

Feasibility of additional Committees

At its November meeting (Min. 25.11.20), councillors had requested inclusion of Planning and Staffing Committee(s) as a matter for consideration on a future agenda.

Planning

Currently, all planning matters are dealt with at Full Council (the parish council holding 7 full meetings each year).

Whilst most consultations have a response time frame of three weeks, in practice, most applications can be scheduled for the next available full council meeting, dates either falling within the consultation period, or an extension having been agreed directly with the planning officer.

Additionally, some more limited matters may be dealt with under delegated authority, as summarised below:

Planning Delegations

- a. Authorisation to call any extra meetings of the Council, having consulted with the Chairman of the Council, for the purpose of considering any urgent planning application(s).
- b. Preparation and submission of responses (in consultation with either the Chair or Vice-Chair) to minor planning applications
 - i. Householder Planning Application(s) and associated Listed Building Consent (HH& LB)
 - ii. Works to Trees protected by TPO's, or Tree Preservation Order Applications (TPO)
 - iii. Works to Trees in a Conservation Area (TCA)

where it is not possible to call a meeting within the timeframe of the consultation or an agreed extension with the planning case officer; and
- c. To apply for planning consent for tree works to be carried out by the Council.

On average over the past three years, full council meetings, officer delegations and the addition of two extra-ordinary meetings, have been sufficient to respond to all planning applications notified to the parish council.

Year	No Planning Applications	Full meetings where applications considered	Extra-ordinary meetings necessary where planning considered	Matters dealt with under delegated authority
2025	25	6	3	1
2024	20	6	2	2
2023	16	7	2	0 – No delegations
2022	21	5	4	0 – No delegations

On average, taking into account preparation of agenda, reports, and minutes, each meeting takes 16 hours, this is in part due to the more detailed reports on Planning matters that are now being prepared to take into account Wickhambrook's Neighbourhood Plan.

In my view, planning matters are best considered at full council meetings, (particularly given that these are matters which are more likely to be engaged with by residents of the parish) where all councillors may represent their views (and those of residents who have approached them), thus being more representative and democratic.

The establishment of an additional committee when the parish council is not at its full complement (currently at 75%) brings with it additional risks:

- Ensuring that any meeting is quorate
- Impact on the workload of existing councillors
- Impact on the workload of the clerk, limiting the delivery of other ongoing projects and services.

Staffing Committee

Currently, the adoption of any new policies relating to staffing are considered by full council, as they should be. The only other matters currently brought to full council are the annual pay award (for noting, it being established within the clerk's contract) and, where applicable, annual increments.

Should succession planning be a matter future parish council meetings (and the establishment of a recruitment panel necessary) this would in most cases be achievable within the short to medium term.

For the reasons stated above under planning, given that the parish council is not at its full complement, this matter would best be deferred and reviewed when either:

- The parish council is operating with its full complement of councillors; and/or
- There is an established need for succession planning.