



Report to: Town Planning Committee

Subject: **Streamlining consultation on applications**

Date: 13 December 2012

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1	Relevant Background Information
1.1	At the Special meeting of the Town Planning Committee of 29 November 2012, the committee was presented with suggested list of application types which the Minister proposed should be added to the current streamlining list.
1.2	The current list was agreed in March 2010. The safeguards which were attached to the list were that any item could be brought to the Town Planning Committee if <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Requested by a Councillor (through Democratic Services) (b) Where there is objection to the proposal notified to the Divisional Planning Office (irrespective of the number) (c) Where the recommendation of the Department is that the application should be refused (d) Where the Area Planning Manager brings the proposal to the Committee due to the nature of the proposal.
1.3	The additional types of application being proposed to be added to the current streamlined consultation scheme are:- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) All other minor and intermediate applications (b) Housing applications up to 25 units, and (c) Office accommodation up to a maximum of 200 sq metres

2	Key Issues
2.1	In order to respond to the proposal from the Minister the Town Planning Committee needs to agree a position on the proposal.
2.2	In considering the options around extending the current streamlined system, Members may wish to consider the following points: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) The number of schemes which are greater than 5 houses (current limit for streamlining) and less than 25 (proposed limit) may be more

	<p>significant in Belfast as there are few sites available which are large enough unless they are in multi storey developments. Whilst it could be argued that such developments are likely to generate objections and would therefore be removed from the streamlined list, the Committee may wish to retain the current 5 unit limit.</p> <p>(b) The limit suggested for office accommodation relates to the current policy limit used by the Planning Office for out of City centre offices. For the most part such offices are on arterial routes or shopping hubs and do not generate significant objections or raise concerns in respect of their development. Where any objections are raised, the application would be brought to the Committee</p> <p>The Area Planning Manager attended the Special Meeting and indicated that he would be willing to work with the preferred option arising from the consideration by Committee. It should, however, be noted that the preference of the Area Planning manager was for the adoption of the recommendation from the Minister as it was considered to be a more straightforward approach if all the Councils were working to the same list</p> <p>2.4 The Area Planning Manager also advised that any decision taken by the Committee in regards to extending the streamlined system could be subject to review, in that the operation of any revised streamlining could be reviewed after a trial period of 6 months.</p> <p>Members' Development</p> <p>2.5 The report to the Special meeting also indicated that as part of the local government reform process there will be discussions with individual political Parties and with Committee members in respect of Planning as a specific transferring function. This engagement will seek to determine the most effective approach to the development of greater understanding of the new roles for Members and Officers in the reformed planning process.</p> <p>2.6 This proposal is that through the exploration of the potential for coordinated activity it will be possible to develop a programme for Member development to build capacity leading up to 2015. The focus will be on the opportunity to support the Committee and the development of the role of members working in partnership with planning staff in the longer term. Annex 1 set out some initial areas which are likely to be covered.</p>
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3	Resource Implications
	None

4	Equality and Good Relations Considerations
	None

5	Recommendations
5.1	<p>The Committee is asked to consider the contents of the report and agree what is the preferred option for moving forward in regards to the modification of the current streamlined system</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">(a) Retain the existing scheme with no modification(b) Adopt selected elements of the additional criteria(c) Accept the proposal as presented

ANNEX 1: MEMBER DEVELOPMENT

1) Awareness of the reformed planning system including:

- (i) *New Planning Regime* – impact of the 2011 Planning Act in reforming the planning and defining future role of councils in delivering planning
- (ii) *Planning Policy Framework* - Regional Development Strategy, Planning Policy Statements, BMAP (the hierarchy of Plans) and proposed single planning policy document
- (iii) *Managing expectations*; what planning can and cannot do within the reformed system

2) Governance including

- (i) *Future Codes of conduct and relationships*
- (ii) *The basis of decision making – access to and provision of information*
- (iii) *Ethical regime* – conflicts of interest
- (iv) *Scrutiny – changing relationships with communities, organisations and external agencies*
- (v) Legal and Administrative processes – open files; role of PAC and Ombudsman; legal challenges; financial consequences; surcharge; role of Auditor

2) Planning and strategic policy development

- (i) Statement of Community Involvement and the Timetable
- (ii) The proposed two stage Development Plan process
- (iii) Guidance documents
- (iv) The importance of Member involvement and participation in setting the context for decision making
- (v) Interface between planning and regeneration and community planning as key place-shaping enablers for Councils and members

3) The Planning Process (role of Members in process)

- (i) *Development Planning process* (see 3 above, Members as leaders and supporters of the planning process)
- (ii) *Development management processes* – what makes a ‘good’ or effective decision
- (iii) *Enforcement* - importance of early action; proportionate response
- (iv) *Community Involvement* – the significance of local community groups; reacting to local concerns/ requirements and changing relationships
- (v) Strategic support and provision of relevant and timely information to elected Members

5) Regeneration and Community Planning

- (i) Understanding and maximising the potential synergies /linkages between planning and wider regeneration and community planning functions of local government.