



Belfast City Council

Report to	Town Planning Committee
Subject:	Deferrals Process
Date:	17 October 2013
Reporting Officer:	Mrs Petra Scarborough
Contact Officer:	Mrs Petra Scarborough

1	Relevant Background Information
1.1	In 2005, as part of the introduction of the streamlining of the planning process, the Planning Service had issued Guidance Notes in relation to the new arrangements for consultations with councils regarding Planning Management Board referrals and the deferral process for planning applications.
1.2	It is an accepted and long established element in the consultation process that district councils can request the Planning Service to defer consideration of individual applications if they disagree with the preliminary opinion.

2	Key Issues
2.1	At that time, the Guidance Notes had stipulated that councils must provide reasons for seeking a deferral on individual planning applications. This was considered a necessary safeguard for the procedure in order that the Planning Service and district councils could demonstrate, in the event of a challenge, that the request for deferral is soundly based on defensible planning grounds. Deferrals may arise in the following cases:
2.2	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. applications which clarify the interpretation of a newly published or previously untested planning policy or where there is a lack of specific policy;2. applications which involve a departure from the Regional Development Strategy or a development plan or a draft development plan;3. applications which have significant environmental impact, requiring the submission of an Environmental Impact Statement;4. applications which have generated strong local/neighbourhood objections based on valid planning concerns;5. where the council considers that all material planning considerations have not been assessed or where the opinion has been made contrary to, or departs from, prevailing planning policy.

2.3	The aspect of the guidance notes which relates to providing a reason for seeking a deferral on individual planning applications has not been enforced strictly by the Planning Service to date. However, it has come to light that it would be prudent if Members provided such information at the time of seeking a deferral on planning applications. Therefore, the Members are requested, from the date of this meeting, to agree to citing which criteria is applicable (based on the information at 2.2) when requesting a deferral.
2.4	Members will recall that it is desirable that any requests for deferrals for office meetings should, where possible, be held within 2 weeks from the date of the request. It is the responsibility of individual Members to make the necessary arrangements for the holding of such meetings, including contacting the relevant applicant/objector and liaising with the Planning Service.
2.7	Most deferrals will be dealt with by the holding of an office meeting; only in exceptional circumstances will a site meeting be organised.
2.8	Subject to the outcome of any such deferral meeting, the applications will be taken back to the Committee with either the same or a revised opinion and the Committee's view will be noted. Thereafter, a decision will be issued. Members should note that there will normally only be one opportunity to defer any particular application.

3	Resource Implications
	None

4	Equality and Good Relations Implications
	None

5	Recommendations
	Members are asked to agree to providing a reason, based on the criteria set out at 2.2 above, when requesting a deferral of a planning application to enable an office meeting to be held.

6	Decision Tracking
	Petra Scarborough to ensure that reasons for deferrals are recorded properly within the minutes.

7	Key to Abbreviations
	None

8	Documents Attached
	None