

REPORT UNDER RULE 2(vi) OF THE COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULES

Report by Councillor J Hanrahan, Design Advocate & Chair of Planning Committee.

Last year my report was focused on the City's first Design Awards. These celebrated the innovation, and integration into the existing built environment, achieved by the City's Architects on behalf of their clients and in conjunction with the City Planners advice and our discerning Planning Committee. This year I am concentrating on the behind the schemes discussions.

Due to the reputation that our City Planners have gained for being proactive in our approach to development, the Council is generally approachable all round and open to new ideas, concepts and materials. Our officers within Planning Services act for the Council as Local Planning Authority and are generally at the forefront of development discussions. Pre planning application discussions often move unacceptable proposals to become not only acceptable but admirable ideas.

The pre-application process seeks to engage with planning consultants, architects, developers and others as soon as possible in the development timeframe for any site in the city in order to guide development to ensure that it is of an appropriate scale and design. This will not always lead to an agreeable outcome but officers pride themselves on the design knowledge and understanding that they hold as a team. Often it will not be a single officer that liaises with external parties and the team will vary from one application to another; everyone has a part to play, including technical consultees.

Planners do not profess to be architects but maintain a good understanding of the wider implications of development, of which the aesthetics of a development is only one part, and seek to balance these competing issues in order to achieve the right development in the right location. However, our planners try to avoid instruction or lecturing in terms of design, so have avoided design training being targeted to those submitting applications, as this will be taken care of by respective professional bodies such as the Royal Town Planning Institute and the Royal Institute of British Architects.

Members may recall participating in several seminars on time for design and the design process a couple of years ago and these may be repeated as Councillors change after elections. Senior Council Officers are due to be meet representatives of RIBA regarding the Urban / Design Room to enhance the exchange of design ideas in the City.

Despite our pre-application discussions, and regardless of the professional experience of applicants, it will sometimes be that the Council needs to say no to

development. This can be an easy decision but there will be times when a judgement is finely balanced and emotive issues such as design often come into play (some might say subjective too). It is therefore the role of the Council's officers and the Members of the Planning Committee to understand and determine when this time is right. We may still get it wrong too, if the Planning Inspectorate overrules the Council's decision. However, officers can point to the fact that it is seldom that planning appeals are allowed on the grounds of design.

The Design Awards presented in 2017 could be seen as a barometer of the success of the process but as this was the opening year of the awards, only the future will tell. The planning is due to start for the next awards, which are hopefully due to be held next year and there are inevitably lessons that can be learnt from the awards process. As one would expect, it would only be right to try make the awards an even bigger success this next time round.

As with the last Design Awards, officers will need to start the process of highlighting projects that we believe should be added to a longlist under several categories. It may well be that these remain as they were for the last awards but this will depend on the selections made and the judging undertaken by the panel. Only applications that have been approved by the City Council, not won on appeal, can make the shortlist. Nonetheless, it will be an exciting process!.

Jim Hanrahan (MRTPI MIED) March 2018