

Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service (GCSPS)

Guidance Note on the Officer Scheme of Delegation – May 2025

Introduction

This guidance note accompanies the GCSPS scheme of delegation to provide a simplified explanation of who makes decisions on planning applications.

With over 5000 planning decisions to make annually, it is impractical and unnecessary for committees of councillors to consider all the planning applications submitted each year. Best practice advice and national guidance therefore encourages the delegation of decision making to appropriate officers of the council. The document that transfers the authority to make decisions to officers is known as a Scheme of Delegation.

The scheme of delegation sets out how applications are to be decided, including the circumstances in which applications will always be referred to a planning committee for decision, or will always be decided by officers.

The key objective of this scheme is to ensure that the planning committees devote their time to those applications that involve complex planning considerations requiring matters of balance and judgement, or where the decision is one that in the interests of transparency and probity, take place in public forums – such as when the application is made by the Council itself.

Decision making

Decisions on planning matters in Greater Cambridge are made via three routes:

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| Route 1 | The decision is made by the relevant Planning Committee |
| Route 2 | The decision is made by planning officers following consideration of whether the matter should be dealt with by the planning committee or by officers via a “delegation panel” |
| Route 3 | The decision is decided by planning officers under powers “delegated” to officers from the Planning Committee |

Route 1 – Planning Committee

Applications that are automatically referred to South Cambridgeshire District Council or Cambridge City Council Planning Committees

- Where the Officer recommendation is one of approval, but the Application represents a significant departure from the adopted development plan.
- Where the applicant is an elected Member or an Officer of the relevant Council, or close relative or family member of either of such persons or where an Application is made on their behalf.
- Where an Application is for the substantial demolition of either a listed building (within the meaning of the Town & Country Planning Act (Listed Buildings & Conservation Areas Act 1990) or a building of local interest.
- Regulation 3¹ Application
- If, in the opinion of Officers there are special planning policy considerations, complex, significant or of strategic importance.

¹Where the relevant council is both the applicant and determining planning authority for its own development; ²A Planning Committee that contains councillors from both Cambridge City Council and South Cambridgeshire District Council to consider applications for major developments in defined areas on the edge of Cambridge.

Applications that are automatically referred to the Joint Development Management Committee (JDMC)²

- If the application is for one hundred (100) or more residential units, or 1,000m² or more non-residential development on a site that is one hectare or more.
- The application includes primary roads, open space, or strategic infrastructure.
- Regulation 3¹ Application
- Where the Officer recommendation is one of approval, but the Application represents a significant departure from the adopted development plan.
- Where the applicant is an elected Member or an Officer of the relevant Council, or close relative or family member of either of such persons or where an Application is made on their behalf.
- If, in the opinion of Officers there are special planning policy considerations, complex, significant or of strategic importance.

Route 2: Delegation Panel

The Delegation Panel comprises of the Joint Director of Planning and Economic Development in consultation with the Chair and / or Vice Chair of the relevant Council's Planning Committee.

The purpose of the meeting is to consider whether the "call in" request or the comments received mean that the application should be decided by the Planning Committee rather than by officers.

Any member is permitted to make a written representation to the Delegation Panel, in relation to an application within their ward, concerning whether the application should be heard by Planning Committee.

Upon request and with the Chair or Vice Chair's agreement, any member (or a member on their behalf) can attend the Delegation Panel to explain the reasoning for calling-in a proposal in relation to an application within their ward.

In respect of route 2; the process works as follows:

(a) Within 21 days of the application¹ consultation beginning, any Ward Member, or a Parish Council requests that an application is considered by Planning Committee.

Or

(b) More than 5 letters on material planning grounds are received on an application¹ that cannot be addressed by a condition and seek a decision at odds with the likely determination by officers.

¹excluding those application types listed in the 'delegation to officers' set out in route 3

Either event under (a) or (b) triggers the applications referral to a "delegation panel"

The panel will consider the following factors in their consideration of whether the matter should proceed to the Committee:

1. Relevant material planning considerations raising significant planning concerns.
2. Significant implications for adopted policy.
3. The nature, scale and complexity of the proposed development.

4. Planning history.
5. Degree of public involvement.

The meeting is led by the Joint Director of Planning and Economic Development, or their representative, and, following a panel discussion using the factors above, the Joint Director (or their representative) decides whether or not the application warrants a committee decision. A record of the decision is made and shared with the party making the request. A copy of the minutes is placed on the GCSPS website as a record of the considerations taken into account in determining the request for referral.

Route 3: Decided by Officers under delegated authority

Delegation to officers

Any application for

- prior approval
- telecommunications
- advertisement consent
- lawful development certificates
- householder development
- discharge of conditions
- S96 non-material amendment
- permission in principle
- tree works
- S19 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.

In respect of route 3: for those application types listed above the decision is made by officers in line with the scheme of delegation. This transfers the authority to make decisions from the Planning Committee to the Director of Planning; and then to those officers that the Director of Planning authorises to make such decisions on their behalf. However, there are some exceptions to the list above including:

- where the applicant is a member, officer or close relative of a member or officer
- demolition of a listed building or building of local interest
- where the relevant council is both the applicant and determining planning authority for its own development (Regulation 3 application)

- where officer opinion is the application should be determined by planning committee because of special planning policy considerations or the complexity of the application or it is of significant and / or of strategic importance.

The scheme of delegation provides either that decisions not automatically referred to committee (route 1) pass either through a delegation panel (route 2) or where a call in or material representations does not trigger such a requirement, the decision is made by duly authorised planning officers acting in accordance with the scheme of delegation.

Consultations

Consultations are carried out in the same way for delegated items as they are for committee items. The scheme of delegation does not affect any parish council or third parties' right to make written representations, to speak at committee or to liaise with officers and ward members in order to discuss any planning matter.