



PLANNING USER GROUP (PUG) SPECIAL MEETING, 16 April 2020 SURVEY FINDINGS

Background

The Government has introduced new regulations requiring LAs to continue the operation of their planning functions during the state of emergency. This involves a re-think of how public engagement will work while social distancing is in force. David Scourfield (Chief Planning Officer) and Councillor Peter Mason (Housing, Planning and Transformation) convened a video conference with residents' associations and community groups to test the technology and gather input to the Draft Position Statement for the new arrangements. The conference call took place from 3.00 – 4.30 pm on Thursday, 16 April 2020.

Ealing Matters followed up the conference call with a survey of its member groups, both those able to attend and those who were not.

Survey objectives

The objectives of the survey were:

- To assess the technical quality of the call and any issues with the technology
- To assess participants' broader experience of the call
- To evaluate the proposals contained in the Draft Position Statement (attached)

Method/sample

We developed a short online self-completion questionnaire comprising ten questions using www.surveymonkey.com. We emailed the Ealing Matters membership inviting them to participate in the survey via a link.

Fieldwork dates

16 – 19 April 2020

Analysis of response

The questionnaire identified respondents in terms of the group/association to which they are affiliated (Q1). 21 member groups have provided views. 18 of these responded to the questionnaire within the timeframe plus one unaffiliated individual. Two further member groups provided comments but did not complete the questionnaire. Their comments have been included where relevant in the analysis.

Findings

The findings in the pages that follow summarise the three key question areas and are aggregated and anonymous.

Please note that this is a qualitative survey. Its aim is to explore the range of opinion rather than the weight of opinion among those who responded. That said, the questions dealing with participation (Q1), satisfaction with technical aspects (Q2), the importance of and satisfaction with key recommendations of the Draft Position Statement (Qs7 and 8) are quantified and indicate the relative strength of feeling among respondents.

21 April 2020

Q2 Did you take part in the PUG online meeting on Thursday, 16 April?

Two-thirds of respondents were able to join the meeting. It is a particular concern that, among those who did not, for two it was because they did not find out about the meeting in time and for one it was because they were unfamiliar with video conferencing.

	All who responded
Base:	(n = 19)
Yes	13
No because I had something else I had to do then (e.g. work)	3
No, because I didn't find out about it in time	2
No, because I didn't know how to join/I'm not used to video conferencing	1
No, just not interested	0

Q3 Please indicate how satisfied you were with the following technical aspects of the meeting.

There was strong dissatisfaction among respondents with the ease of joining the meeting, with more than half 'not at all satisfied'. They were also more dissatisfied than not with the 'ease of taking part in the discussion'. Respondents were more satisfied with the sound and video quality of the meeting, although not resoundingly so.

	Ease of joining the meeting	Sound quality	Video quality	Ease of taking part in the discussion
Base: all who responded	(n = 18)	(n = 18)	(n = 18)	(n = 18)
Very satisfied (4)	1	3	3	1
Quite satisfied (3)	1	9	7	2
Not very satisfied (2)	4	1	3	4
Not at all satisfied (1)	9	0	0	4
Not applicable	3	5	5	7
Weighted average	1.60	3.15	3.00	2.00

If you were dissatisfied with any technical aspects of the meeting at Q3:

Q4 What particular issue(s) did you have with the technical aspects of the meeting?

Issues with joining the meeting	Possible solutions
<p>Didn't receive the link First link provided wrong</p>	<p>Need to ensure that the correct link is provided when the meeting is first set up</p>
<p>Correct link only provided after the start of the meeting Needed several attempts to join even with the correct link</p>	<p>Would be good to have a period, say 15 minutes, before the scheduled start of the meeting when people can assemble ready to begin promptly.</p>
<p>Difficult to get MS Teams to work with or without downloading the app/other apps (e.g. Skype, Zoom) easier Safari (Mac browser) doesn't support MS Teams, had to switch to Chrome while trying to connect</p>	<p>Need precise joining instructions for people unfamiliar with video conferencing/MS Teams, including software requirements and a link to relevant MS Teams support and/or a simple guide with screen prints</p>
<p>Chair's wifi link dropped Possible to take part in a Zoom event using a landline No tech support</p>	<p>Investigate parallel telephone participation</p>
Issues with sound quality	
<p>Poor quality sound from some participants Difficulty finding the mute setting</p>	
Issues with video quality	
<p>Poor quality video from some participants Video froze several times Possible to see only four participants simultaneously with no 'gallery' feature to see all participants (vs Government able to display all Cabinet members/journalists taking part in daily briefings) Inability to see participants on screen inhibits asking questions Computer does not have a camera</p>	
Issues with taking part in the discussion	
<p>Lack of 'show hand' facility as in Zoom makes participation more difficult than it should be Difficulty of working out how to ask questions</p>	

Q5 Thinking now of your experience of the meeting apart from the technical aspects, what, if anything, did you feel was good about it? Please describe fully below.

Overall, participants thought it good that the meeting had taken place and that the Council's planners were trying to engage with residents' groups and overcome the IT problems related to video conferencing. Community and special interest group engagement was felt to be critical during the planning of so many major developments in Ealing.

Several people commented that participants were polite, better mannered than in normal meetings (possibly due to a lack of familiarity with the system) and did not talk over each other. The conversation was felt to be open. Seeing people on video enabled people to put faces to names and that was appreciated, and the meeting was easier to follow as everybody felt closer – more audible, more visible – than in a meeting room.

There was interest in these meetings continuing in this format, especially if the lockdown is to go on for some time. Council office proficiency was expected to increase with usage, and there was evident potential for these meetings to become a useful forum for seeking views from the wider community, possibly replacing the equivalent face-to-face meetings.

Q6 And was there anything that you would have changed about the meeting? What was that? Please describe fully below.

Key criticisms of the meeting in order of the number of mentions were as follows:

Meeting scope and focus:

The meeting tried to cover too much. It was originally set up to deal with emergency measures affecting planning (9 April), but was changed on the day of the meeting to include the Local Plan (a huge issue in itself) and the Council's more general response to the emergency. (Not everybody realised that there was actually an agenda.) These issues were each believed to merit their own meeting. The briefing on the Covid-19 response was felt to be both irrelevant and far too long, eating into the time available for actual planning issues, in particular the detail of the Draft Position Statement. It was felt that the agenda needed to focus on the concerns of residents' groups and provide the possibility to push the politicians to answer.

Meeting management:

Many participants felt that the meeting was poorly managed, failing to follow the agenda and ultimately descending into a free for all. Participants would have preferred a more disciplined approach, e.g. taking questions and comments and arriving at action points on one agenda item at a time rather than going person by person on any topic at the end. It might have helped the Chair to have someone to help screen questions from the chat function. Participants also wanted greater interaction with the officers, specifically to hear more about how the planners are working at the moment, how they can engage with them and about progress on the review of the Local Plan.

Lack of conclusions/action points:

Excessive scope, lack of focus and poor meeting management made it difficult to know what the meeting was for and what conclusions could be drawn and action points agreed. It was felt that this could be clarified if a note of the meeting were prepared and circulated to participants.

Getting the most out of the technology:

Some suggestions:

- Allocate one of four panes on screen to displaying the agenda including timings and what point the meeting has reached to help enable every item to be covered.
- Provide a screen print guide on (for new users of MS Teams) how to log on, how to submit questions/comments during the session and how to view them in real time, how to mute/unmute, how to log out – increasingly important if the Planning Department/Council make more use of MS Teams.
- Show relevant background documents as part of the meeting.

Other comments:

- Very short notice of the meeting. Some groups still not included on the mailing list despite repeated requests.
- Relevant documents should be shared well in advance.
- People without computer software should be able to join in. A lot of the population (older, poor without access to IT) will be disenfranchised if the Council continues to operate in this way.

Q7 The Draft Position Statement explains how the Planning Department will deal with different elements of the planning process during the current emergency. Please indicate how important each element is to you and your group.

The following table sets out the elements in order of how important they each are to Ealing Matters member groups.

	Consultation on major applications	Planning committee meetings	Consultation on prior approval applications for larger residential extensions	Consultation on other (non-major) applications	Planning committee site visits
Base:	(n = 19)	(n = 19)	(n = 19)	(n = 19)	(n = 19)
Very important	18	14	14	12	12
Quite important	1	4	3	6	4
Not very important	0	1	2	1	3
Not at all important	0	0	0	0	0

Q8 Please indicate how satisfied you are with the plans for dealing with each of these elements in the Draft Position Statement.

Member groups were more likely to be dissatisfied than satisfied with the plans for each element as articulated in the Draft Position Statement. Dissatisfaction was particularly intense with regard to the section dealing with Planning Committee site visits.

	Consultation on major applications	Planning committee meetings	Consultation on prior approval applications for larger residential extensions	Consultation on other (non-major) applications	Planning committee site visits
Base:	(n = 19)	(n = 19)	(n = 19)	(n = 19)	(n = 19)
Very satisfied	0	0	1	0	0
Quite satisfied	5	3	6	6	3
Not very satisfied	7	9	7	8	7
Not at all satisfied	7	7	5	5	9

Q9 If you are dissatisfied with any of these plans, why is that? (Please indicate which element(s) you are referring to with each comment.)

Dealing with the different elements of the plan as set out in the Draft Position Statement:

Issues	Suggestions
General	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not sufficiently thought through/lack of detail about the new system/fails to address concerns • Unclear who does what and where the monitoring responsibility lies • Not confident it will work/ensure that ‘the widest range of local residents and groups can participate’ • Real danger of the proposed system being abused • Planning department felt to be very much on the developers’ side • Need to go back to first principles and Probity in Planning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council needs to announce prominently on its website and in Around Ealing that the system is changing and how. PUG could have helpful input
Consultation on major applications (formal)	
<p><i>Notification method:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Posting planning notices on lamp posts inadequate as notification of a planning consultation (many unable to leave home for the next two months) • Print copies of newspapers inadequate vehicle for public information, e.g. difficult to find hard copy of Ealing Gazette • Is there a register of RAs/community groups that groups can join to be emailed notifications? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Post formal site notices routinely on planning website • Use Council’s social media platforms to update regularly and encourage people to register for emails on planning updates • Replace Ealing Gazette with digital platform of Ealing Today • Door-to-door leaflets: need to specify to whom and when in relation to the consultation these will be delivered • Posters need to be in areas with high footfall during this period, e.g. supermarkets, pharmacies, newsagents • Leaflets/posters need to be placed well before any consultation and include a telephone number and postal address so that people can request an information pack and respond postally as well as online
<p><i>Conduct of consultations:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘Cannot be left to major (or minor) developers to do as they pay lip service. Something like 6-8 hours of consultation, six months apart, poorly advertised and with only sales people there to answer questions not good ‘ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developer micro-websites must contain full detail of the development, i.e. building heights in storeys, number/type of units, number/type of tenure, amenity space, commercial space etc. • There should be scope on the micro-site to ask questions and for these to be included with answers in an FAQ section • Should be a way of residents sending comments via Councillors to Planning Department, even if relayed by phone

Issues	Suggestions
Planning committee meetings	
<p><i>Referrals to planning committee:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concern that fewer applications will be referred to committee 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reassurance from Councillor Mason that major planning applications will not be decided via delegated powers
<p><i>Access to planning committee meetings:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many people do not have the technology to participate (older, poor without access to IT/speedy broadband) • Holding planning meetings ‘virtually’ when people have many other concerns not conducive to public engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning committee meetings should be discontinued until the full lockdown is over
<p><i>Functioning of meeting:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What if there are problems with the technology as in the PUG meeting? • Lack of detail about how speakers (applicant/objectors) would be dealt with 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reassurance from Councillor Mason that no planning committee meetings will be held unless the technical issues are resolved.
Consultation on all applications (other than major applications)	
<p><i>Duration:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extended consultation period already implemented before the PUG meeting without reference to residents’ groups • Worried that large scale and contentious plans will go under the radar 	
<p><i>Notification method:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asking residents to notify neighbours beside and behind them absurd/laughable as applicants have good reason not to inform them 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there a register of RAs/community groups with an interest in the area and how do new groups join? How to ensure that they are contacted?
<p><i>Scope:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Notifying immediate neighbours only is inadequate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Depending on the application consultation should involve more than just immediate neighbours, e.g. households opposite where front of property would change (installation of dormer window, change to front boundary), property on a corner site • Each separate address in blocks of flats needs to be notified • Residents’ associations should be involved in determining who should be consulted
Site visits	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vital to maintain site visits for planning committee items to enable committee members to understand the real space and access issues. Otherwise members will be voting on development about which they are poorly informed – unprofessional • Google Earth not up to date and won’t see objection posters in the vicinity • No opportunity for residents to meet those on the visit to express their concerns 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning decisions should be paused until site visits can be conducted • Believe measures could be put in place to enable them to happen with people keeping to a safe distance • Need to extend site visits to items being considered under delegated powers, i.e. residents’ associations should have an opportunity for a formal on-site meeting with the case officer

Q10 Please add any other comments you would like to make below.

Additional comments covered a range of themes as follows (organised in order of the weight of comment):

Implementation of the DPS

- The DPS was felt to be drafted in haste, lacking in detail and to require more work before people could have confidence in it. It was felt that success is often determined by how the detail is managed.
- Releasing the final version only four days after the meeting felt premature. There were concerns with the timetable, namely that the new provisions will be insufficiently robust and inadequately tested to avoid being challenged.
- Much was felt to depend on whether the procedures and actions in the draft are implemented as planned and whether they work.
- It was felt that Ealing should follow up with Camden on how their live-streamed planning committee meetings work.
- There needed to be more clarity as to how long and which proposals would last just for the duration of the epidemic, and whether they would be reviewed thereafter. There were some good proposals for additional consultation activity on major and other applications, most of which is not just applicable during the emergency (e.g. better community involvement, better representations of proposals etc.). These should be retained.

More meetings dedicated to the Local Plan

- Separate meetings are needed on the Local Plan, the Local Plan Review (including the development database) and Conservations Areas as these are huge topics in their own right.
- There was concern that preparatory work has already been commissioned on the Local Plan that will set the context for the consideration of future planning applications, that the agenda for the LDPAC meetings are already being fixed and that residents' input will be limited to commenting on the draft.

Council engagement with residents

- There was some cynicism regarding the willingness of the Council to engage with residents despite the DPS claim to the contrary. This was fuelled by:
 - The perception that communication is top-down rather than meaningful consultation
 - Failure to manage conflicts of interest between planning policy and local political priorities
 - Failure of Chief Planning Office to reply to correspondence from individual residents' associations
 - Failure to engage during the formative period of plan making
 - Failure to involve Ealing residents in the Local plan since 2010
 - Failure to produce a Local Development Scheme

PUG agenda

- It was suggested that residents' groups should control/contribute to the agenda, e.g. by emailing concerns a few days in advance.
- It was considered poor business practice to circulate the agenda on the day of the meeting.

Participation in PUG meetings

- The needs of the community and those of planning consultants/agents/developers are different, so there should be separate meetings for each group. This was a PUG meeting request before David Scourfield joined the Planning Department.
- Councillor Dabrowska joined the meeting but should not have been allowed to ask questions.

Other

- Residents affected by a planning application should be allowed to meet with the developer from the start to have a better understanding and a chance to put forward views.

DRAFT POSITION STATEMENT

Ealing's Planning Service and how planning applications will be dealt with during the Covid 19 Crisis

Maintaining a planning service

Ealing council's planning service remains open and operational and the continuation of the service is consistent with the Government's latest advice as set out in a letter to Councils from the Ministry of Housing, Community and Local Government' Chief Planning Officer in March 2020.

This letter set out the Government's expectations in respect of various planning matters and in particular the planning system's decision making:

'We understand that some councils are concerned about the implications of COVID-19 for their capacity to process planning applications within statutory timescales. It is important that authorities continue to provide the best service possible in these stretching times and prioritise decision-making to ensure the planning system continues to function, especially where this will support the local economy.'

We ask you to take an innovative approach, using all options available to you to continue your service. We recognise that face-to-face events and meetings may have to be cancelled but we encourage you to explore every opportunity to use technology to ensure that discussions and consultations can go ahead. The Government has confirmed that it will introduce legislation to allow council committee meetings to be held virtually for a temporary period, which we expect will allow planning committees to continue.

The service will continue to process and consult on planning applications. Processes remain fundamentally the same with some changes to the way we will be consulting with local communities on planning applications. The service is making use of available digital technology with planning officers and staff working from home.

All activities carried out by the Planning Service during the Covid 19 crisis will adhere to the Government's requirements and guidance on social distancing, public health and wellbeing, in order to help maintain the health of our staff and those in our community.

Planning is a statutory service and one that must be provided by a Local Authority (i.e. Ealing Council) to its resident community and to other individuals and organisations wishing to bring forward development proposals. Regardless of its statutory nature, the Council considers the planning service will be especially important once the current crisis is over and when the nation has moved into the recovery phase. Projects with planning approval that can move into the construction phase swiftly will enable new jobs to be created, boost the construction sector and facilitate economic growth, all of which will be sorely needed following this crisis. Added to this is the imperative that the pipeline of new housing and 'genuinely

affordable housing' must not, if at all possible, be closed off, as this will have significant impacts on Ealing's ability to ensure much needed future provision for its community.

In addition, the vast majority of applications are of a smaller nature submitted by or on behalf of Ealing's residents or small businesses. It is important that the service considers their existing and future requirements alongside the views of 'local communities' in a wider sense.

Listening to our community will continue to be a fundamental part of the application process. The following sections outline the way in which the Council's Planning Service will process, consult and engage and decide planning applications and place additional expectations on applicants, agents and developer teams for the larger major applications. These provisions complement the Council's existing Statement of Community Involvement which can be viewed at:

https://www.ealing.gov.uk/info/201164/local_plans/615/statement_of_community_involvement_sci/1

Consultation on Prior Approval Applications for larger residential extensions.

The statutory process for dealing with these types of applications is the only process that requires a direct letter to neighbours either side of the application property giving 21 days to submit comments. No alterations to this process are required in relation to Covid 19 circumstances.

Consultation on all applications (other than Major applications- see below).

Consultation through the display of Site Notices in the vicinity of the application site will continue. The standard consultation period for a planning application is 21 days. Normally, the planning service will consider representations after this 21-day period and up to the time of the actual decision is made, although late representations are not encouraged as the planning officer need adequate time to assess all considerations before a decision is made. The Government expects decisions to be made within 8 weeks of the day they are considered valid by the Council, and 13 weeks in the case of major planning applications (normally those proposing 10 or more residential units).

It is recognised that, at this time, there are concerns that individual householders will not be aware of planning applications in their neighbourhood due to their inability (particularly if they are self-isolating or shielding) to leave their property and thus view site notices.

Consultation and engagement on planning applications will undoubtedly rest on a combined effort and understanding from the relevant stakeholders: planning officers

and senior managers, Councillors, particularly ward members, community groups and individual residents.

The following revisions are being made to the process to address these concerns. These revised processes will be reviewed as lock down restrictions become relaxed or removed

1. As from 14th April 2020 the formal statutory consultation period for inviting comments on all planning applications will change from the minimum 21 days (3 weeks) to 42 days (6 weeks). This revised period will apply to the dates advertised on site notices, press adverts and in our regular communications with Conservation Area groups and Resident Associations.
2. It is recognised that there will be applications that have been submitted to the council since the lock down on 19th March 2020 and thus are now out to consultation based on the normal 21-day consultation period. These applications will not be determined until a 42-day period has passed.
3. The Council writes to the applicant at the start of the application process to advise that all the necessary documents have been submitted and that the application is valid. At this stage the applicant will be asked to notify the immediate neighbours (immediately to the sides and if relevant to the rear) of their planning application. The applicant will be advised they can download a copy of the formal site notice from the Councils Public Access Module at <https://pam.ealing.gov.uk/online-applications/> for Planning Applications and use this to post through neighbours' doors if possible. Where an agent has submitted the application, they will be asked to contact their client to carry out the above notification. It may be more appropriate for the applicant to use electronic means to make neighbours aware (email, Facebook, WhatsApp etc) of applications.

It is not possible to make this revised process a mandatory requirement upon the applicant or agent, for reasons relating to the staff resource needed to deal with a monitoring process and for legal reasons.
4. Consultation letters will be sent to Conservation Area Groups and residents associations on all planning applications and they will be asked to forward these on to their contacts in the local community.
5. Planning officers will stress the need for applicant/agent involvement in the process during their initial conversation on allocation of the planning application.
6. Produce a 'how to' guide to take residents through the use of the Planning Access Module and the way in which individual resident, Resident Associations

Conservation Area Panels and Councillors can keep track of submitted applications in their area.

7. Produce a 'how to' guide for Councillors for the use of the Planning Access module and specifically the use of the weekly list of applications at ward level.

Consultation on major applications

The Council would expect several large regeneration schemes to be submitted during or just after the Covid 19 period. For the reasons set out above it is considered appropriate for the Council to process these applications as they are submitted.

In taking this position the Council notes that most, if not all, major regeneration scheme that result in an application during this period would have been in the 'pre-application state for some time, normally measured not in months but in years. Local communities would have been made aware of the proposals and would have already voiced opinions. It is considered that with enhanced engagement by the applicant team the process of formal consultation (which will continue through the site notice process) and informal engagement can be managed to an appropriate level.

For major planning applications the Council's formal statutory notification/consultation process would entail putting up a number of site notices. Although the exact number would vary from site to site, depending on the nature of the scheme and the geography of the area around the application site, it is not unusual for 20 or more site notices to be erected. In addition, formal notices are placed in the local press and relevant community groups are directly notified.

Enhanced consultation and engagement from the developer team may involve a combination of the following:

1. The development of a 'micro' website specifically for the development scheme. This would present details of the proposal, using 3D and computer modelled images, outline the pre-application engagement that has taken place and their consideration of any comments, and provide a secondary source for local residents to highlight any issues or concerns they have. The developer would be required to feed back these comments to the Planning case officer.
2. Providing a link from the Council's home page (or appropriate webpage) to the Councils Planning Access Page for the application.
3. The developer's team to discuss and agree with the Planning Service their Statement of Community Involvement which may include the following:
 - o Virtual meetings with ward councillors to provide information on the development scheme

- Door to door leaflet/newsletter drop, with information on the aforementioned web-link
 - Re-engage with all local and political stakeholders who responded to the pre app consultation.
 - Place a minimum of 3 x local newspaper half-page adverts (or the equivalent electronic format) during the course of the application,
 - Also, to explore if a local news site or forum is available to do the same,
 - Use 'Pop up' static exhibitions at suitable public places/buildings and/or on the proposed development site itself.
 - Poster campaign on notice boards at public venues e.g. outside of library buildings (or other buildings with notices boards or suitably secure areas) with web links to LBE and development websites,
 - Re-engage with all local and political stakeholders who responded to the pre app consultation.
4. The use of digital or virtual platforms and software to inform, engage and consult the widest range of local residents and groups.
 5. The use of virtual imagery (using VuCity or other software platforms) showing proposed schemes in the context of their locality, drone camera footage of the site and its surrounding, and video presentations packages for planning committee.

Decision making

Decision will continue to be made having regard to the policies within Development Plans and taking into account the representations made by individuals and groups.

Planning Committee.

The workload of the Planning Committee represents approximately 2% of all planning applications submitted to the Council. The Covid 19 crisis is not likely to see any change in this figure as the Planning Committee tends to deal with major regeneration schemes.

The Government has recently (4th April 2020) enacted legislation that allows Council decision making to be done without Councillors being physically present at a meeting. This can be viewed at: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2020/392/made>

The Council likewise considers it important that decisions continue to be made and therefore it will be conducting some meetings, including Planning Committee, through the use of the digital platform – MS Teams.

It is considered that enhanced digital information on major applications that may be produced by the developer team (see Points 4 and 5 under the section 'Consultation

on major applications' above) will add to the depth of information normally produced by Officers in their presentations to Committee. Officers will also explore the use of Google Maps and Google World during their presentations and in any 'question and answer' sessions.

Planning Committee Site Visits

It has been the 'custom and practice' of Ealing Council to have publicly advertised members site visits on the Saturday morning preceding the Planning Committee meeting. This practice is not a statutory requirement and, in many ways, has become an additional means for the public to put forward their views outside of the regulated procedures of the Planning Committee itself, which are designed to ensure fairness and transparency for all. It is also noted that:

- not all application sites that are on a Planning Committee agenda are visited (a decision on which sites to visit is taken by the Chair in consultation with senior planning managers),
- that it is not mandatory for all Planning Committee members to attend site visits
- that on occasions (the last being the March 2020 Planning Committee) a meeting may be held without any site visits being conducted.

A physical site visit cannot be fully replicated in the virtual world. Whilst Google Maps/World are useful it should be noted that the imagery may not be totally up to date. In addition, to trying to replicate physical site visits, through virtual officer presentations to members, such presentations would in effect be replicating part of the Planning Committee meeting itself, and thus would not add anything to the decision-making process.

Planning Committee will only deal with major planning applications during the period of the Covid 19 crisis unless 'call in' requests are agreed by the Chair of the Planning Committee in consultation with senior planning managers. However, it is considered that this happening will be extremely rare during this period.

The Committees in May, June and July are likely to consider applications that have been submitted for some time and that would have been subject to 'normal' consultation and engagement.

Major regeneration schemes that are in the pipeline for submission immanently or in the near future are likely to be scheduled for Planning Committee from September 2020 onwards. Decisions on when to take applications to Committee are based on a range of considerations and the impact of the Covid 19 Crisis, and the Recovery phases will be fully explored before such decisions are made.

The planning committee schedule shows the forthcoming meetings from 20th May 2020 onwards. Please refer to the Planning Committee webpages for further updates regarding forthcoming meetings in 2020:

https://ealing.cmis.uk.com/ealing/Committees/tabid/62/ctl/ViewCMIS_CommitteeDetails/mid/381/id/15/Default.aspx

Officers are in the process of considering the working arrangements for a 'digital' planning committee in terms of member involvement and voting, officer presentations, public speaking and public viewing.

It is important to note that several other Council meetings will have already taken place in a virtual/digital format prior to the May Planning Committee and therefore procedures and ICT would have been tested beforehand.

END

Draft prepared by:

David Scourfield

Chief Planning Officer

15th April 2020