



## Residents and Environmental Services Policy Overview Committee Review Scoping Report 2015/16

### **Mechanisms for Reviewing Major Developments in the Borough and Identifying Lessons to be Learned for the Planning Process**

#### **BACKGROUND TO THE REVIEW**

##### **Aim of the Review**

The planning decisions made by the Council can have a fundamental impact on our residents. This is primarily through the change in environment that occurs through new development; ranging from impacts on everything from security, drainage, visual appearance, outlook, light, noise, traffic congestion, parking, through to the wider multi faceted impacts on neighbourhoods and town centres from very large scale redevelopments.

It is certainly the case that considerable effort is given to determining planning applications by Planning officers and the Councillors on Hillingdon's Planning Committees. But it is also the case that considerably less effort is given once a decision is made into considering whether the approved development is successful, or once built actually creates a high quality environment for occupiers, users or neighbours.

The review is intended to consider whether there firstly are any simple post development processes that could be introduced to analysis the successes or failures of major developments in the Borough and secondly how decision makers could try to learn lessons from any post development review processes introduced.

#### **TERMS OF REFERENCE**

The following Terms of Reference are proposed:

1. To understand how lessons are currently learned post approval from processing planning applications;

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2. To look at suggested models of best practice (such as the Building for Life Standard) that stem from Governmental or professional bodies and to seek advice from local experts in the fields of planning or architecture.
3. To consider, and recommend to Cabinet any improvements to, the Council's present approach.

## **INFORMATION & ANALYSIS**

It is proposed that the review be broken into two key themes, in order that it is managed efficiently and covers all aspects of the review. The structure is offered as a broad outline in order to ensure that all key aspects of the review are covered. Members are welcome to revise this structure and to add additional themes as they see appropriate.

### **Hillingdon's Current Mechanisms**

It is proposed that Members will firstly gather evidence regarding the review mechanisms currently used by Hillingdon Council. Members will need to understand clearly the aims of the planning process in Hillingdon and identify how well these are met by the existing mechanisms.

- The Local Plan to an extent provides a mechanism whereby officer and public feedback regarding development is given, however, much of the feedback on planning issues of importance stems from views on development already undertaken. The Local Plan is also developed over many years and does not represent a targeted qualitative review of whether the Borough's planning decisions are resulting in high quality development.
- The Planning Department also undertakes occasional customer feedback exercises targeted at applicants and agents. However, this tends to result in customers focussing on whether they liked the service given by a particular officer or the merits or otherwise of phone calls going through a customer contact centre. The feedback given, however, does not tend to provide meaningful responses on the quality of developments arising from the planning process.
- Lastly there is individual site specific feedback from residents or Resident Associations on development which is being built. This is almost entirely focussed on potential breaches of planning control, rather than constructive feedback on schemes once built.
- Historically, the Council has undertaken annual mini-bus tours for Planning Committee members. These no longer occur. When they did occur they were structured only in so far that officers selected a range of sites and secured access to the sites. The developments were not reviewed by Councillors following a prescribed framework or process.

### **Alternative Approaches**

An initial review of practices of nearby Councils has not identified any potential models of best practice or usage of post development review processes. There is literature available from professional bodies such as the RTPI (Royal Town Planning Institute), RIBA (Royal Institute British Architects) and RICS (Royal Institute Chartered Surveyors) and from the Design Council concerning post development review. There is a Housing Quality Indicator System used by affordable housing providers (but this has limitations).

The most well known post development quality review process is the Building for Life Standard. Linked to the Building for Life Standard is the 'Built for Life' website. This website allows potential house purchasers to see how a new development rates against 12 quality indicators. The nearest rated developments to Hillingdon are in the London Borough of Barnet, which has a handful of large major developments subject to the 'Building for life' quality standards.

Within the Borough of Hillingdon there are a small number of very experienced planning and architectural practitioners who it is considered would be willing to attend a witness session to share their expert views.

Members may also wish to consider how modern technology can be used in the review of developments, and engaging the public in this process.

Members will want to look at how the Council could constructively review its decisions, and what benefits such approaches could bring to Planning in Hillingdon. Members will wish to be mindful of the resource implications of different review mechanisms.

### WITNESS, EVIDENCE & ASSESSMENT

The table below sets out the possible witnesses that could be invited to present evidence to the Committee. Members are reminded that this is not an exhaustive list and that additional witnesses can be requested at any point throughout this review.

<b>Meeting</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Purpose / Outcome</b>
<b>RESPOC:</b> 29 July 2015	The scoping report will be presented to the Committee. Members will have the opportunity to agree and/or propose alternative witnesses/topics.	Information and analysis
<b>RESPOC:</b> 12 November 2015	Witness Session 1 <b>Hillingdon's Current Mechanisms</b> Planning Policy Senior Planning Officers	Evidence and enquiry
<b>RESPOC:</b> 19 January 2016	Witness Session 2 <b>Alternative Approaches</b> Expert Planning Consultant Expert Architect Consultant	Evidence and enquiry
<b>RESPOC:</b> 24 February 2016	Agree Final Report and Recommendations	Consider Draft Final Report
<b>Cabinet:</b> TBC	The draft final report will be presented to Cabinet by the Chairman of the Committee.	Cabinet may approve, amend or reject as many of the report's recommendations as it wishes.

*It is also proposed that a tour of a few recent developments is undertaken at some point between the two witness sessions.*

## **ASSESSMENT**

As is standard practice for a Policy Overview and Scrutiny Committee review, once a report's recommendations have been agreed by the Cabinet, officers will be asked to begin delivering the necessary changes. The monitoring of officers' work is a fundamentally important aspect of the Committee's work and, as such, regular reports on progress can be requested by Members and a full update report will be added to the future work programme of the Committee.

## **RESOURCE REQUIREMENTS**

This review will be undertaken within current resources. The plan set out above will be coordinated and delivered by Democratic Services. The additional resource of staff time required to present, collect and format evidence for witness sessions will also need to be considered.