



**SPECIAL PLANNING COMMITTEE MEETING HELD
WEDNESDAY 21 MAY 2025**

Table of Key Adoptions

No.	Item	Summary of Decisions
1.	Apologies	<i>Alderman Callan, Stewart, Councillors C Archibald, MA McKillop, Nicholl</i>
2.	Declarations of Interest	<i>None</i>
3.	Order of Items and Confirmation of Registered Speakers	<i>None</i>
4.	Actions from previous meeting held 13 February 2025	
4.1	NI Water Conditions	<i>Information</i>
4.2	PAD survey	<i>Information</i>
4.3	Flow chart of planning process	<i>Information</i>
5.	Reports for Decision	
5.1	Planning Committee Report template	<i>That the Planning Committee agrees the Planning Committee Report Template as set out at Appendix 1 of this report.</i>
6.	Comments from RSUA/RTPI members in attendance	<i>Received</i>
7.	Any Other Relevant Business (in accordance with Standing Order 12 (o))	<i>None</i>

**MINUTES OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE SPECIAL PLANNING COMMITTEE
MEETING HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, CIVIC HEADQUARTERS AND
VIA VIDEO CONFERENCE
ON WEDNESDAY 21 MAY 2025 AT 7.00PM**

Chair: Alderman Hunter (C)

Committee Members: Alderman Boyle (C), S McKillop (C), Scott (R)
Councillors Kennedy (R), McGurk (R), McMullan (C),
Peacock (R), Storey (C), Watton (C)

**Non Committee
Members Present:** Councillor Kane (R)

Officers Present: D Dickson, Head of Planning (C)
J Keen, Committee & Member Services Officer (C)

In Attendance: M Bell, Royal Society of Ulster Architects (C)
R McCann, Royal Society of Ulster Architects (C)
R McNaugher, Royal Town Planning Institute (C)
D McLaughlin, Royal Society of Ulster Architects (C)

L Boyd, ICT Officer (C)
C Ballentine, ICT Officer (C)

Press 1no. (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

Apologies were received for Alderman Callan, Stewart, Councillors C Archibald, MA McKillop, Nicholl.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

3. ORDER OF ITEMS AND CONFIRMATION OF REGISTERED SPEAKERS

The Chair stated there were no changes to the order of the Agenda.

4. ACTIONS FROM PREVIOUS MEETING HELD 13 FEBRUARY 2025:

4.1 NI Water Conditions

The Head of Planning advised that progress has been made, and negative conditions are now being applied to planning applications.

4.2 PAD survey

The Head of Planning advised that positive responses to the PAD survey have been received to date and that she would contact other Agents to get their responses.

In response to questions from Elected Members the Head of Planning advised that at the end of February 2025 there were 8 new applications for PAD's completed and the length of time to go through the process is variable. The Head of Planning advised that details are set out in the schedule for the types of PAD and provided examples of what could occur during the process. The Head of Planning stated that the Agent directs the process and can state what they would like to see for example a statutory consultation.

4.3 Flow chart of planning process

The Head of Planning confirmed that the development of a flow chart of the planning process was complete and issued with validation acknowledgement letters.

5. REPORTS FOR DECISION

5.1 Planning Committee Report template

Report, previously circulated, was presented by the Head of Planning.

Purpose

This Report is to seek Members agreement to the Planning Committee Report Template for circulation to Members and publication on Planning Portal and Council's website for members of the public to view.

Details

At the special Planning Committee meeting held on 13 February 2025 it was 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”.

The Planning Committee Report is the key document that informs Planning Committee Members in making a decision on a planning application and is therefore a critical part of the decision-making process. It sets out the Council's Planning Department's assessment and recommendation of planning applications to be brought to the Planning Committee for determination.

It is important that the report is clearly understood by Planning Committee Members and all interested parties. It should set out the decision-making process in an open and transparent manner, detailing the important material considerations in the assessment of the planning application and how these were considered in reaching the recommendation.

The Report should set out:

- the details of the proposed development
- the substance of letters of representation
- the views of statutory consultees
- details of the relevant planning policy, development plan and related planning history
- a detailed assessment of the proposed development against the development plan, planning policies
- any other material considerations and assessment of these
- a clear recommendation with conditions and informatives for approval/ reasons for refusal

The Planning Committee Report and the minutes of the Planning Committee meeting are important documents relied upon to defend challenges to a decision either through the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman or through a judicial review challenge in the High Court. It is therefore important that the report covers the points set out above to ensure that open and transparent decision-making. However, the detail provided will be on a case-by-case basis determined by the complexity of the application and level of representation received.

NIPSO has found cases of maladministration in Councils where the Planning report did not clearly and accurately record all key decisions and rationale for making those decisions

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Planning Committee considers and agrees the Planning Committee Report Template as set out at Appendix 1 of this report.

In response to questions the Head of Planning advised she has looked at the issue with hyperlinks and will follow up with ICT. The Head of Planning confirmed that details of applications are provided on the Planning Portal including emails and notes of meetings to show the process of how decisions are made for planning applications and that the information is publicly available.

Proposed by Alderman Boyle

Seconded by Councillor Storey

- that the Planning Committee considers and agrees the Planning Committee Report Template as set out at Appendix 1 of this report.

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 the Planning Committee considers and agrees the Planning Committee Report Template as set out at Appendix 1 of this report.

6. COMMENTS FROM RSUA/RTPI MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE

The Chair invited the presenters to introduce themselves. Each took it in turn to state their name and which Association they represented.

The Chair invited the presenters to speak.

M Bell stated that in relation to NI Water the wording of the negative conditions requires further discussion. M Bell referred to hyperlinks and stated these can be added to PDF documents. M Bell stated that it is a rare event to see internal communications regarding applications, the purpose of the Planning Portal is to view the progress being made on an application. M Bell stated that the key purpose of engagement is to make the process better and make our place better. M Bell stated that he would like to see post application learning take place where one or two applications are considered and discussion occurs on how the process can be improved for example if an application took 4 years to process, consideration can be given to why it took so long and what can be done to fix this.

R McCann stated she was in attendance at the meeting to learn, she does not have a lot of business in Causeway Coast and Glens. R McCann stated she concurred with M Bell.

R McNaugher stated he has 16 years experience in the public sector and recognises the difficulties faced by the Planning Department. R McNaugher commended the work completed so far and acknowledged the high standards

set by the Planning Department. R McNaugher stated the PAD process has improved and welcomed this and stated that the Planning Performance Agreement is a valuable resource. He reflected on the value of Customer Service training for junior members of staff stating that how staff behave impacts on the outcomes of the department. R McNaugher referred to the charter Fermanagh and Omagh District Council have developed and suggested this is something that could be explored.

D McLaughlin concurred with all that had been previously said. D McLaughlin stated he had been in positive discussions with the Head of Planning over the last 6 months and that the drive to make improvements from all involved was clear. D McLaughlin reflected on how the private sector do not understand how the public sector work, the planning process is seen as a block in profitability and that this is a big issue that needs to be addressed and that a faster planning process is required.

Councillor Storey stated that fees paid to the Planning Department are a considerable part of the cost of a project and the process should be on the basis that the Agent is the customer and that the Planning Department and Planning Committee are providing a service. Councillor Storey reflected one architect had said he refuses to take work in Causeway Coast and Glens stating that it was not worth the hassle, Councillor Storey thought this was very poor. Councillor Storey enquired of D McLaughlin that if there was one thing he could change what would it be?

D McLaughlin stated that with every application the presumption should be that it will be approved. D McLaughlin acknowledged there are some applications that do not meet policy, he referred to one Committee schedule where there were a number of applications for refusal and should not have come to Committee as they should have been refused, this is a waste of time for the Committee, Planners and Agents. D McLaughlin stated that the week of Planning Committee the focus of staff is on the Committee and there is little other work completed as a result of this. D McLaughlin stated that the Committee need to trust the Officers.

M Bell stated he supported D McLaughlin's comments on the whole, that the Planning Committee have a task to do, that Committee Members have a heartbeat for the Community and Planners have a heartbeat for policy.

R McNaugher stated that applications that will not be approved should be filtered out although this would be met with mixed reactions, there needs to be democracy alongside Officers advice and that there are people who want to push applications through.

R McCann stated that in previous years Agents were able to discuss applications with Planners, this is no longer the case, there is negativity in Causeway Coast and Glens and Planners just refer to the policy. R McCann stated she does see planning applications being processed more quickly recently.

Alderman S McKillop sought clarity from M Bell when he referred to better lives as a result of the planning process? Alderman S McKillop stated that planning applications are about making a difference in the community. Alderman S McKillop sought clarity from D McLaughlin on the service coming from a position of refusal. Alderman S McKillop queried if a Gantt chart would help, each part of the process should be timebound if the process is to be quickened up. Alderman S McKillop queried when a customer comes with a smaller budget are exceptional circumstances included in the architects process.

M Bell responded to Alderman S McKillop to confirm he meant improving the living experience and that progress with the Area Plan is having an impact on planning applications.

R McCann confirmed that exceptional circumstances are put forward to planning at an early and are met favourably.

D McLaughlin stated that the Planners in Causeway Coast and Glens are positive, and he has seen the change in the last 12 months, he acknowledged that dealing with negativity on a regular basis can be difficult. D McLaughlin advised that he would have a couple of clients in the year in exceptional circumstances such as charitable clubs or organisations and social housing. D McLaughlin referred to problems with NI Water and this has been the biggest challenge recently even with planning permission granted.

Alderman S McKillop thanked the presenters for their input and time.

Councillor Watton reflected on the difficulties with getting enough social housing available for those who need it.

D McLaughlin reflected on the need to have Senior Officer input with case officers early in the planning process to assist in addressing difficulties which may arise.

M Bell advised he had asked for feedback from other architects to bring to the meeting. He stated the feedback consisted of agreeing that a few applications are now being processed quickly. M Bell referred to large applications that are difficult and stated these need to be processed more quickly and asked again for post application learning.

The Head of Planning advised that larger applications were reflected in the quarterly report last month and that the Planning Department are making good progress on the applications in the system over 24 months. The Head of Planning advised that recently over 40% of applications have been processed in less than 15 weeks, there has been improvement in processing times and the Department are focused on getting the right balance. The Head of Planning stated she had considered the customer charter in Fermanagh and Omagh District Council as a template and the validation checklist will assist in the frontloading of applications with the necessary information, if the information is received early the application can be processed more quickly. The Head of Planning advised that consideration will now be given to the Planning Performance Agreements and confirmed that the validation checklist currently in place has assisted in improving performance. The Head of Planning confirmed that a Customer Charter will also be considered.

The Head of Planning confirmed that the quarterly meetings with Agents are very constructive and collectively consider the planning process and how to speed it up; the meetings with RSUA/RTPI are valuable and that the joined-up working is beneficial. The Head of Planning stated that the progress made can be seen. She stated that quick decisions are not always best, that quality is also important. The Head of Planning stated that Planning has a 94% approval rate which shows a positive attitude towards approvals.

Councillor Storey stated there is a duty of care to staff, acknowledged the challenges in recruitment and retention and stated there is a need for an enhancement in the resources. Councillor Storey gave a word of appreciation to staff. Councillor Storey stated that changes in the planning policy will be seen when houses have been built. Councillor Storey queried if the right balance had been got in the Validation Checklist.

The Head of Planning confirmed that the validation checklist had been considered at a meeting with RSUA and RTPI and has been adapted to reflect issues raised and only necessary information is being requested. The Head of Planning stated that the public consultation on the Validation Checklist supported Pre Development Enquiries to NI Water but negative conditions are now in place. The Head of Planning confirmed the Planning Department are working with Agents to get solutions to issues and this is working well.

Alderman Scott stated he was pleased to see positive discussions between the Head of Planning, RSUA and RTPI. Alderman Scott referred to a comment from D McLaughlin about applications recommended for refusal and stated that Agents and Architects need to discuss applications with their clients and could

stop some applications coming through, other applications could then be processed more quickly.

Further discussion ensued about considering what applications are brought to Planning Committee and finding a way forward.

The Chair thanked all in attendance for the discussions and the positivity and confirmed that post application learning can be discussed at the quarterly meetings between Planning and RSUA/RTPI.

7. ANY OTHER RELEVANT BUSINESS (IN ACCORDANCE WITH STANDING ORDER 12 (O))

There were no items of Any Other Relevant Business.

This being all the business the meeting closed at 8:40pm

Chair