law on what can be a complicated area. Rather, they set out advice on conduct and procedure which, if followed, should allow both members and officers to avoid falling into error.
- 1.3 The Corporate Governance Inspection of 2009 carried out under the auspices of the Wales Audit Office, contained a separate piece of work on planning which made certain recommendations. Those were incorporated into the Planning Service’s “Planning Decision-Making Process Improvement Plan 2010”. Amongst the improvements in the Plan was a review of the Rules. Specifically how the Rules operate as regards to the conduct of the Planning Committee and as a code of practice for both members and officers dealing with planning matters.
- 1.4 In addition to the review a number of other changes to the Constitution have been implemented during the last year. These include:
- Trial period for public speaking,
  - Mandatory training for new Committee members,
  - Removal of full Council’s rights to decide large, economic applications,
  - Changes to the layout and presentation of Committee reports,
  - Committee Agendas and reports appearing on the Council’s website, and
  - Proposed digital recording of Committee meetings for placing on Council’s website.

## **2. The Review**

- 2.1 The review was undertaken by the Legal Services Manager, who is also the solicitor who advises on planning matters. The review was undertaken in consultation with the Head of Service (Planning and Public Protection) who, in turn, consulted with other members of his staff.
  
- 2.2 The product of the review is set out in the Appendix. The document is a clean copy and incorporates all changes and amendments. Copies of the document showing the changes and amendments “tracked” onto the document will be available at the meeting if needed. This opportunity has been taken to generally tidy-up the Rules as well as to make some fundamental changes. The major changes and the reasons for them are set out in the table below.

### 2.3 TABLE OF SIGNIFICANT CHANGES TO THE RULES

Paragraph Changed	Proposed Change	Reason(s) for Change
4.6.4.3.3	That a local member who serves on the Committee should not be allowed either to vote on or to propose or second a recommendation on an application located in their ward.	There is a danger that a local member who serves on the Committee may be perceived to be pursuing a particular outcome on an application for political rather than purely planning reasons. Removing their right to vote and make or second a recommendation reduces both this risk and a challenge to the decision. The local member may still address the Committee but only as local member.
4.6.10.2	Clarifying the rules as to which applications by members and by certain officers should be referred to the Committee for decision rather than being made by officers under delegation.	The previous rules were less than clear as to which categories of applications should be referred to the Committee and applications by which category of officers should be so referred. The changes now make clear what type of application ought to be referred to Committee (basically all applications that are required to be made by statute) and the category of officers' concerned (officers at and above Head of Service level and all officers directly involved in the planning process).
4.6.19.1.1(vi)	That where the Committee vote for a site visit then only those Committee members who have visited a site shall be allowed to speak or vote when determining that application.	Where the Committee believes that a site needs to be visited before an application can be determined then it reasonably follows that only those members who have seen the site are properly placed to determine the application.

2.4 The proposed amended Rules will need to be submitted to full Council for consideration and adoption, but only after having been submitted to the Standards Committee for consultation.

### **3. Recommendation**

3.1 The Standards Committee is invited to consider the proposed amended Rules.

### **Background Papers**

The Planning Decision-Making Process Improvement Plan 2010.

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## **4.6.1 Introduction**

4.6.1.1 Determining planning applications is an important duty undertaken by the County Council. These rules set out how the Council as local planning authority will deal with planning applications. The rules apply to councilors and officers as the context requires.

4.6.1.2 Most applications will be determined by planning officers acting on behalf of the local planning authority and the Planning and Orders Committee (the Committee) will determine all other applications. The rules as to whether officers or the Committee will determine applications are contained in Part 3 of this Constitution at paragraph ... Of those instances where the decision may be made by the Committee, the potentially most significant is where the local councilor (that is the councilor in whose ward the proposed development site is located) may require that the application (which would otherwise be decided by officers) should be submitted to the Committee for determination. In these cases, the local councilor must 'call-in' such application in writing addressed to the Chief Planning Officer within 21 days of the date of the letter notifying him / her of the application. In the case of those applications classified as 'fast-track' economic ones, the period within which to refer it to the Committee will be only 14 days. The local councilor may withdraw their call-in at any time before the Committee Agenda is published by notifying to the case officer and confirming the withdrawal in writing.

4.6.1.3 Planning is not an exact science. Rather, it relies on informed judgement within a firm policy context. It is also highly contentious because the decisions affect the lives of everyone and the private interests of individuals, landowners and developers. This is heightened by the openness of the system (it actively invites public opinion before taking a decision) and the legal nature of development plans and decision notices. It is important, therefore, that the process is characterised by open and transparent decision making.

4.6.1.4 One of the key purposes of the planning system is to control development in the public interest. In performing this role, planning necessarily affects land and property interests, the financial value of landholdings and the quality of the environment. It is important, therefore, that local planning authorities should make planning decisions affecting these interests, openly, impartially, with sound judgement and for justifiable reasons. The process should leave no justifiable grounds for suggesting that a decision has been partial, biased or not well-founded.

## **4.6.2 Decision Making on Planning Applications**

4.6.2.1 Decisions on planning applications are sometimes referred to as regulatory or quasi-judicial decisions and this means that those making such decisions must

4.6.2.1.1 take into account all relevant planning considerations

4.6.2.1.2 ignore irrelevant or non planning considerations

4.6.2.1.3 act impartially, fairly and not take into account any political considerations

4.6.2.2 Planning law requires local planning authorities to determine planning applications in accordance with the Statutory Development Plan unless material planning

considerations indicate otherwise. The emphasis in determining applications is upon a 'plan-led' system.

4.6.2.3 The basis of the planning system is the consideration of private proposals against wider public interests. Much is often at stake in this process and opposing views are often strongly held by those involved.

4.6.2.4 Those persons determining planning applications have a duty to take into account representations made to the local planning authority as a result of consultation with interested bodies or as a result of public notice or neighbour notification. In doing so it is necessary to decide which representations are material to the decision to be made, and, if so, what weight to attach to them. This conclusion should not be reached by the Committee until all the facts have been presented in the officer's report to the Committee.

4.6.2.5 Councilors must not give a commitment in relation to any planning matter prior to its consideration at Committee. It is recognised, however, that councilors will from time to time be approached individually by applicants, agents and objectors in relation to planning proposals. These rules are intended to assist councilors in dealing with these approaches and is designed to ensure that the integrity of the decision making process is preserved.

4.6.2.6 Failure to follow these rules without good reason could be taken into account in investigations into possible maladministration and any investigation regarding the conduct of councilors and / or officers.



### **4.6.3 Pre-determination Discussions by Officers with Applicants**

4.6.3.1 In any discussions on planning issues, it will always be made clear at the outset, that such discussion:

- will not bind the local planning authority to make a particular decision, and
- that any views expressed are based on the officers' provisional professional judgement but do not commit the local planning authority to any particular decision.

4.6.3.2 Any advice given will:

- be consistent and based upon the Development Plan and other material considerations,,
- be impartial and the best that the officer can give in the circumstances, and
- try to highlight any apparent problems.

4.6.3.3 No Councilor shall take part in the officers' discussions with applicants at any stage prior to determination of the application. Where this does occur, a complaint may be made against the councilor to the Council's Monitoring Officer.

### **4.6.4 Lobbying of and by Councilors**

#### **4.6.4.1 Councilors who are Members of the Committee**

4.6.4.1.1 Councilors who are members of the Committee are likely to be approached by applicants, objectors and others interested in the outcome of planning applications.

Because of the quasi-judicial or regulatory nature of planning decisions, councilors on the Committee should not allow themselves to be lobbied by anyone - whether for or against an application. If approached they should inform the person seeking to lobby them that if they discuss the application with that person, this may disqualify them from taking part in the decision on the application. Instead potential lobbyists should be advised to contact either their local councilor (see 4.6.4.3 below) or an appropriate officer within the Planning Department.

4.6.4.1.2 Councilors who are on the Committee should not organise local support or opposition to a planning proposal if they later wish to take part in the discussion on the application.

4.6.4.1.3 In taking into account the need to make decisions impartially, councilors on the Committee should not favour or appear to favour any person, company, group or locality and should not declare which way they intend to vote in advance of the meeting. To do so without all relevant information and views would be unfair and prejudicial. If the councilor feels that the public would believe he/she had come to a conclusive view on the planning matter or application before the meeting, or that he/she has been lobbied by an interested person then he/she should not take part in the debate, nor vote on the issue - this is without prejudice to his/her right to address the committee as provided for in section 4.6.5.2 of these rules.

4.6.4.1.4 Where the Monitoring Officer or his/her representative believes that a councilor has prejudiced his/her position by expressing a conclusive view on an application before its determination by the Committee, the Monitoring Officer or his/her representative will advise the councilor that it would be inappropriate for him/her to take part in the debate, or vote on the application. The final decision, however, rests with the councilor - subject to any external scrutiny.

#### **4.6.4.2 Councilors who are not members of the Committee**

Councilors who are not members of the Committee should not be lobbied, whether by applicants, objectors or anyone else interested in the outcome of a planning application. If approached such councilors should inform the person seeking to lobby them that they should either contact their local councilor (see 4.6.4.3 below) or an appropriate officer in the Planning Department. If such a councilor is lobbied he/she should not lobby councilors who are members of the Committee and he/she will not be entitled to speak at meetings of the Committee.

#### **4.6.4.3 Local Councilors**

4.6.4.3.1 There are differences to the rules set out in 4.6.4.1.1 and 4.6.4.2 in relation to the 'local councilor' i.e. the councilor in whose ward the proposed development is located.

4.6.4.3.2 If the local councilor is not a member of the Committee then he/she can legitimately be lobbied by an applicant, objector or anyone else interested in the outcome of a planning application. If such councilor is lobbied then, provided that he/she does not have an interest to declare in accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct for Councilors, he/she will be entitled to make representations to and address the Committee. However he/she must not themselves lobby, whether directly or indirectly, councilors who are on the Committee.

4.6.4.3.3 If the local councilor is a member of the Committee then, the provision of rule 4.6.4.3.2 above will also apply to them and he/she may address the Committee but will **not** have the right either to propose or second any recommendation or to vote on the application. But he/she may should they so wish, refer the person seeking to lobby them to a councilor who represents an adjoining ward and who is not on the Committee and, for the purpose of these rules, such a councilor will be regarded as a local councilor.

4.6.4.3.4 Local councilors may not become involved in making any representations at meetings of the Committee or participating in decision making on planning applications if they have an interest to declare in accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct for Councilors. This is so regardless as to whether or not they are on the Committee. If a local councilor is in this position he / she should refer any potential lobbyists to a councillor who represents an adjoining ward and who is not on the Committee and, for the purpose of these rules, such a councilor will be regarded as a local councilor.

4.6.4.4 Where letters of 'neighbour notification' of a planning application are sent to properties not in the same ward as the application site, then the councilor who represents those properties may also speak as a local councilor at the Committee. This rule only gives the right to speak at the Committee and confers no other rights on that councilor as a local councilor.

#### **4.6.5 Seating and Speaking Arrangements at Meetings of the Committees**

4.6.5.1 When attending meetings of the Committee, councilors who are not members of the Committee should sit quite separately from councilors who are on the Committee - whether or not they intend addressing the Committee. They should not communicate with those councilors who are on the Committee and who will be making decisions. The objective of this rule is to emphasise the quasi-judicial nature of the Committee's proceedings when considering planning applications.

4.6.5.2 The right to address the Committee shall apply to any member of the Planning and Orders Committee (including the local councilor) who:

- has been lobbied, or
- who may have already expressed a conclusive view on an application, or
- who has spoken on the application at Town or Community Council level or the local councilor, or
- is the councilor who represents an adjoining ward as referred to in 4.6.4.3.3(ii).

However if this right is exercised, the councilor on the Committee should comply with paragraph 4.6.5.1 above when consideration is given to the particular matter and may not participate in the decision making and should declare at the meeting why he/she is not participating in the decision.

4.6.5.3 The Committee Chairperson will conduct business at the meeting in accordance with the attached Appendix.

## **4.6.6 Public Meetings Relating to Development Proposals**

4.6.6.1 Officers involved in the processing or determination of planning matters should not attend public meetings in connection with development proposals or submitted planning applications, unless those meetings have been arranged by or with the express agreement of the Authority. To do so could lead to allegations of bias or prejudice in relation to a particular point of view. If put in such a position of attending meetings arranged by, or with the consent of, the Authority, or by accident, then officers should take great care to maintain impartiality, concentrate on providing factual information, listen to comments and avoid giving views on the merits or otherwise of the proposal.

4.6.6.2 Similarly, councillors involved in the determination of planning applications should take great care to maintain impartiality when attending public meetings in relation to planning matters. At such meetings no view on the merits or otherwise of a proposal should be given.

## **4.6.7 Councillors who are Members of the Committee and who are also Town or Community Councillors**

These councillors should make a choice in relation to every planning application which may be considered by a Town or Community Council (or a committee or subcommittee of the same). The choices are either:

4.6.7.1 Participate in the discussion at Town or Community Council level and then, if they wish, speak at the Committee as provided for in Section 5.4 of these Rules but not otherwise take part in the deliberations of the Committee or vote on the application, or

4.6.7.2 Take no part in discussions at Town or Community Council level (and preferably not be in the room when the matter is discussed) and then participate fully at the Committee.

4.6.7.3 **NB:** those councillors who sit on the Committee but who are **not** members of the Town or Community Council have, like any other member of the public, the right to attend public meetings of that Council. In these cases those councillors should only observe proceedings at the Town or Community Council and not take part in them.

#### **4.6.8 Correspondence Received by Councilors**

Should councilors receive directly any correspondence from persons interested in the outcome of a planning application they shall ensure that a copy is forwarded to the Development Control Section. The Section will then:

4.6.8.1 if time permits, send a copy to the applicant or his/her agent so as to allow him/her an opportunity to respond,

4.6.8.2 place a copy of all representations on the Planning file,

4.6.8.3 if time permits ensure that the report to Committee refers to the correspondence received.

#### **4.6.9 Registration and Declaration of Interests**

The Law and the Council's Code of Conduct for both councilors and officers in relation to these matters is of particular relevance to those dealing with planning applications and must be followed at all times.

#### **4.6.10 Development Proposals Submitted by Councilors and Officers**

4.6.10.1 Proposals by serving councilors (whether or not they are councilors on the Committee), certain categories of officers and their close friends and relatives can easily give rise to suspicions of impropriety. It is vital that they are handled in a way which gives no grounds for accusations of favouritism. In these rules "relatives" encompass spouse or partner, parent, grandparent, child, grandchild, brother or sister.

4.6.10.2 Planning applications falling within the following categories will be reported to the Committee for consideration and not dealt with by officers under 'delegated powers':

- those where the applicant is a serving councilor or the relative of a serving councilor,
- those where a serving councilor acts as agent or has prepared any part of the application or plans,
- those where the applicant is a relevant officer or their relative. In this rule "relevant officer" means the Managing Director, all Corporate Directors, all Heads of Service, all officers working in the Planning Department and all other officers whose work is directly linked to the development control process (such as officers in Highways and Environmental Health who are consultees or lawyers who advice and represent the Planning Department in development control matters),
- those where the applicant is a close friend of a serving councilor or relevant officer.

In this rule "planning application" shall mean all applications required by statute to be made and which (apart from this rule) would fall to be determined under the Council's Constitution by the Head of Planning Service. These would include applications for outline consent, reserved matters approval, listed building consent, conservation area consent, consent under Tree Preservation Orders and so forth..

4.6.10.3 Planning officers shall endeavour to identify and highlight such applications and shall accordingly inform the Head of the Planning Service and the Authority's Monitoring Officer. Serving councilors who make applications, who act as agents or who prepare plans or whose relatives make applications, should play no part in the decision-making

process for that proposal.

4.6.10.4. The Monitoring Officer should confirm in the Committee report that such application has been processed normally and must, therefore, be given the opportunity to review the file.

4.6.10.5 Officers involved in the development control process must not prepare plans or act as agent for any person or body (including their relatives) pursuing a planning matter with the Council. If they submit a proposal on their own behalf, they should take no part in the processing of that application.

#### **4.6.11 Officers' Report to the Committee**

4.6.11.1 All planning applications reported to the Committee will have a full written report including a reasoned assessment of the proposal and a justified recommendation.

4.6.11.2 Any new matters which have arisen between the preparation of the report and the date of the Committee will be reported orally and references to this will be included in the minutes.

4.6.11.3 Every planning application file will contain an accurate account of events throughout its life, particularly the outcome of meetings or significant telephone conversations.

4.6.11.4 The same principles of good record keeping will also be observed in relation to enforcement matters. Monitoring of record keeping will be undertaken on a continuous basis by managers within the Development Control Section.

#### **4.6.12 Decisions Contrary to Officer Recommendation**

4.6.12.1 Where the Committee are mindful to either approve or refuse a proposed development contrary to an Officer recommendation, the item shall be deferred until the following meeting so as to allow the officers to report further on the matter. The Committee must set out the reasons for wishing to decide against the officer recommendation. Committee members should adhere to these Rules when making planning decisions and take policy guidance from planning officers into due regard and only vote against their recommendations where genuine and material planning reasons can be identified. A detailed minute of the Committee's reason(s) shall be made and a copy placed on the application file. Where deciding the matter contrary to the recommendation may risk costs on appeal the Committee will take a recorded vote when deciding the application irrespective of the requirements of paragraph 4.1.18.5 of the Constitution.

4.6.12.2 The officer's further report shall detail the reasons put forward by the members, indicate whether such reasons are, in their view, genuine and material planning reasons and discuss the land use planning issues raised.

4.6.12.3 In the case where councillors wish to add or amend conditions which are recommended by officers, the officers should be invited to draft such a condition and bring this back for approval at the subsequent meeting unless the drafting is straightforward and can be agreed at the initial meeting.

4.6.12.4 Where planning officers are unable to defend such decisions on appeal (due to requirements of the professional conduct rules of the Royal Town Planning Institute - RTPI) they shall make this point known to the Committee before the final vote is taken. In such cases the Committee shall nominate (at least) two of its members who voted contrary to the recommendation to appear at any appeal and explain the Committee's decisions and the reasons for them. These should, normally, be the proposer and seconder of the proposal which was contrary to the officer's recommendation.

#### **4.6.13 Appeals Against Council Decisions**

4.6.13.1 Officers will organize and generally appear as witnesses at planning appeals and other proceedings on behalf of the Council. In some circumstances it may be necessary to appoint consultants to appear for the Council.

4.6.13.2 In giving evidence, officers will present the best possible case on behalf of the Council whilst complying with the RTPI Code of Professional Conduct.

4.6.13.3 Where a decision contrary to officer recommendation is subject to an appeal and officers have previously made known to the Committee that they are unable to defend such decisions, officers shall report the appeal to the next Committee meeting. Councillors will then be responsible for presenting the Council's case at the appeal.

#### **4.6.14 Conduct of Officers**

4.6.14.1 Officers who are Chartered Town Planners are guided by the Royal Town Planning Institute Code of Professional Conduct. All officers whether members of the Institute or not shall abide by the same principles namely they -

4.6.14.1.1 Shall act with competence, honesty and integrity;

4.6.14.1.2 Shall fearlessly and impartially exercise their independent professional judgement to the best of their skill and understanding;

4.6.14.1.3 Shall discharge their duty to their employers, clients, colleagues and others with due care and diligence in accordance with the provisions of this Code;

4.6.14.1.4 Shall not bring the profession or the Royal Town Planning Institute into disrepute;

4.6.14.1.5 Officers shall not disclose or use to the advantage of themselves or the Authority information acquired in confidence in the course of their work;

4.6.14.1.6 Officers shall decline any discounts, gifts or commissions offered by any third parties in connection with their work as professional planners.

#### **4.6.15 Councilor / Officer relationship**

4.6.15.1 In order to engender a committed professional relationship between both officers and councilors, each shall have respect and regard for the roles both play within the decision making process.

4.6.15.2 Councilors shall respect the advice given by officers at Committee or when dealing with delegated applications and shall not place pressure on officers for a particular recommendation or decision. Any officer who considers that this has happened should deal with the matter as set-out under section 5.3.4 of this Constitution (Bullying, Intimidation and Harassment).

#### **4.6.16 Site Visits by the Planning and Orders Committee**

4.6.16.1 The protocol on site visits is attached as an Appendix to these Rules.

#### **4.6.17 Gifts and Hospitality**

4.6.17.1 Advice to councilors on registration of gifts and hospitality is contained within the Council's Code of Conduct for Members and shall be accordingly observed.

4.6.17.2 Officers during the course of carrying out their duties may be offered hospitality from people with an interest in a planning proposal. Officers should refuse offers of hospitality of any kind. If the receipt of hospitality is unavoidable officers must ensure that the absolute minimum level is accepted and declare its receipt as soon as possible to the Monitoring Officer.



## **4.6.18 Training**

4.6.18.1 No member may sit on the Planning and Orders Committee unless and until they have attended Induction Training. The contents of the Induction Training shall from time to time be determined by the Head of Service (Planning and Public Protection). Updating training thereafter will be provided at least twice a year to include changes in legislation or procedure.

4.6.18.2 Councilors shall ensure that they attend a minimum 3 training events over a two year period in order to keep abreast of planning matters and thus provide a positive input into the decision making process. Attendance records will be monitored and reported to the Council. Any member of the Planning and Orders Committee who fails to attend the stated minimum number of training sessions shall be removed or suspended from the Committee by vote of the full Council at such time as when the attendance records are reported.

## **Appendix**

### **4.6.19 Protocol Regarding Site Visits by the Planning and Orders Committee**

#### **4.6.19.1 Criteria for Site Visits**

4.6.19.1.1 It is important that criteria should be set out for deciding when a site visit is justified and consider the procedure for such visits. In this respect account should be taken of the following points:-

(i) site visits can:

- cause delay to the decision making process,
- possibly lead to an appeal to The Planning Inspectorate on the basis of 'non-determination',
- affect the Service's performance in respect of its 8 week target, and
- lead to additional costs both to the Service and possibly to the applicant(s).

(ii) there needs to be consistency both in the way that it is decided that a site visit should take place and in the conduct of such visits. Otherwise it may leave the Authority open to the accusation that site visits are arbitrary or possibly a lobbying device.

(iii) site visits should be carefully organised and well-attended to ensure that the purpose, format and conduct are clearly established at the beginning and subsequently adhered to.

(iv) site visits should be used only where the expected benefits are substantial. The 'substantial benefit' test should apply in every case. Site visits should only be necessary if the impact of the proposed development is difficult to visualise and comprehend, i.e. where lack of clarity with the application makes visual assessment necessary

(v) site visits may be appropriate to consider large, more complex applications.

(vi) if the Committee are of a view that the site needs to be visited and seen before the application can be determined, then only those members who attended the official site visit may participate in and vote on the application when it is further considered by the Committee.

Recommendation of site visits by officers shall be referred to within the report to Committee.

4.6.19.1.2 Site visits should **not** apply in the following cases:

- (i) to solely consider boundary or neighbour disputes,
- (ii) to consider objections issued on competition grounds,
- (iii) to consider objections raised on the ground of loss of property values,
- (iv) to consider any other issues which are not material planning considerations,
- (v) where councilors have already visited the site within the last 12 months, except in exceptional circumstances

#### **4.6.19.2 Requests for Site Visits**

In order to adopt a structured approach to site visits the following format should be adhered to:-

4.6.19.2.1 All requests for site visits must be made in writing to the Head of Development Control / Planning Control Manager by 1.00pm on the final working day prior to the Committee meeting. Any verbal request received prior to the Committee meeting must be followed up in writing before the Planning Committee commences. The reason for the 'site visit' shall be clearly stated and accordingly reported to the Planning Committee.

4.6.19.2.2 If a request is made for a 'site visit' during the Planning and Orders Committee Meeting once again the reasons for the visit shall be recorded in the minutes.

#### **4.6.19.3 Procedures at the Site Visit**

4.6.19.3.1 The applicant shall be informed that a site visit will take place but will not be allowed to be present during the visit to make any representations.

4.6.19.3.2 The primary purpose of the site visit will be for the planning officers to explain the planning issues relating to the case and for councilors to view the site.

4.6.19.3.3 There shall be no discussions at the site visit as regards the merits of the application. The site visit shall not be used as a forum for debate.

4.6.19.3.4 The Chairperson or Vice-Chairperson shall conduct and lead the site visit. If either the Chairperson or the Vice-Chairperson is absent, councilors shall vote for one of their number to act as Chairperson.

4.6.19.3.5 The Chairperson shall formally open the meeting and set out the reasons for the visit.

4.6.19.3.6 The planning officer shall be requested to outline the proposal and the main issues.

4.6.19.3.7 The councilors shall view the site, relevant buildings and surroundings as necessary.

4.6.19.3.8 Councilors shall be offered the opportunity to raise questions or seek clarification of points of fact with the planning officer and/or local councilors.

4.6.19.3.9 The local councilor in whose Ward the application site is located (if present) shall be offered the opportunity to comment on the proposal.

4.6.19.3.10 Notes shall be made of the site meeting and these shall be accordingly minuted at the following Planning Committee Meeting when the application is discussed.

#### **4.6.19.4 Regular Review of Decisions**

4.6.19.4.1 The Audit Commission's Report 'Building Quality' recommends that councilors should visit a sample of implemented planning permission to assess the quality of the decision. Such a review should improve the quality and consistency of decision-making, thereby strengthening public confidence, and assist with reviews of planning policy.

4.6.19.4.2 The review should be undertaken annually. It should include examples from a range of categories of development including applications which officers have determined under delegated powers.

#### **4.6.20 Role of the Committee Chairperson and Conduct of Business at the Committee**

##### **4.6.20.1 Election of the Chairperson / Vice-Chairperson**

4.6.20.1.1 The Chairperson shall be elected to his/her post by the councilors on the Committee at its first meeting following the annual Council meeting. The councilors shall at the same time elect a Vice-Chairperson for the same period of office or until such time as either or both of them step down.

4.6.20.1.2 In the absence of the Chairperson for the whole or part of the Committee meeting, the Vice-Chairperson shall be the Chairperson. If the Vice-Chairperson shall be absent, the Committee shall choose one of their number present to be Chairperson for that meeting or part of it until the Chairperson (or Vice-Chairperson) returns.

#### **4.6.20.2 Responsibility of the Chairperson**

The Chairperson shall have the following responsibilities:

4.6.20.2.1 to preside over meetings so that Committee business can be carried out efficiently and with regards to the rights of councilors, officers and the interest of the community as a whole.

4.6.20.2.2 to ensure that the Committee meeting is properly conducted as a forum for debate on planning matters and statutory orders only.

4.6.20.2.3 to ensure that the business of the meeting is carried out in accordance with the relevant provisions contained within the Council's Constitution.

4.6.20.2.4 to support the planning officers and the Monitoring Officer's representative in reminding members about their duty to adhere to genuine and material planning discussions in their decision making process.

#### **4.6.20.3 The Role of Officers at Committee Meetings**

4.6.20.3.1 Officers shall provide professional advice to the Chairperson in order to ensure that he/she is able to discharge the duties of the post.

4.6.20.3.2 Officers shall provide advice as follows:

(i) at pre-Committee meetings so that the Chairperson is fully briefed on issues that may arise at meetings

(ii) at any post-Committee meetings (if relevant)

(iii) during Committee meetings where questions are directed towards the Chairperson for response

(iv) during any meetings which may be convened by officers in order to discuss issues relevant to 'planning' or 'orders' issues

#### **4.6.20.4 Conduct of Committee Meetings**

4.6.20.4.1 Each agenda item for discussion or for information shall be introduced by the Chairperson.

4.6.20.4.2 Once introduced the Chairperson shall ensure that the officer is allowed to report on the item. Where the public speaking procedure applies to a particular application, this shall occur before the officer reports on the item.

4.6.20.4.3 The Chairperson shall allow the local councilor to speak first after the officer's report. This is whether the local councilor wishes to speak for or against the item and whether or not they are on the Committee.

4.6.20.4.4 The Chairperson shall then allow the councilors to participate in the discussion in the order in which he/she acknowledges their wish to speak.

4.6.20.4.5 The Chairperson will ensure that all councilors shall abide by the provisions of the Council's Constitution and by the relevant provisions of these Procedure Rules.

4.6.20.4.6 All those councilors wishing to speak shall be allowed an opportunity to do so. Councilors shall refrain from making speeches and shall address the Committee on 'planning' (i.e. material planning considerations) and 'orders' matters only. The Chairperson may intervene and curtail councilors who are making repetitions or irrelevant statements.

4.6.20.4.7 Where officers need to respond to comments or questions from councilors then the Chairperson shall ensure that officers are given that opportunity.

4.6.20.4.8 If the Chairperson wishes to speak as a local councilor on an item then the provision of the Constitution shall apply equally to him/her as they apply to all councilors.

4.6.20.4.9

(i) At the conclusion of the discussion the Chairperson shall request councilors on the Committee to vote on the matter under discussion. Unless councilors disagree with the officers' recommendation they shall indicate their voting intention through the showing of hands.

(ii) Should an amendment be proposed and seconded to the officer's recommendation that amendment will be voted on first.

4.6.20.4.10 All councilors and officers shall respect the position of Chairperson. The ruling of the Chairperson on all questions of procedure at the Committee shall be final and not open to discussion. The Chairperson shall ensure that at all times regard is had by all councilors (including himself/herself) and officers to the protocol on Member/Officer relationship and that respect is shown to the advice given by officers at the Committee.

#### **4.6.21 Public Speaking**

##### Eligibility to Speak

4.6.21.1 The planning application concerned must be on the agenda of the Planning and Orders Committee meeting in question. In the event of an application being deferred, public speaking will not be allowed if an opportunity has already been given at a previous Committee meeting when the application has been fully considered.

4.6.21.2 Both applicants (or their agents) and objectors (or their agents) can speak and there are no other qualifying criteria other than compliance with the Council's procedure.

4.6.21.3 Normally only one person can speak for and one person against an application. Very exceptionally the Chair of the Committee may exercise his/her discretion to allow one additional speaker per 'side'. This discretion will usually only be exercised for major applications where there are significant differences of view within one 'side' (e.g. two people speaking against an application for a large supermarket where one represents the views of retailers and the other the views of nearby residents). In such cases the 'other side' will be allowed 2 speakers or twice the normal time, if they wish to use it.

4.6.21.4 Anyone requesting to speak must allow the Council to give their name and contact number to other people (of the same view) wishing to speak so that they can agree on a spokesperson, the issue to raise etc. If they cannot agree, the first person who notified the Council of his/her intention to speak will normally be chosen to speak.

4.6.21.5 Requests to speak must be made to the Administrative Officer in the Planning Department before the deadline referred to in the notification letters sent to applicants and neighbours.

##### Time allowed to Speak

4.6.21.6 The spokesperson will be allowed up to 3 minutes to address the Committee.

##### Visual Aids

4.6.21.7 The spokesperson may not circulate or display written material in the Committee meeting. Any written representations should have been submitted to the Council during the statutory publicity period and will be summarised in the Officer's report.

##### Procedure

4.6.21.8 The procedure for public speaking at Committee is described in the appropriate documents.