

Session 2

Politics of Planning

Cllr Adele Morris and Cllr Sean Anstee

The Attractions and Challenges of being a Planning Committee member

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What is the attraction of being a planning committee member?

- To be an active part of the decision making process
- To help protect local heritage, assets or green spaces
- To input your local knowledge
- To help shape the future of your area



What are the challenges of being a planning committee member?

- Understanding why officers recommend something for approval that isn't in the local plan/policy compliant
- Explaining to residents why you can't always say "no" or why their objections aren't valid
- Keeping up with the bigger picture, locally and nationally



What goes wrong at committee?

- Decision making is swayed by resident objections and not valid policy reasons
- Councillors don't agree with officers' interpretation of the planning policies
- Councillors refuse an application but don't have any planning grounds for doing so



Why does that happen?

- They may be under pressure from other politicians or their own local residents to vote a particular way



- Some councillors may not have had enough training to fully understand the planning process/policies
- Some may not have read the papers in detail – councillors often work full time

A Southwark Example



- Elephant and Castle Shopping Centre
- Recommended for approval
- Deferred

- Improved? & approved
- Approved by Mayor
- Judicially reviewed?



Finally.....

- No matter what declarations are made at planning committee about decisions being impartial, not whipped etc., planning IS political – councillors can lose their seats through making the “wrong” planning decisions
- The committee is there to make the final decision, using a combination of officer advice and their own interpretation of policy
- After all, what would be the point in a committee who are just there to rubber stamp the officer recommendation?

Thank You

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