

Action Plan - Response to Scrutiny Challenge Session on Determination of Major Planning Applications

Recommendation	Response / Comments	Date	Update – October 2008
<p>R1 That Development and Renewal seek to improve resident involvement through holding sessions that help support and give guidance about proposed developments. This would give residents the confidence to exercise and extend involvement to its fullest potential.</p>	<p>Planning process training sessions to be offered through the LAP network to local residents.</p>	<p>During 2008/9</p>	<p>Officers from Development Control and Development Schemes attended such sessions in early 2008 to inform and discuss with LAP members and residents the planning process and legal (S106) agreements.</p>
<p>R2 Public meetings on Pre-Planning Applications should be held during daytime at weekends to maximise community participation.</p>	<p>Community Forum Customer Feedback forms to include a question on preferred times for holding public meetings.</p> <p>Future Community Forum meetings to be arranged in accordance with customer's wishes.</p>	<p>View taken over next 6 months</p>	<p>Officer requests to hold Community Forums at weekends have not been well received by applicants and resisted in all instances. Nevertheless, officers have encouraged exhibitions of very large schemes to take place at weekends in suitable venues and have been largely successful in achieving this. Attendance at evening Community Forums has been very healthy in almost all instances and</p>

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			their content and usefulness have been praised widely.
R3 An external facilitator should be asked to chair public meetings to ensure its smooth running and avoid accusations of bias.	<p>Applicants to be requested to provide and finance an independent facilitator from list provided by officers.</p> <p>It must be noted that applicants cannot be compelled to do this and in the absence of an independent facilitator these meetings will be chaired by officers.</p>	On-going – reviewed December 2008	Applicants have resisted paying for an “independent facilitator” on cost grounds, preferring instead to use their own (already hired) PR/communication consultants. The results of using these consultants to run meetings have been mixed and less effective than when run by officers. This appears to be because officers are seen as ‘neutral’, whilst the applicant’s communications consultants are seen as being connected to the applicant and therefore biased.
R4 Lists of current and forthcoming Major Planning Applications to be circulated to all Councillors.	Many early discussions on developments do not result in an application. Generally these discussions are also commercially sensitive and have to be treated confidentially. Once a Community Forum is proposed, pre-application developments can be circulated to members in	From April 2008	Current applications’ lists are already sent to members and lead members are briefed on request by the Heads of Service. A study is currently underway in

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	the form of a period list. Current applications can be included in this list.		in conjunction with Legal Services to improve member involvement in major applications prior to their reporting at Strategic Development Committee. This has to be carefully set up due to probity considerations. It is being undertaken in consultation with the chair of the development committees.
R5 That documents should be prepared to guide local residents confronted with the complexity of planning applications and legislation, with advice and practical support to enable them to support or object to applications that affect them. This would include guidance in simple language on what is a material planning consideration, how to comment on planning applications, how the council determines applications etc. Members' suggestions on what type of guidance might assist	A suite of such documents is being prepared and will be published on the web site in the next few months. When published, members will be informed via the Members' Bulletin and requested to advise on what other material may help their constituents.	Advice notes published on web April 2008	A comprehensive suite of guidance notes have been completed and publicised. The planning pages on the council's web site have also been extensively revised to improve their utility to the public. The notes are available both in the planning reception and on the Council's website.

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constituents could be considered.			
R6 Research into other Local Authorities should take place to see best practice when consulting with residents. This might help develop and improve the delivery of service.	The Service Head Development Decisions, as Chair of the Association of London borough Planning Officers, will undertake an audit of other London Boroughs' practice and explore further any examples of best practise.	Audit by April 2009	The Service Head will carry out this audit in the first quarter of 2009 to enable what in many cases are recently introduced procedures to bed in and reveal best practise.
R7 Support with any training needs that may help Members become involved more.	The current programme of compulsory "core" training in planning and probity each May will continue, and be supplemented with 3-monthly courses on other planning issues. Section 106 and Development Finance has already taken place and a session on the LDF process is planned for April. Future ideas for sessions are Urban Design and Secure by Design.	On-going – reviewed April 2009	Completed – training on legal (S106) agreements, development finance and the LDF process have been undertaken. Further on-going training sessions will follow in due course in response to emerging needs and requests.