

PAS Review of Planning Committee Decision Making

Key Recommendations/Advice and Response

PAS Recommendations or Action Needed	Problem / Issue	Response	Status / Actions
Recommendation 1(a): Review the way that members are involved in planning proposals at pre-application stage. This should involve a review of best practice followed by councils who engage members in pre-application discussions, using the PAS pre-application advice and Planning Performance Agreements (PAS) guidance.	Unable to find any procedures in place for member involvement in pre-application discussions Interest group frustration in being forced to take an adversarial approach with applicants due to not being able to engage at an early stage with developers Developer frustration at not being able to engage with members at an early stage to identify issues of local concern Issues might be relatively easy to address at the early design stage (otherwise more difficult, time-consuming and expensive)	Ensure a protocol is established and made clear in the Council's guidance on seeking pre-application advice The Council's Statement of Community Involvement (2021) makes clear that the Council will encourage developers and promoters for large scale development to undertake their own consultation and engagement process with local people. Providing for member involvement in the pre-application process would assist local representation We will therefore encourage developers and promoters for large scale development to undertake their own consultation and engagement process with local people.	A protocol has been prepared to provide the opportunity for prospective applicants and applicants to seek engagement with relevant ward members and the Portfolio Holder in taking pre-application advice. The new approach to member / developer engagement will be reflected in the Council's charging schedule (existing hourly rates apply) The Council's pre-application guidance will be updated. DM staff have been reminded of the provisions of the SCI.
Recommendation 1(b) Review the way that members are	Lack of procedure for pre-committee discussion	Ensure a protocol is established for applicants and made clear in the Council's guidance and in	A protocol (part of the pre-application protocol above) has been prepared which provides

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involved in the build-up to planning committee. Also, a review of the way councils allow pre-planning committee developer presentations, using the PAS Modernising Planning Committees National Survey 2025 to identify councils who operate this practice.	Unable to find any procedures in place for either member involvement in pre-application or pre committee discussions Common for arrangements for developers to hold information briefings with members prior to committee. Danger of pre-determination does not need to be a major threat provided that there are clear protocols that are followed	PPA charging.	opportunities for developer briefings to Members before applications are presented to Planning Committee. The Council's advice for applicants and the charging schedule will be updated. Additionally, following the establishment of the new Planning Committee in May/June, regular pre-committee briefings are to be held with committee members to assist the smooth running of the committee and the readiness of both Councillors and Officers.
Recommendation 2a – Site visits procedures Improve awareness of the existing site visits procedure both for members and officers so that it is used consistently and effectively. The existing procedure should form part of	The written guidance on site visits is poorly understood and rarely implemented in practice Site visits carried out in an ad hoc manner Items being deferred even though the protocol states very clearly the very specific criteria that need to be met to warrant a site visit. Site visits are often poorly attended even by members who have voted for a site visit. Better training needed for both officers and members	Review site visit procedure in the constitution to ensure it remains fit for purpose https://modgov.cherwell.gov.uk/documents/s54142/Part%209%20-%20Planning%20Committee%20Procedure%20Rules%20-%20December%202020.pdf Ensure site visit training in a rolling officer training programme to be established (in addition to personal CPD)	A protocol (part of the pre-application protocol above) has been prepared

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		Ensure site visit training in rolling members training programme Prepare guidance for members in addition to constitutional procedure. Formal arrangement at committee for visit before meeting Ensure there is a regular day for site visits (ideally 2 days before meeting after agenda is published) and guidance on substitution Ensure guidance for being a member of committee emphasizes availability for site visits	
Recommendation 2b - Member training programme To help efficient running of the planning committee.		Need to be a rolling member training programme renewed each year for induction Also need a guide for being a member of planning committee of planning committee (beyond code of conduct)	Enhanced induction training is to be provided for Planning Committee Members following the 2026 local elections. A twelve-month on-going training programme will be presented to Members at that training session. Meetings of the internal members' forum are to be forward planned for twelve months. The next meeting is in April. A best practice committee training

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			session is also to be arranged and recorded for officers.
Recommendation 3 – Managing late information received for planning committee	All participants are clear about the approach Members can be given a very large amount of additional material only a few hours before the actual committee meeting and 5 minutes at the actual meeting to read the material Not giving the viewing public confidence that the information had been fully considered Should be 24 hours before the meeting at the latest	Ensure there is a written, published protocol for the submission of late material and a clear deadline of 4pm the day before committee for the publication of written updates.	Completed.
Recommendation 4 – Member engagement with appeals Increase member engagement with the appeals process, building upon the Informal Planning Forum meetings. Discussing appeals during an early stage of a planning committee meeting (when appropriate)	More member engagement needed on planning appeals More emphasis on planning appeal performance at committee.	Ensure there are regular meetings booked for the year for informal members forum At informal members forum have a standing item on appeals Bring forward appeals report earlier in the committee agenda Include appeals in training programme (above) Standing item for informal meeting Ensure that members of the planning committee are trained	As above. A forward plan of items for the internal Members' Forum is to be presented to Members which will include the standing item on appeals. Appeals are also to be included in the Members training programme for the new municipal year. Appeals are being brought forward on the agenda for planning committee (the next meeting is 19 March)

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Improving training for members on appeal Actively encouraging members to be involved in supporting the council position at planning appeal hearings and public inquiries		and ready to support planning appeals when appropriate	
Recommendation 5 – Member engagement with planning enforcement Improve member awareness of planning enforcement Have regular item on the planning committee agenda to report planning enforcement cases opened and closed, alongside reviews of the local enforcement plan. Member training on planning enforcement	More member engagement needed on planning enforcement	Include planning enforcement as standing item at the informal members forum Include enforcement in the members training programme Have a standing item on planning enforcement at planning committee. Liaise with legal services whether a part 1 or part 2 (confidential) item. Restart regular performance reports to planning committee. Include enforcement performance.	Implemented. A report on Planning Enforcement is to be presented to the March Planning Committee and thereafter on a quarterly basis. An overall item on Planning Enforcement was taken to the internal Members Forum on 12 February (practice and cases).

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matters.			
Recommendation 6 - Review of planning committee officer reports Review the content and structure of the officer reports that are used at planning committee. Reflect on the good practice currently taking place and areas for improvement. Use the PAS best practice in report writing guidance to assist with this review.	On the whole they are competently written reports. Potential areas of improvement: no sections on equalities, human rights or financial considerations (must be considered as part of any planning decision). Pre-application discussions are sometimes referred to in reports, but not consistently. Sometimes conditions are separated under pre-commencement, pre-occupation etc, but this discipline is not consistently used; and A summary might be helpful for longer reports to help members digest very long reports.	Review reporting consistency Ensure officer training Review reporting template Provide report exemplar Review sign-off process to improve standards and accuracy	Committee training is to be arranged and recorded for officers (as above). This will include an item on report writing. Head of DM and DM Team Leaders are reviewing best practice with a view to achieving consistency to set expectation standards for sign-off. The potential for technology to assist report writing and checking to be discussed with the Transformation and ICT services.
Recommendation 7 – Review the existing member training programme Review the training available to members to address areas for improvement Include training on site	Need to improve Councillor knowledge and skills	As above – establish regular and rolling training programme Include standing item at informal members forum Establish training contacts for Members, process for disseminating opportunities and recording of member training	As above. A rolling training programme is to be presented to Members in the new municipal year. Sessions on decision making and planning enforcement have been taken to the Members Forum. Development viability is scheduled next using an external viability consultant. Post induction barrister training is to include a Barrister led session.

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visits Provide practical training on lessons learnt from decisions			
Recommendation 8 - Re-introduce the developers' forum Better engage the local development community by re-introducing the developers' forum. Learn from best practice from across the country on how a developer forum might work. Consider how members can be involved in the developer forum	Need a planning focused developer forum	Establish forum and with dates in advance at least every 6 months and agenda circulated in advance Provide opportunities for developers to submit agenda items Portfolio Holder, Planning Committee Chair, Deputy Chair to attend. Other committee members invited	Area based developer fora support the Council's Area Oversight structure (Kidlington, Bicester and Banbury). This is to be supplemented by development management focused sessions. Officers are also invited to a countywide developers forum and participate in a countywide s106 working group.
Recommendation 9 - Review the Legal representation at the planning committee	More support for members and officers	CDC Head of Legal Services now attends committee and agenda setting meeting. Confirm that Head of Legal Services attends	Completed. This Council's Head of Legal Services now provides legal representation.

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meetings Review the current arrangements whereby a representative of Oxfordshire County Council attends the planning committee meetings (as a representative of CDC). Consider the areas of support that officers and members best need to make sound decisions at planning committee, particularly prior to the formal meeting.		Chair's briefing	
Advice: Consider size of the Planning Committee CDC currently has 18 members who sit on the planning committee. Government direction of travel is to limit planning committees	To help make more efficient use of time and resources All members of the committee need a chance to speak without the meeting being protracted Greater flexibility and representation – allows for a sufficient pool of councillors to focus on ward representation when needed Ensure no more than one councillor from an	Agreed in principle to have a committee of 11 members. To be pursued through governance procedures Review substitutes	Officer and member engagement has taken place. The decision is subject to an on-going governance process culminating in a report to Council (16 March).

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to 11 members. PAS considers that a planning committee between 9 and 12 members is best practice.	individual ward is on the committee Need to provide cover as committee substitutes from a greater pool of members reducing the chance of cancellations etc		
Advice: Officer advice to members	Officers give good, solid advice on planning matters with the lead officer playing an important role in backing up the advice given by case officers. Whether officers could be more assertive could be an area of discussion between the chair and lead officer to help to reduce the length of the meetings and the tendency for some members to stray off the key issues of the application.	Discuss with Chair and at informal members forum	Discussions have taken place with the Chair of Planning Committee and it has also been discussed at the internal Members' Forum. The provision of officer advice is also being discussed with Executive Members to help identify areas for continuous improvements and the smooth running of the committee. Officer training is also being arranged (see above)
Advice: Member Questions and Debate	Members were being swayed more strongly to local objections rather than evidence presented to them. For example, members were sceptical of advice given by transport officers without having evidence to the contrary given by objectors. Recommend that any further training considers	Include evidential decision making and handling objections in member training programme.	To be included in the rolling 12 month training programme with attendance from OCC highway as appropriate to help build confidence in professionally guided and evidence-based decision making.

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	the importance of looking for evidence to support issues raised by objectors.		
Advice: Performance	The portfolio holder is keen that enough time and focus is given to performance management of the planning team and that all tasks are recorded with specific timings agreed and acted upon before each performance review. The portfolio holder is also keen to see planning performance agreements more closely monitored in terms of time and outcomes and the performance of partners in contributing to the process. There is a regular item at planning committee meetings to report appeal decisions and this is good practice. Have this at the front of the agenda (see above), particularly if there are lessons to be learnt from an appeal that is upheld or costs have been awarded against the council. The Informal Planning Forum and Overview and Scrutiny Working Group will be the places for detailed discussion.	Review content of regular report on performance to meet Portfolio Holder expectations. See above on planning appeals.	A performance dashboard has been created and subject to on-going review. Planning is one of the priority areas in the Council's Transformation Programme, including a focus on digitalisation. Options for future planning 'back office' systems are being reviewed to support cross service improvement and workflow, 'the customer front door', process efficiency and performance. The national indicator for the quality of decision making (the % of decisions on major developments overturned at appeal) remains an area of focus, particularly considering the relatively high number of applications for major development the Council receives. A report on performance is to be presented more regularly to the Planning Committee. Service improvement is a standing item at Portfolio Holder

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			Briefings. Updates are provided to the internal Members Forum but this needs to be more structured as the forum meets more regularly (see above)
Advice: Length of meetings and number of items	Between June 2024 and April 2025 the average number of items on the agenda was 5, but it varied enormously with one committee having 15 items and another only 2. The length of the meeting varied greatly (from 6 hours 20 minutes to 13 minutes), but averaged at approximately 3 hours. The PAS modernising planning committees national survey 2025 found that 78% of planning committees considered 2-4 items per meeting and the majority averaged between 1 and 3 hours in length.	Shorten length of busy meetings, review number of items presented and time management	Concerns have also been expressed by individual committee members. The issue has been discussed with senior management and legal and democratic services. Changes are ongoing, including a 9pm cut off time, mandatory breaks for long meetings and the holding of additional meetings when required.

Other Matters Arising from Officer Consideration	Problem / Issue	Response	Status / Actions
Consideration of the PAS report	Ensuring the report is socialised	The PAS report has been discussed with within the service, with the Corporate Leadership Team, with the Members of the Council's Executive, with the Portfolio	The Council's response to the report is being discussed at the Overview and Scrutiny Meeting on

		Holder, with Committee Members (internal Members Forum), and with the Legal and Democratic Services team. The report is publicly available at https://www.cherwell.gov.uk/download/downloads/id/18229/cherwell-district-council-planning-committee-review.pdf	24 March 2026 and at a meeting of the Executive on 7 April 2026.
Culture	Ensuring evidence-based decision making	The importance of evidence-based decision making and the committee not being overly influenced by local objections has been discussed at briefings with Portfolio Holder and Committee Chair and through dialogue at the internal Members Forum. Message reinforcement, in the interest of ensuring decision making is as robust as possible, takes place through the Head of Development Management at committee meetings. Following the May 2025 local elections, two training sessions were arranged to support Members of the new Planning Committee .	Enhanced use of the internal Members Forum and structured training programme (above) to provide Member support and opportunity for officer and members to constructively review decision-making experience and performance on an on-going basis.
Running of Committee	Ensuring a quality of response to Members' questions at committee and supporting the efficiency of the meeting	The pre-committee briefings for Members are to be used to invite questions. This will assist officer preparation. It is entirely without prejudice to Members' lines of enquiry at the committee meeting. Officers had invited questions previously on an item by item basis for complex cases.	Being implemented so that any questions are received at least 2 working days before the meeting.
Time of day for the meeting	Ensuring an optimal time for Members.	The current start time of 4pm is still considered to be optimal.	No change
Drafting reasons for	Ensuring more efficiency in capturing	Without prejudice to their	Being Implemented

refusal	Members' reasons for refusal	recommendations, officers are being asked to consider the potential reasons that might arise from the issues and considerations presented in the officer reports	
Local Plan	Having an up to date local plan to inform decision making	A proposed local plan was submitted in July 2025. Initial hearings were held in February 2026.	The Inspectors' initial letter is awaited
Five Year Housing Land Supply	The absence of a five year housing land supply and the application of the 'tilted balance' in decision making.	An Annual Monitoring Report was approved by the Council's Executive in December 2025 which contains a comprehensive review of housing land supply.	At 31 March 2025, the district had 10,271 homes with outline or full planning permission. The AMR also shows that it has a total forward supply of 21,650 homes from 1 April 2025 (excluding additional supply from the new Local Plan). However, 6,123 homes presently meeting the Government's definition of 'deliverable' which produces a 3.1 year housing land supply when the requirements for Cherwell and Oxford's needs are combined.
Government Reforms	Readiness and Engagement	The Council is engaging on a countywide and Thames Valley basis in anticipation of SDS regulations and guidance in Summer 2026. Should the Council's new Plan be found sound at Examination, the Council will be well-placed for any new Local Plan process that tracks the SDS. A response to the NPPF consultation has	Continuance of preparation

		been prepared and officers are engaged with PAS, RTPI and other events to support readiness.	
MHCLG/ Homes England / Atlas Engagement / OGC	Responding to the national planning agenda	The Council is engaged with the New Towns Programme, in responding to the OGC report and on delivery and infrastructure matters at Bicester. It is therefore liaising with MHCLG, Homes England and OGC. ATLAS is working on four projects with the Council including the provision of resource and expertise to support work on strategic applications and housing delivery.	Continuance of engagement and delivery of projects
Resource & Capability	Being well placed to support decision making and delivery	A new Place and Regeneration Directorate has been created with additional Executive Director resource made available to support the oversight of Development Management. More support has been provided for the implementation and delivery functions of the Growth and Regeneration service. A new permanent Head of Service has been appointed. A new majors Development Management Team (a 3rd) has been created and a new team leader appointed. A new Biodiversity and Climate Resilience service has also been created with a new Head of Service. Additional planning resource has been approved through the budget process for 26/27 including resource for improvement. The planning service has a designated officer within the Transformation Team – an experienced	Retain focus on performance and improvement.

		planner with digitilisation expertise.	
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