

Planning & Environment Committee

Report Title:	P&E and CAAC Survey Findings (January 2024)
Meeting Date:	23 January 2024
Contact Officer:	Lizzie Fuller, Committee Services & Processes Officer

Purpose of the Report

1. To provide the results of the survey.

Action Required

2. To receive and note the results of the survey.

Background

3. As reported at the previous P&E meeting, a survey was conducted with members of this committee between 21 December 2023 and 7 January 2024.
4. Thank you to the ten (of eleven) members of this committee who responded to the survey.
5. The results have been analysed and are summarised below for information, along with commentary from Officers. A full breakdown of the results can be found at Appendix A. All responses are anonymous.
6. The intention of the survey was to gather an understanding of the committee's views with respect to P&E's / CAACs functions, processes, and delegations. A copy of this report is being shared with CAAC who are meeting on 17 January 2024.
7. The results of this survey will inform recommendations as part of the wider committee structure review as reported at Full Council on 16 January 2024.

P&E

Topic	Survey response	Officer Comments / Action
Committee frequency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strongest support for keeping a 4-weekly cycle. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A 4-weekly cycle is working well and is manageable – but note 'Delegations' section below.
Officer reports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most aspects of the report were considered helpful. • Most helpful were the Officer Recommendation, Key Issues and TNP Policies • Reports were most useful for Major / Minor 'FUL' applications 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Officers note the findings.

	<p>and Listed Building consent applications.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reports are considered least useful for advertisement consents, variations of conditions and amendments. 	
Delegations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There was no support for all applications to be handled by the committee therefore this shows that Cllrs would support some delegation in the handling of planning applications. • The most supported approach would be to delegate to Officers to respond to applications where the recommendation is to support and the application is not considered to be contentious. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Officers to continue researching other councils who have this approach to establish best practice. • This approach would potentially reduce the length of P&E meetings and workload for officers. • Consideration needs to be given to public participation and transparency in the process
Functions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mixed response. • Strong support to keep planning applications, and have local / regional plan consultations responses, on P&E • Some support for working groups to handle street furniture, parking / transport • Little support to delegate to officers or Chair / Deputy • No clear majority on where Environmental matters should sit. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Officers recognise there is some overlap with committees and working groups. • Reorganisation of the committee / WG functions may avoid duplication of work and provide clearer focus. • Further consideration needs to be given to which committee Environment matters feed into (if any – should it be a theme across all?)
Accessing planning applications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Majority access via OneDrive. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Officers note there are difficulties with the OneDrive and security concerns. • The downloading of plans from SODC’s website to the OneDrive is time consuming – Officers to trial using shortcuts and continue exploring alternatives to the OneDrive for information sharing.

CAAC

8. At the previous P&E meeting (19/12/2023) “It was agreed that Officers would collate views from this committee on CAAC and provide an update at the next committee meeting.” The findings from the survey are below.

Topic	Survey response / comments	Officer Comments / Action
CAAC strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledgeable about Thame • Observant / valuable insight • Monitor Conservation Area changes • Involves the community • Independent advice 	<p>All comments noted.</p> <p>Overall, the results show Members recognise the valuable work of CAACs observations to date, whilst also recognising the potential for CAAC to have more influence with a larger and more diverse membership. Officers suggest that an advert be put out to the community to gauge interest in joining CAAC.</p>
CAAC weaknesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opinions not facts • No statutory authority • Duplicates P&E function • Closed group / lacks broader view 	
Suggested improvements / changes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • P&E needs to understand CAAC and work closer with them • More expertise / relevant skills needed amongst membership • TTC needs to market the importance of CAAC • ToRs need reviewing / updating to confirm membership arrangements • Could run an awards scheme 	
CAAC membership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More accredited professionals and those with relevant interests • More diverse • Noted challenge of recruiting new members. 	
TTC – CAAC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strongest support (but not a majority) for keeping as an advisory committee 	

9. At the previous meeting, Cllr Baines referenced a successful Conservation Area Advisory Panel in his previous local authority area. This was Worcester City Council and their Conservation Advisory Panel's Constitution can be found at Appendix B for Members to consider.

Next Steps

10. Officers will prepare some draft terms of reference for P&E for consideration at a future meeting as part of the committee review work. The functions of P&E and any delegations need to be agreed before the meeting frequency can be determined.
11. P&E have expressed support to reinvigorate CAAC. One option as a first step would be for TTC and CAAC run a publicity campaign to gauge interest from the community about joining CAAC. This would be with the view to increase CAAC's membership numbers and diversity, and to see whether there is sufficient interest and suitable candidates amongst Thame's community. If so, this would justify the continuation of CAAC and review of its Terms of Reference, which would need to be updated to reflect new membership and any change in its remit.

Resource Appraisal

12. There are no resource implications other than officer time to progress relevant actions.

Risk Assessment

13. There are no significant risks associated with any of the proposals.

Legal Powers:

- Local Government Act 1972, Section 101
- Local Government Act 1972, Section 102

Recommendation

- i) To receive and note the results of the survey.*
- ii) To consider running a publicity campaign to gauge the community's interest in joining CAAC.*