

Inner North West Community Planning Officer

The purpose of this report is to update Members of the Area Committee on the work of the Community Planning Officer. The Committee is asked to consider if it wishes to continue the funding of this post in 2007/08.

1.0 Background Information

1.1 At the Inner Area Committee meeting of 14th October 2004, it was agreed to extend the Community Planning Officer post for 2 years beyond 2005, subject to receiving six monthly monitoring and evaluation reports.

2.0 Main Issues

2.1 The Planning Officer's role has developed over time in order to respond to changing needs. The main functions of the role are listed below and give an indication of the current workload.

2.2 Development Advice

2.2.1 One of the of the main functions of the position has been to react to current development activity and advise Members and community groups about the acceptability of planning proposals, including how best to resist those proposals which are unacceptable by identifying conflict with planning policy, guidance and other material planning considerations. Advice of this nature has been provided either in person via briefing sessions/residents meetings, over the phone or in writing. Advice is not limited to formal applications and is accessed by community/residents groups as and when development proposals affect them, but more regularly by Elected Members. Increasingly, there is more involvement in pre-application proposals, attending community consultation sessions and providing advice to Members and the public. Information about planning applications is also regularly posted electronically through community websites and by email communication.

2.3 Participation

2.3.1 Attendance at a number of working groups has been necessary and is ongoing to ensure strategic planning issues are taken forward and important information is communicated. The following list includes those groups that consider planning matters:

- Headingley Centre Strategy Group – Responsible for developing the strategy for central Headingley – 'Headingley Renaissance', which is now acknowledged by the City Council as a community document and is utilised in discussions between the Council and stakeholders. Although the group has not met for some time, ongoing involvement is intended to assist with the realisation of action points.
- Shared Housing Group – Responsible for implementing the 'Action Plan' developed by the Private Rented Sector Strategic Working Group and stakeholders, which aims to resolve conflict between students and host communities.

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- North West (Inner) Area Committee Sub Group (Planning) – Formed to consider planning matters specific to the area and to communicate relevant planning information to the Area Committee. A special group has recently met to focus on the creation of Neighbourhood Design Statements and a planning framework for the Kirkstall Valley. It is intended that this will require ongoing assistance and involvement.
- North West (Inner) Area Committee Sub Group (Transport) – The group has recently been resurrected and ongoing attendance is intended as there is a clear link between transport and planning matters.
- Private Rented Sector Strategy Group – Acts as an interface between the City Council and landlords/agents, considering issues around HMO Licensing, planning policy and the letting boards code.

2.3.2 In addition, attendance has also been made at a number of other local forums (Headingley Forum, Hyde Park and Woodhouse Forum and Kirkstall Burley Forum), community association and residents meetings in order to provide planning advice.

2.4 *Education and Policy*

2.4.1 A key element of the post has been to explain how the planning system operates, what is and is not a material planning consideration and how changes in local and central government policies are implemented at a local level. Recently, there have been a number of amendments to the planning system and there will continue to be changes which are pertinent to future development in the locality. By improving local knowledge, stakeholders are better equipped to take part in the planning process and to challenge unacceptable proposals, both now and in the future.

2.4.2 A number of area based planning initiatives have now been published, including the Headingley Centre Strategy, 'Headingley Renaissance' and the Far Headingley, Weetwood and West Park Neighbourhood Design Statement. Headingley Renaissance' contains a number of action points likely to result in further, more detailed initiatives, designed to improve the public realm, town centre vitality and viability and the amenity of local residents and users. Similar Neighbourhood Design Statements are currently being proposed for other parts of the area.

2.4.3 The former Office of the Deputy Prime Minister approved a Direction to restrict To Let boards in part of Inner North West in August 2005, which was subsequently implemented by the Council from 1st January 2006. A consultation working group was set up, involving key stakeholders in the drafting and implementation of a code of operation. Close liaison has continued with Planning Services and Compliance to educate agents and landlords and develop the Council's approach. The code has recently been subject to a review meeting and progress is currently being made on revising the guidance document and resolving matters of concern.

2.4.4 Assistance has also been provided in conjunction with the Development Department in considering how the Area of Housing Mix (AoHM) may work in practice. It is intended that collaborative work takes place with case officers on dealing with applications and appeals affected by the AoHM.

2.4.5 An increased degree of cross working has been taking place, intended to optimise the benefits of HMO Licensing under the Housing Act 2004 and the requirements of the Licensing Act 2003, involving dialogue with other areas of the Council.

2.5 *Monitoring and Compliance*

2.5.1 Monitoring and reporting breaches of planning in terms of unauthorised works or those developments not built in accordance with approved continues to take place. Analysis of appeal decisions also forms part of the monitoring role to ensure stronger reasons for refusal are developed where necessary or to influence future thinking on development proposals. The Planning Officer post has been used by residents and community groups as a point of contact for planning issues where initial advice is sought and subsequent enforcement action may need to be taken.

2.6 *Workload*

2.6.1 A significant amount of the work generated is in central Headingley and the residential areas of Hyde Park and Far Headingley. This is partly as a result of the focus of Headingley town centre within the locality and also the prominence of issues relating to student housing and a number of major developments in the area. More work is starting to be generated in the Woodhouse and Little London areas due to increased development pressures in those areas. However, the work balance may continue to vary over time when developments at Kirkstall District Centre, Kirkstall Forge, Woodside Quarry and the Little London PFI progress further.

2.7 *Potential areas of change*

2.7.1 The vast majority of work carried out by the Community Planning Officer post is distinct from the work carried out by Officers in Planning Services. The greatest degree of overlap with Planning Services is in relation to the development and review of the To Let boards code.

2.7.2 Members are asked to comment on any other areas or projects they feel the post should become more or less involved with.

3.0 **Recommendations**

3.1 The Area Committee is asked to consider if it wishes to continue the funding of the Community Planning Officer post.