

Tonbridge Town Centre Forum
12 February 2007

Making Planning Decisions – ‘Over to the Forum’

Briefing Note for Members of the Forum

As previously trailed the forthcoming meeting will be an opportunity for members of the Forum to take part in an interactive event around the subject of determining planning applications.

It is planned that this will take the form of a ‘mock’ planning committee meeting during which Forum members will play the role of planning committee members and debate a small number of fictitious planning applications that raise some topical issues that are often found in an around Tonbridge.

It is hoped that Forum members will take part in the event in the spirit in which it is planned. It is intended to be a learning event but also fun. No prior competence of planning matters is needed to take part. It is not the intention to put any ‘committee members’ on the spot and help will always be to hand. The purpose of the evening is to widen the appreciation of the issues and challenges that are faced in reaching decisions on what can be contentious and high profile planning applications that are dealt with by the Borough Council and indeed other planning authorities in the current policy climate.

Attached to this note are some reports on fictitious planning applications. You may notice some similarities of the issues that each of them raises with some cases that have come forward in Tonbridge. However, they are purely hypothetical and have been designed to bring out debates on some key planning matters.

An introduction to the evening will be given so that all those taking part will be aware and comfortable of their role. It is up to individuals to take a greater or lesser part in proceedings but we do hope that you will feel able to help the event along by joining in as appropriate.

The “planning committee” will be chaired by the real Chairman of the Area Planning Committee 1, Councillor Chris Smith. The body making up the committee will be members of the Forum and will include two members of the Council (Councillor David Aikman and Councillor Matthew Balfour) who are Cabinet members for Community Development and Planning & Transport respectively and who have experience of sitting on planning committees.

The Committee will be advised by a planning adviser and a legal officer and there will be officers taking the part of applicants and members of the public who will speak to the committee in a similar fashion to what happens at Planning Committees in Tonbridge and Malling and elsewhere. It is likely we will have a public gallery made up of anybody who attends on the evening and other Members of the Borough Council who normally attend the Forum. Where appropriate some members of the public gallery will also be invited to speak.

Following the advisors and speakers the Chairman will invite the committee to debate the issues as is normal practice and will then draw each case to a conclusion and ask for a vote on the decision before moving to the next case to be considered.

At the end of the evening it is intended that there will be a summing up of what happened both by those observing and those taking part.

The success and value of this evening depends largely on those involved entering into the spirit of the event and making a constructive contribution. It is hoped that the conclusion will be a measure of shared learning and awareness about various aspects of the planning decision making process.