

To: by email attachment to: Councillor Members of Norwich City Council Planning Committee
cc: by email attachment to: Norwich City Council Officers – Graham Nelson; David Parkin; Mark Brown; Jackie Rodger

21 April 2020

Planning Applications Committee – democratic oversight

Dear members of the Planning Applications Committee,

We note that a meeting of the Planning Applications Committee has been scheduled for 23 April via video-conferencing with an item proposing temporary changes to the scheme of delegation. We would like to ask members of the committee to oppose this proposal, and instead suggest that the Planning Applications Committee continues to hold meetings via video-conferencing, to maintain an appropriate level of effective and transparent decision-making in these difficult times.

Whilst we recognise that a decision was already made by a meeting of a subset of the committee on the 30 March, we feel that there was not enough notice of that meeting or an adequate mechanism for members of the public or groups like ours to feed in before that decision was made. Furthermore, we feel that the publication of new government guidance on 2 April should be taken into account. This includes the provision for committees at all levels of local government to meet virtually, as well as maintaining the requirement for public meetings to be made accessible to the public, and therefore it should not be necessary to amend the scheme of delegation for the Planning Applications Committee.

We are concerned that the proposal leaves the responsibility for making key decisions on potentially major and highly controversial applications in the hands of a single councillor, and does not give any opportunity for democratic oversight from opposition councillors or other members of the committee.

Given that the inability to hold public meetings in person may not be restored for several months, we believe that the only way to ensure such democratic accountability at this time is to hold meetings virtually, with the ability for members of the public to observe.

Yours faithfully,

David Hook,

Chair, Vision for Norfolk Committee, CPRE Norfolk