

Report to Policy and Resources Committee

Monday 2nd September 2024

Agenda Item 9 - Display of Planning Applications

Faversham Town Council should consider putting documents on public display for the South East Faversham planning application and agrees to refer the issue to the Policy and Resources Committee to recommend best course of action.”

The background to this was that during spring 2024 a resident attended a planning meeting in order to lobby the Town Council to run a public exhibition displaying documents produced by the Duchy of Cornwall as part of its planning application for the SE Faversham site. This followed at least one other parish council deciding to hold public exhibition about the Highsted Valley major application in the west of the borough and an informal planning meeting where councillors asked that clear reasons for not holding a planning exhibition be publicly stated.

At the Planning Committee the Mayor stated that the Town Council had decided not to have an exhibition for legal and financial reasons. This followed advice given by the planning consultant retained by the Town Council. However no formal decision was taken by the Town Council on this issue through any of its committees and no public statement was issued by the Town Council afterwards explaining why it wasn't having a display.

The Duchy of Cornwall planning application is a major issue for the town and it is reasonable to assume that the fact that no formal position in relation to holding an exhibition had been agreed and that the view expressed on behalf of the Town Council at the meeting was not publicised, ran the risk of discrediting the council.

To avoid similar problems in the future it is proposed that the committee

1. Note the advice of its planning consultant that:

- The responsibility for publicising the application rested with SBC as the planning authority rather than the Town Council as a consultee;
- The Town Council would have had to display all documentation available on the public portal to avoid the risk of having an apparent bias in favour or against the application
- There would have been significant costs involved in making all of this information available for the public to view.

2. Agree that the Town Council should issue a statement explaining why it didn't run a public exhibition about the Duchy application based on the advice above.

3. Recommend that:

- The terms of reference for the Planning Committee are reviewed in order to give it clearer responsibility for this type of decision.
- A planning protocol is developed laying out the general procedures the Planning Committee will adopt as a consultee on planning applications.
- The annual review of committee terms of reference and scheme of delegation ensures that all policy and procedure decisions, which are a matter of significant public interest, can be taken by an appropriate committee of the council, with a clear public statement issued afterwards, if appropriate, explaining what the council's position is and what the reasons for it are.

Cllr Julian Saunders