

Annual Report of the Planning Committee 2025



Chair's Foreword

As Chair of the Planning Committee, it gives me great pleasure to provide the foreword for this annual report.

My role is to chair, lead and co-ordinate the activities of the Planning Committee. The continued hard work and dedication of our planning officers, ably supported by the Members of the Committee, means we have achieved success throughout 2024. Additional changes to planning legislation and continuing challenging economic times faced in 2025, have also required adaption and focus.

We have continued to incorporate changes to working practices which have improved both the swiftness of dealing with applications and ensuring that high quality development is achieved. We received excellent feedback from our customers which demonstrates we are responsive to customer needs: this also contributed towards our success at the RTPI awards (2024) when we were recognised as the Planning Authority of the Year.

This progress is largely down to increased delegated powers to officers and the setting of performance targets above and beyond those required (and closely monitored) by Central Government, coupled with a rolling programme of Member training regarding new planning regulations and related matters.

I was extremely pleased with the way Members and officers alike rose to the challenges and dealt with each application in such a professional manner. This has meant the planning process has continued to perform well. Going forward in 2025, the Planning Committee will continue to seek added value to new development in Sandwell by ensuring that effective and efficient determination of planning applications is conducted in a fair, open and transparent manner.



Councillor Kay Millar - Chair of Planning Committee



Introduction to the Planning Committee

Council Planning Committee is selected each year to deal with matters relating to the Town and Country Planning Acts and related legislation. This mainly concerns the determination of planning applications which is a statutory function of the local authority.

How Planning Committee Works (At the Meeting)

The aim has always been to ensure that Committee is as open and inclusive as possible. In this respect, both applicants and objectors are invited to the meeting relating to their application. Interested parties can then contribute to the meeting or observe the Committee process, debate and determination of application. The process in more detail involves:

One representative from each side is given a maximum of five minutes each to make their particular case. Members may also ask supplementary questions of each side. Senior officers from Planning as well as Democratic Services, Highways, Legal Services and Public Health are present to field questions that Members may have. Plans and photographs are displayed on large screens for all present to see. The public gallery is also managed by planning officers who are at hand to answer any further questions from the public. The public are given a real opportunity to take part in the meeting, see the democratic process in action and have their voice heard.

Membership

From April 2023 to May 2024, the following Members sat on the Planning Committee: -



Councillor Millar (Chair);

Councillor Chidley (Vice-Chair);

Councillors Chapman, Fenton, Fisher, S Gill, Kaur, Kordala, Loan, Pall, Preece, N Singh, Tromans, Uppal, Webb and Younis.

(Councillors J. Giles and Dunn have also served on Committee during this time)



At its annual meeting in May 2024, the Council appointed the following Members to the Planning Committee: -

Councillor Millar (Chair);

Councillor E Giles (Vice-Chair);

Councillors Bhamra, Chidley, Cotterill, Horton, Hussain, Kaur, Kordala, Loan, Piper, Preece, N Singh, Tromans, Uppal and Webb.

How does the work of the Committee contribute to the objectives within the Council Plan?

Growing Up in Sandwell	<p>A great place for children to grow up and to ensure a brighter future for children and young people.</p> <p>The Planning committee have faced some difficult decisions in relation to small children's home over recent months. As such, they have balanced the needs against the impact of these homes to reach decisions that are in best interest of providing good quality provision in the right locations.</p>
Living in Sandwell	<p>Improving the local environment with a focus on cleanliness, ensuring that the community takes pride in its surroundings.</p> <p>Sandwell has a shortage of housing sites compared to its housing needs; therefore, the decisions of Planning Committee are essential in ensuring new housing schemes come forward in the right places to ensure people have good quality homes to live in.</p>
Thriving Economy in Sandwell	<p>The Sandwell Local Plan serves as the blueprint for future development, guiding housing and employment growth while ensuring new infrastructure investments like transport and schools. Providing an award winning, efficient, and proactive development management service alongside a high-quality decision making by officers and Planning Committee provides confidence to developers to invest in Sandwell, creating jobs and improving local services.</p>



Healthy in Sandwell	<p>Commitment to fostering a community where every resident has the opportunity to lead a healthy and fulfilling life.</p> <p>The introduction of biodiversity net gain has provided increased opportunities for improved natural habitats as part of the new developments which can benefit local communities.</p>
One Council One Team	<p>Sandwell Council's ethos of 'One Council One Team' reflects a commitment to unity and Collaboration, striving for excellence in serving the community.</p> <p>The planning process is built on community engagement and providing an opportunity for residents to raise any concerns. When three or more objections are received, the planning committee provides an opportunity for residents to be heard and their concerns considered by elected members before a decision is reached.</p>

Legislation Reference

The primary legislation is the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended).

Committee Activity Overview

Work Programme Spotlight

During 2024/25, Planning Committee met on nine occasions. Below is a breakdown of each Committee meeting in terms of numbers of applications determined and whether the decisions at each meeting were in accordance with the officer's recommendation or not. It should be noted that Members, after considering the facts of a case, can decide to visit to see the application site for themselves or defer in order to seek further information.



Date of Committee	No of Applications on Agenda	Decision With Officer Recommendation	Decision Against Officer Recommendation	Application Withdrawn	Visit	Deferred
June	5	5	0	0	0	0
July	5	4	0	0	0	1
Sept	11	8	0	0	3	0
Oct	8	5	2	0	1	0
Nov	2	2	0	0	0	0
Jan	6	4	1	0	1	0
Feb	6	2	1	0	2	1
April	7	7	0	0	0	0
April	3	2	0	0	1	0
Total	53	39	4	0	8	2

Overall, the number of applications which were determined during 2024/25 were consistent with the previous year as were delegated decisions and the percentage of applications approved or refused.

The overall number of planning and related applications Sandwell received and determined between 1st April 2024 to 31st March 2025 was: -

1087 planning applications received of which **929** applications were determined.

234 Prior approval applications were received of which **224** applications were determined.

Of the **929** planning applications determined, **895** (96%) were dealt with by officers using delegated powers and for the **224** prior approvals determined, **221** (98%) were dealt with by delegated powers.

Of all the above applications determined: -

808 planning applications were approved (87%)

120 planning applications were refused permission (13%)

199 prior approvals were approved (89%)

25 prior approvals were refused (11%)



Of those refused planning applications **23 (26%)** submitted an appeal. The table below details the breakdown, of these decisions and whether they were committee or delegated decisions. As can be seen, 70% of these decisions were dismissed.

	Dismissed	Allowed with conditions
Committee decision	0	1
Delegated decision	16	6

The large percentage of applications approved in part reflects the openness of the service in encouraging developers and prospective applicants to engage in pre-application discussions, but for those occasions when applications were refused the planning inspectorate agreed in over 70% of cases with the council's decision.

A charge for pre-application discussions was introduced at Sandwell from September 2019 and these charges have increased proportionately since that time with last increase being approved by Cabinet in February 2025. The pre-application service enables applicants to receive comments in relation to their proposal in advance of submitting a planning application at significantly greater cost.

The positive outcome of the vast majority of planning applications submitted at Sandwell is also in part a reflection of how, officers will endeavour to negotiate workable solutions within the prescribed time scales when there are challenges with a proposed scheme.

In addition to the above planning applications, the Planning Enforcement Team currently have a total of **552** open cases. In 2024/25, **235** complaints regarding alleged breaches of planning control were received. **191** related to breaches of planning and **42** related untidy land.

Officers remain acutely aware of the fact that when breaches of planning occur, timely and appropriate enforcement action should be taken. The team work hard to find resolutions that ensure that harm caused to residents is investigated and acted on appropriately.



The local planning authority also has the power to deal with privately owned land or buildings, the condition of which may be adversely affecting the amenity of a particular area (untidy land). Unfortunately, since the loss of grant funding the service has relied on negotiation skills or prosecution, in the absence of funds to take direct action. However, when the situation has been severe, the team have worked with the Neighbourhoods service to secure funding which resulted in two large sites being cleared in the last financial year.

Performance



Planning Applications

The local planning authority is monitored closely by the Government regarding the time taken to determine planning applications.

The Government targets are as follows: -

60% of major applications to be determined in 13 weeks

70% of minor applications to be determined in 8 weeks

80% of other applications to be determined in 8 weeks

("Major" developments are defined as applications for 10 or more dwellings; where the floor space of the proposal exceeds 1000 square metres or if the application site area exceeds 1 hectare.

"Minor" developments include schemes for less than 10 dwellings and where floor area is less than 1000 square metres.

"Others" includes changes of use and householder extensions).



The planning service has consistently exceeded these performance targets and improved on their performance last year. The on-going commitment of all staff, coupled with the assistance of Planning Committee, has very much helped to achieve this.

Major applications: 35, No. determined in 13 weeks target:

Performance – 100%

Minor applications: 194; No. determined in 8 weeks target:

Performance – 98%

Other applications: 614, No. determined in 8 weeks target:

Performance – 95%

Pre-Planning applications

Whilst there are no targets set by the Government, the service commits to responding to these enquiries within 4 weeks and our performance in 24/25 indicated that 60% of responses achieved this. For those that did not, this was generally to allow the applicant more time to submit further information for review. This response rate equals that set by Government for major planning applications (60%), but the service wants to improve this target moving forward.

Planning Enforcement

Whilst there are no specific targets set by government. **436** cases were closed in the last financial year as follows:

333 planning enforcement cases

Performance **60%**

103 untidy land cases.

Performance **59%**

This demonstrates that despite the complexities of breaches of planning the team are working with members to resolve cases that are of concern to their constituents.



Looking Ahead

The Government has recently brought forward The Planning and Infrastructure Bill. This Bill recognises that planning committees play a vital role in allowing residents to have their say about planning proposals. The bill wants to support the work of the planning committee whilst also providing an opportunity for additional resources to be provided to local planning authorities. In the forthcoming months, work will be undertaken to provide additional support and training to members and identify areas within the planning service that require further resources to support high quality and timely decision making.

The Council will continue to strive to deal with planning applications in an effective and efficient manner and to increase the response rate for pre-application responses. We will also seek to investigate and resolve enforcement complaints raised by members and their constituents and we hope to engage with members in the forthcoming months in relation to further improvement towards direct action for untidy land. We are also committed to service improvement and so will be working towards a digitised questionnaire to gain more feedback from our customers about the service we provide.

The continued support and pragmatism shown by Committee Members is invaluable for the service to continue to maintain and improve our performance and customer satisfaction levels achieved to date.

