

**Councillor Anne-Marie Simpson
Cabinet Member for Planning**

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Dear colleagues,

I hope you're all well and successfully balancing the various challenges of personal, work and councillor life during the Covid-19 pandemic.

I wanted to write to you to give you my thoughts on the recent changes to the council's system for determining planning applications (the "scheme of delegation"), which were made by the Chief Executive under emergency powers as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

While the changes were brought in as a response to the challenges presented by the pandemic, they'll also help to strengthen the links between council planning officers and ward members and towns and parish councils.

By strengthening those links, people at the heart of the community can better influence how, and what, we grant planning permission.

The vast majority of planning applications that are referred to planning committee have always been as a result of a town or parish objection.

One of the changes therefore sets out that where a town or parish objects to a minor application, the planning officer will contact them to discuss it and see if they can find a suitable resolution with the developer. If they can find a resolution, the officer will potentially then be able to determine the application using delegated powers – meaning the town or parish council has been able to positively influence the application to ensure it's suitable to their community.

The local ward member can request to call the application in to be heard at committee within 28 days of its registration. Town and parish councils are therefore encouraged to discuss any continued concerns with their local ward member and request, where appropriate, that the application is called in.

This strengthens the links between town and parish council and ward members. It also means the impact of applications on local communities is the focus for

applications going to committee rather than the previous “one size fits all” approach to the automatic calling in of applications.

It's worth bearing in mind that the ward councillor would not need to agree with the view of the town or parish councillors or attend the planning committee meeting on their behalf but would ensure that there are adequate material planning considerations to justify calling in and referring of the applications to the planning committee. Where a ward member requests an application is called in, the Head of Planning, committee Chair and Vice Chair and the ward member will discuss and decide whether it will go to committee or remain as a delegated decision.

All major applications (i.e. 10 houses or more, commercial space of over 1,000 m² or any sites over a hectare in size) that are recommended for approval will still be referred to the planning committee where the town or parish object and their concerns cannot be resolved through discussions with the officer.

For the avoidance of doubt the following types of application would still automatically be referred to the planning committee:

- Large-scale major applications of over 200 homes, where they are full or outline planning applications.
- Any application that is recommended for approval which represents a significant departure from policies in the development plan or the views of a statutory consultee.
- Applications for minor and major applications where the owner/applicant is the council, a ward councillor or member of staff and objections have been received

The council will be reviewing all of the changes set out above after six months.

If you have any questions about the changes, please feel free to get in touch with me, or you can email democratic services: democratic.services@southvale.gov.uk.

Yours sincerely



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