



City of Winchester Trust

Planning Appraisal Group Guidelines

Introduction

- 1. Purpose:** When local government reorganisation in 1974 combined the previous City and District Councils as one authority (confusingly called Winchester City Council), Winchester lost a level of local representation in comparison with the district's small towns and rural parishes. The Trust formed a selective planning application monitoring group (later renamed PAG) to provide this representation as far as planning matters are concerned, without trespassing on the wider role of ward councillors.
- 2. Role:** The Trust Council is ultimately responsible for all planning policy as advised by the Planning Policy Group. PAG has delegated responsibility for appraising all the weekly planning applications within the City boundaries and commenting to the Planning Authority, without reference to the Trustees or the Planning Policy Group due to the tight programme of WCC meetings. It is therefore particularly important that monthly reports are made to the Trust Council, when questions of policy or principle may be raised.
- 3. Range:** The bulk of PAG appraisals are planning applications for individual buildings and small developments.
- 4. Presentations:** Some projects likely to have a major impact on the City will also be the subject of presentations by the applicants to special panels composed of available Trustees and PAG members. Generally this will be at the request of the applicant prior to an application being made or on the recommendation of the planners. PAG will still appraise the application when it is made, taking into account the comments made at the presentation, although they may reach a different conclusion.
- 5. Large developments:** Projects on a much larger scale than experienced until recently, including peripheral housing estates, redevelopment of urban areas and major facilities, are in the first instance dealt with and commented on by members of the Planning Policy Group reporting to the Trust Council.

Principles

Since the Trust's primary goal is to preserve the character of Winchester, its guiding principle for development is that it should be in character with Winchester both visually and functionally. The Trust recognises that changes of style over the centuries are a major characteristic of Winchester so it would not wish to stand in the way of further changes by only favouring traditional styles. However, it believes that change has previously been a slow and piecemeal process, with buildings replaced here and there as they became

redundant, so maintaining the texture of street frontages. Comprehensive 'house-style' redevelopment across several frontages is not in character for an historic town such as Winchester, and continuous frontages need to be visually broken up in some way. So, whilst it is always safe to build in the same materials and scale as adjoining buildings, over the years there have been many examples of interesting contrasts, and this form of liveliness must not be ruled out if the new building is good enough.

Policies

1. The Trust has presumptions in favour of the following:–

- a) A very strong case must be made if demolition is proposed, and its replacement must also be simultaneously considered.
- b) The retention of an old facade on an otherwise new building should be a last resort where restoration or good new architecture appears unattainable. It should never be an excuse for the non-essential gutting of a period interior.
- c) Traditional local materials, pitched roofs, etc. are preferred for infill in historic streets, but a really good innovation can also be appropriate.
- d) The design of a new building may be
 - i. completely modern provided it is in scale and sympathy with its surroundings
 - ii. in an appropriate traditional style expertly executed
 - iii. a clever and deliberate combination of the two.
- e) In all cases it is important that the design should be a composition whose elements relate to the whole, which in turn relates to its context.
- f) Retention of road frontages, since the shapes and enclosures of spaces between buildings are just as important as the buildings themselves. Road widening or narrowing can completely change the character of a street.
- g) Avoiding the felling of otherwise healthy trees, but the replacement of very aged trees is acceptable given that Winchester is very short of the next generation of trees.
- h) Avoiding the loss of garden areas for use as car parking, but where this is unavoidable, space for the growth of large trees should be kept, and planting of indigenous species made a condition of approval, as well as adequate protection for existing trees during building work.
- i) Have interesting spaces and good urban landscaping.
- j) The principles of good urban design should apply to any development involving a group of buildings. The Trust has a preference for 'streets and squares' development that creates surroundings that encourage neighbours to communicate with and care for one another, where the difference between private space and public realm is clear, where cars do not dominate and where there is a distinctive character to the development. This is sometimes summed up as 'place-making'.

2. Importance of comments

PAG comments are important because

- they communicate the Trust's view to the Planning Authority
- they keep the Trust Council and members informed

- they record the Trust's views for future reference
- they communicate the Trust's views to the public via the City's planning website, the Trust's website and its publications.

To achieve these aims the comments must be clear, concise, well-reasoned and consistent with current Trust principles and policies.

3. Nature of comments

Comments made by panel members should represent the Trust's policies rather than their own personal views. To this end it is important that panel members read *Trust News* and other Trust publications to ensure their comments are broadly in line with the policies and principles of the Trust. It should also be remembered that although some government edicts limit the powers of Planning Officers (eg Permitted Development), panels can nevertheless continue to comment on or raise objections to aspects of a scheme of which they disapprove, and we have been encouraged to do this by the Planners.

4. Scope of comments

- a) Our area is the City of Winchester and anything that affects it and its setting, or can be seen from Winchester.
- b) We aim to comment on all applications for Winchester Town, even if it is to say that we have no comment to make.
- c) Special attention should be paid to the Conservation Area, since on occasion neither the Planning Committee nor the Planning Officers can be relied upon to uphold the Conservation Area policies when these conflict with other local interests. (See <http://www.winchester.gov.uk/heritageconservation/conservation/conservation-winchester/> for a summary of policies and a map of the area covered).
- d) Our primary concern is with the external appearance of buildings and their surroundings. The interiors of buildings open to the public are an exception since they can be appreciated by the public in the same way as an exterior. It is not normally our concern to comment on internal planning unless there is a concern about the preservation of important interiors or artefacts. Nor do we comment on the provision of facilities unless the arrangement could be detrimental to those using them or to the public interest, or are clearly damaging to the fabric of a Listed Building (the Planning Officers are expected to have access to details about a building's structure, about which we have no knowledge).
- e) Likely adverse impact on neighbours should be considered since this might encourage a site visit from a Planning Officer and/or alert them to a concern that neighbours (for the sake of good relations) are reluctant to raise publicly.

5. Format of comments

- a) Comments are submitted online to the WCC planning website.
- b) They are also available on standard headed comments sheets in hard copy for distribution to members of the Planning Committee and the files at the Heritage Centre, with each objection to an application on a separate page and the rest of

the comments given in sequential order on the following page(s), finishing with applications on which no comment has been made.

- c) Comments should be well presented, clear and considered, using terms suitable for the opinion of a respected amenity society, and should avoid architectural or planning jargon wherever possible. Comments should aim to be helpful, providing an indication of where improvements might be possible and explanations of any criticisms made, especially when we are objecting to an application. (The Trust therefore uses the words '**OBJECTS** to this application' when we feel an application should be refused.)

6. Procedure

- a) Planning Applications for Winchester Town are reviewed each week by one of four panels working in rotation.
- b) Each panel consists of four Trust members: its chair and comment-drafter, plus three other Trust members, one of whom must be a retired or non-locally practising architect. There is a reserve list of Trust members willing to fill in when a regular panellist is unable to attend. It is essential that enough new panel members are recruited to ensure that there is a full complement of four members available for each panel if a swap cannot be arranged between panel members.
- c) The PAG Chair is responsible for coordinating panel activities and writing up the weekly comments, with discretion to make amendments so that they conform with Trust policy.
- d) When notified of a change made to plans to which we have objected, the PAG Chair will, depending on the scope of the change, respond or consult with the chairs of reviewing committees before responding, or send it to be reviewed again by another panel. Any modification of our position is to be included in the monthly report to the Trust Council.
- e) When an applicant lodges an appeal against a refusal by the Local Planning Authority, the PAG Chair normally only writes to the Planning Inspectorate in support of a dismissal if we have objected to the original application. On the rare occasion that we disagree with the Council's decision a letter can be sent supporting the scheme. A copy of the letter to the Inspectorate should also be sent to the Chair of the Trust, to the administrator of the Trust website and be filed at the Heritage Centre.

7. Conflicts of interest

A conflict of interest could arise if a panel member has a personal interest in any property near to the site for which a planning application has been made and which may be affected by that application. Every panel must prevent a conflict of interest affecting decision-making. To this end a panel member should declare any such interest at the beginning of the panel meeting and the panel chair should take what he/she considers to be the appropriate action. In deciding what course of action to take where a conflict of interest arises, the chair of the panel should seek to ensure that the panel

- always makes its decisions only in the best interests of the Trust

- is aware of the impression that its actions and decisions may have on those outside the Trust and so seek to protect the Trust's reputation
 - is able to demonstrate that they have made decisions in the best interests of the Trust and independently of any competing interest.
- a) If the planning application is significant or there is a risk that it will be controversial, the appropriate step is likely to require the withdrawal of a conflicted member from the room before the application is discussed. In such a case the chair may, before there is any discussion of the application, allow a conflicted panel member who is withdrawing, to provide any information about the application which is considered to be relevant.
 - b) The chair may allow a conflicted panel member to participate where the planning application is insignificant and the interest of the panel member is small and will not adversely affect the public reputation of the Trust.
 - c) If the chair of the panel has a potential conflict of interest over an item on their list they should both inform their panel and let the PAG Chair know. Depending on the significance of the item, the PAG Chair may either assign that item to a different panel or seek a second opinion.

Panel chairs should be aware that the presence of a conflicted panel member can affect trust between members, inhibit free discussion and might influence decision making in some way.

The Trust welcomes informative comments from local people, but must avoid being influenced by vested interests or personal matters. Individuals who believe their interests are being threatened by proposed schemes are advised to contact their Ward Councillors, who have more influence over such matters.

Planning Document References

The overall planning framework is set by the Local Area Plan Parts 1 & 2 which can be found at <http://www.winchester.gov.uk/planning-policy/>

This site has links to further supplementary planning policies. WCC has quite a number of these and is not entirely consistent in its naming which can make it difficult to search their website for them. PAG members should know what these cover and be ready to refer to them when it seems relevant. A site which catches many of them is: <http://www.winchester.gov.uk/planning-policy/supplementary-planning-documents--spds-/>

Documents there include:

- High Quality Places
- Design Guidance for the Control of Shopfronts and Signs
- Car Parking Standards
- Broadway Friarsgate Planning Brief
- Affordable housing

There are also local area design statements or planning frameworks such as:

- Sleeper's Hill Local Area Design Statement

- <http://www.winchester.gov.uk/planning-policy/village-design-statements/sleepers-hill-local-area-design-statement/>
- Stanmore Planning Framework
<http://www.winchester.gov.uk/planning-policy/evidence-base/planning-frameworks/stanmore-planning-framework/>
 - HMOs in Stanmore Article 4
<http://www.winchester.gov.uk/planning-policy/a4d-hmo/>
 - Winnall Planning Framework
<http://www.winchester.gov.uk/planning-policy/evidence-base/planning-frameworks/winnall-planning-framework/>
 - Chilbolton Avenue Local Area Design Statement
<http://www.winchester.gov.uk/planning-policy/village-design-statements/chilbolton-avenue-local-area-design-statement/>
 - St Barnabas West Neighbourhood Design Statement
<http://www.winchester.gov.uk/planning-policy/village-design-statements/st-barnabas-west-neighbourhood-design-statement/>
 - West Fulflood and Oram's Arbor Neighbourhood Design Statement
<http://www.winchester.gov.uk/planning-policy/village-design-statements/west-fulflood-oram-39-s-arbour-neighbourhood-desig/>
 - St Giles' Hill Neighbourhood Design Statement
<http://www.winchester.gov.uk/planning-policy/village-design-statements/st-giles-hill-neighbourhood-design-statement-revis/>

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