



1.0 BIRMINGHAM CIVIC SOCIETY PLANNING COMMITTEE
TERMS OF REFERENCE: as approved 12.05.2020

1.1 Helping to make Birmingham better

Our aim is to support the development of Birmingham for the people who live, work and visit the city through the provision of professional, fair and constructive advice.

The committee's aims and objectives are derived from those of the Civic Society:

The Birmingham Civic Society is established to promote the City of Birmingham as an attractive city by stimulating interest and pride in its history and well-being.

The charity aims to achieve this purpose through the following objectives:

- 1) *Promote high standards of planning and architecture;*
- 2) *Educate the public in the geography, history, natural history, culture and architecture of the city;*
- 3) *Secure the preservation, protection, development and improvement of public amenities and features or areas of historic or public interest in the city;*
- 4) *Promote the concept of active citizenship among the people of the city.*

We support sustainable development and promote high quality design, acting as a critical friend to developers, professions, the local authority and communities.

We engage with communities to provide support in planning matters which are a cause of concern. We welcome invitations by developers and land owners who wish to receive professional, fair and constructive advice at an early stage of design resolution, to reduce potential friction in the planning process and achieve the best overall result for the city.

1.2 Policies

In the first instance, policy will reflect International (e.g. ICOMOS), National (e.g. NPPF) and Local (e.g. Birmingham Development Plan) planning guidance. Areas of interest include but are not limited to:

- Sustainability (Environmental and Economic)
- Conservation (Historic Environment)
- Architecture (in terms of design quality)
- Land Use
- Transport and Infrastructure
- Community, Diversity & Inclusion

Generally we will weigh the importance of conflicting areas of need to the same degree as they are considered within the wider planning system – for example the importance of historic buildings in comparison to sustainability. We are a *planning* committee, rather than a *conservation* committee.

The committee will however be critical where local needs are not appropriately served by existing guidance, and will seek to advise and have influence where policy is seen to be failing.

We will work to engage with causes, buildings, spaces and communities which are otherwise overlooked or lack support.

1.3 Consultation & Influence

The committee welcomes the opportunity to be consulted on;

- Planning Applications (including Listed Building Consents, etc)
- Planning Policy
- Master Plans (Local Authority led plans for land use)
- Third party proposals (Developer led, or community led plans for land use)
- Ad-hoc proposals within the broad remit of its interest

Civic Societies are not 'Statutory Consultees' and thus there is no duty for applicants to consult the committee, nor for planning officers to seek our view.

The committee will be vigilant however, and comment on applications or ad-hoc matters which are of interest. This may involve campaigns, for example for the protection of non-designated historic assets.

1.4 What we wish to be consulted on

There is no concrete definition for the types of development which the committee is interested in, either in terms of scale or nature, however as a guide we are interested in being consulted upon proposals involving:

- Tall Buildings
- Work affecting historic buildings, places or monuments (whether designated or not)
- Major Applications (i.e. defined as major applications by the Local Planning Authority (LPA))
- Work which may have significant environmental impacts
- Work which may have significant impacts on communities

1.5 Performance

As the committee is not a statutory consultee, our influence is derived from, but not limited to the following factors;

- Historic Role
- Value of advice
- Fairness
- Formality

The committee must protect and enhance its reputation for the above by;

- Upholding the status of the Civic Society in planning and other matters.
- Fielding a committee of experienced and trained professionals able to understand applications technically, and able to sensitively reflect upon consultations.
- Avoid perceptions of unfairness, declare conflicts of interest where they exist.
- Reflect and be sensitive to the needs of diverse communities, reflect the views of our constituency (those who live in, work in and visit Birmingham).
- Promote high quality design – not be seen solely as negative campaigners.
- Combat perceptions of industry bias or conflicts of interest by including lay members.
- Respond to consultations in a constructive, timely, and professional manner.

1.6 Working with others

The committee will informally engage with other groups with allied interests, for example Amenity Societies (such as The Victorian Society), Birmingham Conservation Trust, or local / special groups formed for a particular purpose. The committee will seek to share views and information to coordinate responses where appropriate.

1.7 Responding to consultations on policy

The committee will engage in any consultations on policy, whether this is following formal invitation or an open invitation to the public / groups. The method for doing so will depend on that set out by the consultee, but may be by letter, survey response, focus group or interview. Initially, members of the committee will be invited to show their interest in responding, and from those wishing to participate, a response will be formulated.

1.8 Responding to formal consultations on planning applications

The Civic Society receives formal consultations from the LPA which are collated by the chair into a 'tracker' distributed approximately every two weeks. Consultations are filtered by the chair to determine whether they are of interest, and any conflicts of interest declared. Committee members are requested to respond within a timeframe to allow formal responses to be issued electronically to the planning officer (normally within 21 days of the consultation being made), also declaring any conflicts of interest. Responses are collated and drafted by the chair, or other delegated member. Normally these are not shared to the committee, unless requested, or considered sensitive.

1.9 Responding to invited consultations on planning applications

The committee welcomes invited consultations, ideally at an early stage of development (say RIBA Stage 2 or earlier) where our input may have influence. Consultation may be delivered in various ways (and with the agreement of the applicant);

- Written – responding to a document sent by email. The document will be circulated to the committee, and comments collated by the chair and issued as for a formal consultation.
- Meetings or site visits – two or more members of the committee will attend a meeting or site visit, and comment upon a presentation. Comments and advice will be collated and sent to the applicant. Proposed consultees will be declared ahead of the meeting, in case the applicant is concerned by potential conflicts of interest.

The format of the consultation will likely be affected by the level of resolution in the proposals, and a meeting may be more suitable where these are at any early stage of development.

The committee should strive to provide advice which is friendly, constructive, supportive, and otherwise upholds the qualities set out elsewhere in this document.

Invited consultations are provided free of charge.

1.10 Privacy in consultations

It is assumed that the applicant may wish to publish written correspondence in future applications and this is welcomed.

Where consultation are invited prior to a Planning Application being submitted the committee must treat as confidential any information issued during consultation, treating it as having 'pre-app' status, private to the author and not for publication in any manner. Where advice is given, this will not be shared with third parties (for example amenity societies).

If we wish to share a view on a proposal with a third party, this will only be upon material within the public domain, for example once a Planning Application is submitted.

If we hold discussions with Local Authority offices these will remain private and be considered 'without prejudice'.

We may share the responses sent to planning officers, or other formal responses, as these are themselves within the public domain. BCC do not publish these on their website, but have a right to do so.

1.11 Rewarding high quality design

In order to promote and reward high quality design, the committee awards two prizes, the Renaissance Award and the Haywood Award.

Renaissance Award – for reuse of a historic building (given annually).

Haywood Award – for a development, group or work of an individual which has been completed over ten years ago and has had significant positive impact on the city (given biannually).

We will support developments which are of a high quality through formal comment.

1.12 Who is on our panel

The majority of members are experienced, practicing professionals, and all give their time to the committee free of charge. The panel changes regularly due to the commitments of its members, but an ideal size is 12 to 15 people as providing sufficient resource while remaining manageable as a voluntary organisation. We will strive to promote diversity in all respects within the panel, while favouring ability and relevance in the skills and experience of its constituents.

1.13 Lay people

Historically the planning committee was composed in order to act as a fair and unconflicted party in development. Fairness remains a key strength, as does quality of advice. In order to maintain this tension, we will seek 'Lay' members (that is not of the traditional construction professions) who have suitable skills and experience to comment on consultations. A key role of these members will be to question, and remain critical of the formal planning process and policy, and the ingrained assumptions of the 'construction professional' members.

1.14 Professions

We will endeavour to field a committee of members from the following professions (in no particular order), or with these skillsets:

Planning Professionals
Architects
Urban Designers / Landscape Architects
Conservation Architects or Historic Building Consultants
Commercial Surveyors / Quantity Surveyors
Building Contractors / Buildability
CDM / Health & Safety
Sustainability / M&E
Environmental Consultants (Acoustic, Contamination)
Structural Engineers
Transport Consultants
Community Engagement Professionals

1.15 Joining the panel

The committee welcomes speculative applications, but will also seek or advertise for suitable parties. Applicants will initially be met by the chair and invited to attend a meeting as a guest. If the interest in joining the panel remains mutual, the chair will invite comments from other members of the committee before proposing the person to the trustees. Approval by the trustees is required to join the committee. Members should provide a short biography giving experience, qualifications and interests for publication on the BCS website and circulation to interested parties.

1.23 On the Role of the Civic Society;

“...to bring public interest to bear upon all proposals put forward by public bodies and private owners for building, upon the laying out of open spaces and parks, and generally upon all matters concerned with the outward amenities of the city and district. It will insist that taste is a thing that matters, and if any offence against taste is challenged at the outset, great good will be done, and converting of mean and unlovely parts of the City will gradually follow...”

First President of the Birmingham Civic Society, the Earl of Plymouth, 1918