

**SPECIAL PLANNING COMMITTEE MEETING HELD
THURSDAY 13 FEBRUARY 2025**

Table of Key Adoptions

No.	Item	Summary of Decisions
1.	Apologies	<i>None</i>
2.	Declarations of Interest	<i>None</i>
3.	Deputation – Local Architects Group	
3.1	Draft Planning Application Validation checklist	<i>Received</i> <u>Action</u> <i>Complete a customer survey on the 8 new PAD's received to obtain a steer on their experience of the overall process from a customer service perspective.</i>
3.2	NI Water	<i>That Planning Committee; write to the other 10 Council's to look at how they do it; obtain a policy steer how they deal with these issues and cases; and engage independent advice if necessary; that a report is brought back to Planning Committee on policy on conditions on NI Water issue, in order to set a steer how to go forward.</i>

3.3	Seeking to Improve efficiency and speed of Applications	<p style="text-align: right;">Received</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><u>Action</u> The Head of Planning agreed to undertake a flow chart to attach to Agents validation correspondence.</p>
3.4	Avoid Excessively complex and repetitive planning reports	<p style="text-align: right;">That a report is brought back to the next available Planning Committee to look at the Planning Committee Report template to agree and take forward.</p>
3.5	The challenge of second homes in the Borough – action required	<p style="text-align: right;">That Planning Committee hold a Special Planning Committee in May 2025 at 7.00pm, regarding progress here tonight so that Elected Members and Planning are engaged.</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><u>Action</u> Dates to be put to Planning Committee Members and Agents to agree.</p>

**MINUTES OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE SPECIAL PLANNING COMMITTEE
MEETING HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, CIVIC HEADQUARTERS AND
VIA VIDEO CONFERENCE
ON THURSDAY 13 FEBRUARY 2025 AT 5.00PM**

Chair: Alderman Hunter (C)

Committee Members: Alderman Boyle (C), Callan (C), S McKillop (C),
Scott (C), Stewart (C)
Councillors Anderson (C), C Archibald (C), Kennedy (R),
McGurk (R), Nicholl (R), Peacock (R), Watton (C)

Officers Present: D Dickson, Head of Planning (C)
S Duggan, Civic Support & Committee & Member Services Officer
(C)

In Attendance: D Jackson, Chief Executive (C)
M Quinn, Director of Corporate Services (R)

M Bell } (C) Royal Society of Ulster Architects
S McCloskey } (C)

A Lennox, ICT Operations Officer (C)
C Ballentine, ICT Officer (C)

Press 2no. (R)
Public 3no. (R)

Key: R = Remote in attendance C= Chamber in attendance

The Head of Planning undertook a roll call.

The Chair reminded Planning Committee of their obligations under the Local Government Code of Conduct and Remote Meetings Protocol.

1. APOLOGIES

There were no apologies recorded.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

3. DEPUTATION – LOCAL ARCHITECTS GROUP

The Chair welcomed M Bell and S McCloskey to the meeting and invited them to present for 10 minutes and that would be followed by questions from Planning Committee Members. The Chair reminded Elected Members that discussion should be held on strategic matters, no application references or specific cases were to be given.

Alderman Callan stated it had been agreed not to discuss live applications, but references could be made to any old, relevant applications on strategic issues.

The Chair stated she was not happy with the suggestion made.

M Bell addressed Planning Committee, he advised he had just been notified of the time limit.

The Chair clarified she was content for him to present in whatever way he wants or to move straight to questions and answers.

Alderman Callan suggested Planning Committee set aside the 10 minute limit on the Deputation.

Councillor Watton asked the meeting to progress and allow M Bell to speak.

*** Councillor McGurk joined the meeting remotely at 5.15pm.**

M Bell advised the last Local Architects Group meeting had been held with The Head of Planning, the Development Management and Enforcement Manager and Development Management Manager along with 14 representatives in attendance and 5 online. He stated the tone was of concern and he had welcomed the opportunity to converse with Planning Committee. M Bell stated benefits from feedback from professional agents to the Planning Committee and the need to work together to make Causeway Coast and Glens planning and development smoother and have faster processing.

Throughout the meeting, M Bell referred to previous correspondence between the Local Architects Group and Head of Planning, copied to Planning Committee members.

3.1 Draft Planning Application Validation checklist

M Bell outlined there had been a number of applications returned invalid that had not met the new Planning Application Validation Checklist which is not mandatory. He stated there would always be a number of poor quality applications for which, they were not responsible and refuted reference to bad quality applications and this is causing a wedge.

In response to Alderman Callan, M Bell outlined issues for example with submitting an application for a dwelling in the countryside, and restrictions on the carrying out of a bat survey between May-September. He stated the Head of Planning accepted this at the last meeting and agreed that the applications can be submitted with the biodiversity checklist and preliminary ecological assessment if necessary.

The Chair advised that as a Deputation, The Head of Planning could not answer questions. Alderman Callan stated a productive conversation was not productive in the way the meeting was being handled by The Chair. The Head of Planning agreed to answer questions.

* **Councillor Kennedy left the meeting at 5.30pm.**

The Head of Planning stated disappointment in the comments by M Bell as feedback at meetings with agents was that they were constructive and beneficial. The Head of Planning referred to the previous meeting with Local Architects held on 30 January 2025 and outlined the resolution that had been reached - to accept the biodiversity checklist and preliminary ecological assessment to validate the application and any bat surveys required to be submitted when completed due to the breeding season. The Head of Planning clarified there was a public consultation on the draft Validation Checklist which was discussed with agents at the meeting and where she had encouraged agents to complete and input comments.

Discussion was held on the percentage of returned applications.

In response to Councillor Mc Gurk regarding Pre Application Discussions, M Bell stated he had feedback where some said the PAD was working well but for themselves it was disappointing, he stated an opinion was required within the PAD response. M Bell stated that perhaps the new PAD process may be worth exploring.

In response the Head of Planning advised that those present at the agents meeting on 30 January 2025 who had submitted a PAD through the new process had stated that it was working as they had requested. Alderman Callan suggested a customer survey on the 8 new PAD's received in order to

obtain a steer on their experience of the overall process from a customer service perspective.

3.2 NI Water

M Bell stated Causeway Coast and Glens were taking a more cautious approach than other Councils, where a negative condition could be applied to progress applications. He considered the matter to be a secondary process to the planning application, that could be dealt with later, like Building Control, outside the planning process. During discussion M Bell referred to an example of a housing development in County Down approved with negative condition.

*** Alderman Boyle arrived at the meeting in The Chamber at 5.43pm.**

The Head of Planning responded, that as discussed at the agents meeting held on 30 January 2025, it was agreed that when it was identified by NI Water that a solution was possible, the application would proceed with a negative condition. This would enable the application to be progressed and the developer would continue to work through the details of the potential solution with NI Water. The Head of Planning stated where there was no NIW solution possible, she would have strong reservations of proceeding with a negative condition particularly where there may be a potential impact on environmentally designated sites.

During consideration the following motion was formed.

Proposed by Alderman S McKillop

Seconded by Alderman Callan

- That Planning Committee dig deep to understand the impact of NI Water issues on actual housing development outcomes and future potential developments by investors and how this is affecting our people.

Alderman S McKillop stated that we need to scrutinise, challenge, address issues of concern for those using our service. We also need to use our planning regimes as a positive force for good to meet our spatial community plan/needs of our community our people now. Alderman S McKillop felt we needed to dig deep to gather data from others and ensure we work with others including departments within this council and councillors to obtain this information only then will we improve our planning service and performance.

Alderman S McKillop wished to understand the impact a change of policy would have on Development.

The Chair put the motion to the Committee to vote.
10 Members voted For; 0 members voted Against; 0 Members Abstained.
The Chair declared the motion carried.

RESOLVED - That Planning dig deep to understand the impact of NI Water issues on actual housing development outcomes and future potential developments by investors and how it is this affecting our people

- * **Councillor Anderson was not in attendance for the vote and had left The Chamber at 5.55pm.**
- * **There was no response from Alderman Scott to the call for a vote.**

3.3 Seeking to Improve efficiency and speed of applications

M Bell raised the matter of an application that did not appear on the contentious list and had been refused without reference or contact with the Architect. M Bell stated he was unsure if a contentious application was clearly understood especially for outside Architects, for example, those in London.

The Head of Planning of the Scheme of Delegation and requested M Bell send her through the details of the application and she would look into the matter raised.

Discussion took place regarding the advice provided by senior planning officers to case officers and improved communications.

The Head of Planning outlined the process for less experienced officers and that for more experienced officers. She advised that internal management reports are used to monitor applications and advised that processing of new applications since 01 September 2024 when the validation checklist was introduced had shown significant improvements.

Discussion was held with the Head of Planning on published information and advice in relation to the Planning Application process, the Scheme of Delegation and operational staffing activities related to case management.

Alderman Callan suggested it would be useful to have standard guidance note or an easy step guide for Agents, attached to their validation correspondence.

The Head of Planning referred to the information on the website and following discussion agreed to undertake a flow chart.

- * **S McCloskey left The Chamber at 6.24pm.**

3.4 Avoid excessively complex and repetitive planning reports

M Bell stated the view that if Mid and East Antrim could prepare a 3-page Planning Committee report, there should be a way for Causeway Coast and Glens to do similar.

Alderman Callan advised that issue had been proposed within the Review of Planning and proposed shorter reports.

Alderman S McKillop supported that we investigate a more concise report format for Planning Committee. Alderman S McKillop agreed that Elected Representatives need all relevant information at their disposal as they are the decision makers when applications come to Planning Committee.

The Chair stated that on many occasions Planning Committee had not enough information brought forward and applications deferred for further information.

The Head of Planning stated serious concern and reservations as Planning Committee reports had often been used to respond to the Ombudsman on complaints received and justify assessment at Pre Application Protocol Letters demonstrating how applications had been fully considered, and clearly setting out how the assessment and determination of the applications had been made for members of the public to understand. The Head of Planning clarified that most of the initial information of the reports were auto generated from the Planning Portal such as planning histories, consultations, constraints etc. with detail on the assessment against planning policy inputted by the case officers.

Discussion on the timescale for a report to be brought back was held.

The Chair stated she was unsure regarding a legal position in reducing the content of reports and felt The Head of Planning could take the suggestion away and consider how the Ombudsman would look at it. The Chair stated Mid and East Antrim only had a couple of applications to Planning Committee at a time.

It was proposed by Alderman Callan, seconded by Alderman S McKillop that Planning Committee trial shorter reports for the March Planning Committee Meeting, to see how it works; Mid and East Antrim can do them more concise.

Alderman Boyle proposed an Amendment that a report would be brought on the pro's and con's of different formats before we consider shorter reports.

Proposed by Alderman Callan

Seconded by Alderman Boyle

- That a report is brought back to the next available Planning Committee to look at the Planning Committee Report template to agree and take forward.

The Chair put the motion to the Committee to vote.

9 Members voted For; 0 Members voted Against; 0 Members Abstained.

The Chair declared the motion carried.

RESOLVED – That a report is brought back to the next available Planning Committee to look at the Planning Committee Report template to agree and take forward.

* **There was no response from Alderman Scott to the call for a vote.**

* **Alderman Scott left the meeting at 6.56pm.**

* **The Director of Corporate Services left the meeting at 7.00pm.**

The Chair declared a recess at 7.02pm.

* **The meeting reconvened at 7.13pm.**

3.5 The challenge of second homes in the Borough

M Bell, referred from a development side, there were problems with second homes, a lack of housing was a screaming situation, he stated there were solutions and much more opportunity in finding areas, processes and solutions going about this.

M Bell stated his thanks, advising he was conscious that what he was saying was challenging but have to find ways of making a better Causeway Coast and Glens and believed they could contribute to that.

Alderman Callan thanked M Bell and others, he stated there are so many different issues and it is useful to have a discussion, proactive engagement. Need to be looking at solutions and getting responses on the ground as quickly as possible. Regarding lack of engagement and second homes, he advised Ulster University were carrying out research on housing for Council.

It was proposed by Alderman Callan, seconded by Alderman S McKillop that Planning Committee hold a Special Planning Committee meeting in 3 months' time regarding progress here tonight so that Elected Members and Planning were engaged.

The Chair sought clarification as M Bell had earlier referred to an informal opportunity to speak.

The Head of Planning raised concerns over duplication of purposes of her meetings with agents on operational issues, and Planning Committee want to meet with Agents to look at operational issues and referred to capacity and duplication. The Head of Planning considered there would be no significant change in 3 months' time as reports will only be brought for to Planning Committee in March for decision.

Councillor Watton thanked M Bell, he stated despair at the situation of the lack of housing, which was getting worse.

Alderman S McKillop thanked M Bell advising the meeting was very constructive. Alderman S McKillop invited M Bell to speak on what was being suggested regarding repetition.

In response to the Chair, M Bell stated decision making was key.

Discussion was held on the time and date of the further proposed Special Planning Committee Meeting.

The Chair advised dates would be put to Planning Committee Members and Agents to agree.

Alderman Callan referred to Planning Committee Training held after the Annual Meeting in June and advised NILGA offered relevant training, an outside body could be engaged to deliver.

Proposed by Alderman Callan

Seconded by Alderman S McKillop

- That Planning Committee hold a Special Planning Committee in May 2025 at 7.00pm, regarding progress here tonight so that Elected Members and Planning are engaged.

The Chair put the motion to the Committee to vote.

9 Members voted For; 0 Members Voted Against; 0 Members Abstained.

The Chair declared the motion carried.

RESOLVED - That Planning Committee hold a Special Planning Committee in May 2025 at 7.00pm, regarding progress here tonight so that Elected Members and Planning are engaged.

The Chair thanked M Bell and S McCloskey for attending. The Chair stated Causeway Coast and Glens was open for business and willing to work with Agents and Architects.

This being all the business the meeting closed at 7.43pm

Chair