

## **Development Services Portfolio Holder Update**

### Service Plan Performance

The service area is continuing to perform at a high level with regard to planning application performance with the number of planning applications determined within the statutory time scale again remaining at over 90%. There also continues to be significant schemes submitted resulting in sustained high levels of fee income.

There has been an increase in the number of successful appeals against officer and committee decisions including high profile residential proposals which officers sought to vigorously defend. Officers prepare regular reports to planning committee to give an opportunity to review the decisions.

The number of enforcement cases on hand throughout the year has remained at a level of up to 150 open investigations. This has increased from previous years.

Following its introduction last year, the revised procedure to monitor section 106 agreements and contributions is working well with those procedures being kept under review and fine-tuned particularly in respect of the level of collaborative working that is required with the County Council and other partners. A further internal audit of this area of work was undertaken in March this year which concluded that there was a substantial level of assurance reflecting the progress that has been made to date.

The new householder 'drop in' service which provides free pre-application advice on domestic extensions, etc. has been well received and continues to be fully booked on a weekly basis.

In line with most other Council's, a charging regime for the provision of non-householder pre-application advice was introduced in February this year and is being kept under review and closely monitored. To date, the income received is resulting in a cost neutral position. The scheme will be considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at their meeting on 28 June 2016.

Late last year, a Land Charges Kiosk service was introduced in the Riverside House reception area, which enables personal search providers to access the relevant information themselves without any input from officers.

As expected, the demand and take up of this service has been very high, which has also resulted in a reduction in the workload and a post on the establishment offered up as a saving.

Within Development Management, Officers are continuing to review processes and procedures to ensure that all areas of work are undertaken as effectively

and efficiently as possible whilst also ensuring a continuing high level of customer service.

The Government continues to press ahead with proposals to move land charges to become the responsibility of the Land Registry in the next few years.

Building Control is now part of a joint service with Rugby and Daventry Councils. This year we have also done a re-structure as a result of the joint service. The workload remains at a fairly constant level which, (despite strong competition from Approved Inspectors), which is positive. Building Control continues to receive positive feedback from clients responding to the customer satisfaction questionnaire, with a very high level of satisfaction.

For Economic Development, market conditions have continued to improve and the vacant units we have reflect that condition. A number of lettings have been made recently, which involve rent free periods to allow the tenant to upgrade the buildings.

In February 2016, Council approved modifications to the Local Plan to address the issues raised by the Inspector in his letter of 1<sup>st</sup> June 2015. This followed extensive work to reach agreement with the other Councils in Coventry and Warwickshire to redistribute unmet housing need arising in Coventry. The Inspector has agreed to a period of suspension and it is anticipated that the modified Local Plan will be submitted to the Inspector in late May/early June in line with the agreed timetable.

Development Services has a permanent part time officer working on HS2, ensuring that the authority is fully engaged with the process, is in a position to deal effectively and appropriately with the related planning applications when they start to arrive and able to assist areas that are significantly affected by HS2 wherever possible.

The Economic Development and Planning Policy parts of the Service have undergone a resign during the year. This has brought these teams together, along with the Corporate Project Officers (previously part of the Chief Executive's office) and the events function (previously part of Culture). This new section is designed to focus resources on growth and prosperity.

### Risks

Risks to the service area are as follows:

Local Plan being delayed or not being adopted with impacts on our ability to defend appeals or resist applications outside the green belt and inability to progress needed development in the green belt

Failure to allocate G&T sites resulting in difficulties in progressing Local Plan and potential for G&T sites being set up in inappropriate locations

Lack of marketing Building Control service resulting in further loss of business to AI's

Failure to progress key corporate projects on time or budget, with impacts on budget savings, additional costs and failure to deliver against corporate priorities

Volume of work – increase in number of planning apps

Difficulty in recruiting professional experienced staff generally

Work Volumes: The volume of planning application and other related work remains at a high level and whilst all staff continue to work as effectively as possible and are fully supported by managers in doing so, there is a risk of increased levels of health and well-being impacts that managers are monitoring closely.

### Workforce Planning

There have been significant difficulties in recruiting experienced staff in specific areas such as planning and building control. We are therefore considering ways of developing staff so that we 'grow our own' expertise in these areas. One example of this has been with a member of staff in Development Management, who was appointed in a trainee role, and has developed into a Senior Planning Officer and is currently at the late stages of her qualifications supported by the Authority. We are also recruiting for an Assistant Conservation Officer role at an appropriate level to assist with the range of heritage-related work within the team but also grow and develop into that role and an Assistant Building Control Officer.

Succession Planning: Historically, Development Services have had some difficult experiences with the lack of succession planning severely impacting on the service, and therefore we are trying to ensure that we have plans in place by training and developing staff to assist in their career development. It is hoped that we will have staff able to step into more senior roles when they become available.

Skills, Training and Competency Needs: Officers are developing a service area training plan following on from staff appraisals, which will provide generic planning training as well as specialist planning training.

### Finance

Development Services achieved the 2.5% saving on discretionary budgets in 2015/16, and for 2016/17.

Within the service plan, there are a number of budget pressures highlighted that are or need to be addressed during the year. The cost of defending appeals is very high as a result of the number and scale of the appeals. Of course, many of the appeals are a direct consequence of not having a local plan in place. There is

a direct correlation to the increased number of applications and fee income, which helps to offset some of the additional cost.

The additional work to progress the local plan will require the Planning Reserves being topped up. There will be a need to carry out some short pieces of work to strengthen our evidence if the local plan continues to progress on the examination.

Finally, we need to consider ways of retaining our current Building Control staff, who are often being approached by the private sector, due to the lack of qualified people in the industry. This review was agreed by Employment committee in December and work is commencing shortly.

The service area has recently taken on a consultant to assist in sourcing grant funding for projects, not just for development services, but for the whole organisation. This is in recognition of the reduction in financial resources in local government, and allows us to identify opportunities to enable projects to be progressed and delivered. This resource is on a temporary basis to measure the output and ensure that it provides value for money. The budget allocated was £50K.

Grant funding application successes achieved during 2015/16 include:

- Racing Club Warwick – support for business plan development, funding applications.
- Creative Quarter, Leamington Spa – EOI application
- Whitnash Community Centre – grant strategy report for WTC
- Cemetery Chapels – grant sources for renovation
- Green Spaces – additional funding sources identification
- St Marys Lands – additional support

Budget: Officers have been involved in additional finance training throughout the year.

Procurement: As part of the training stated above, officers are working closely with the Procurement team to ensure that procedures are improved.

Contract management: Through a significant amount of work and scrutiny of the Contracts Register for the service area by Finance and Audit, the data held is now much clearer and has helped us as a service area understand what needs to be included in the Contracts Register. An up-to-date contracts register is being maintained

Audits: We have had a number of recent audits which have all had satisfactory or substantial ratings.

Risk Register: This is regularly reviewed for the service area. This is also a standing item on our team meetings.

## Work Streams and Projects

### Building Control:

During the year, we have progressed the new structure for Building Control following the merger of the three Councils services. We are also transferring Rugby and Daventry ICT systems onto IDOX which is a major migration process and very time consuming and costly for the joint Building Control service.

The Building Control service is established and recognised by Architects and Builders who continue to use the service as we are able to remain competitive, cost neutral and reactive. Building Control has been partnered with Bloor homes for a number of years and recently won back 150 new houses in Bishops Tachbrook, Leamington Spa, which is worth £25k in fees. We have a strong relationship with Warwick University and the Developers where we have secured the contract to provide the BC Service for the Sherbourne Residential Blocks, the conference centre which is under construction, Sports Hall Hub and 6no extensions to the Art Block. We are inspecting at JLR Honiley a new test facility, and projects at Warwick Hospital. Rugby School has over 30 million to spend over the next few years. Work has recently picked up in Daventry area due to the BC service being more robust, and the competition not servicing their clients effectively.

### Development Management:

Across Development Services there is a need to continually improve the electronic delivery of the services we offer, ranging from development management to the property systems and building control.

Alternative Service Providers within Development Management: The Housing and Planning Bill which is currently going through Parliament proposes the introduction of alternative providers for key elements of the development management service which will add a significant level of complexity into the process and potentially reduce workloads by a substantial amount.

The Council has provided detailed comments in response to a consultation paper issued in respect of the proposed changes and is closely monitoring the passage of the Bill through parliament. Consideration is also being given to the way in which the Council might proactively seek to engage with these changes for example by becoming an alternative provider itself in order to bid for such work in other Council areas.

### Policy:

A number of neighbourhood plans are expected to reach adoption during the year.

We have continued to progress the examination of the local plan. Linked to this we will be submitting the Community Infrastructure Levy and will be commencing the examination process for this. Work to allocate sites for Gypsy and Traveller sites also progressing in with the Local Development Scheme. Also, work is commencing on an Area Action Plan for Leamington.

#### Tourism:

In May 2015 there was the launch of the Destination Management Plan (DMP) for tourism which took place at Kenilworth Castle. The DMP seeks to ensure that all facets of our destination are well managed – as a result of the launch, Neighbourhood Services trained their new Rangers using World Host. Visitor audits have also been commissioned in Leamington and Kenilworth whilst the Warwick audit is currently at the inception stage.

February saw the launch of the Shakespeare's England arrival pier campaign which will be seen by 5million people this year. This was only possible as Birmingham Airport are active board members of Shakespeare's England.

There has been significant activity within the Technology and gaming sectors – including the creation of a new umbrella group for all tech companies – Tech Central. This initiative is being led by Warwick District in conjunction with WCC, and a number of private businesses – the group has recently bid to Midlands Engine for capital to expand the reach, run export events and take cohorts on trade missions. Continued work on the games sector with attendance at events such as Develop Brighton and the London Games Festival, as well as facilitating local events such as Codeaoke and the TIGA event at the Spa Centre in May.

ED&R took part in the South Warwickshire Businesses at Parliament day and took a number of businesses to the event. Good profile for the district council.

The ED&R team has continued to provide support, information and leads for inward investment colleagues. As well as hosting several visits from investors and UKTI, ED&R have attended investment shows such as MIPIM UK and BCSC.

Althorpe Enterprise Hub (AEH) – occupancy is currently at 92%, with 1 small office available (exceeding the optimal target set at 81% for this project, which allows for business growth)

Court Street Creative Arches (CSCA) – is 90% let, with just one small arch available to let.

26HT – is currently 60% let with 3 offices available. A current tenant is looking to expand and take a further office imminently.

Jobs Fair 2016 was very successful with approximately 250+ attendees. Feedback has been positive from both businesses and job seekers alike. We understand that 10 vacancies have been filled as a result of the event.

Support for colleagues developing a Coventry and Warwickshire approach to business support and coaching. WDC will be funding the programme to the tune of £12,000 pa which will lever in 3 times this amount for business support for the district.

Engagement with businesses continues through a number of routes – business networking events, as well as engaging with problem resolution with individual and groups of businesses.

Design and Delivery of a lot of promotions for the town centres around Christmas, including preparation for events such as the 750<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Siege of Kenilworth and the Aviva Women’s Cycling Tour.

Raising sufficient finances for the Christmas lights and bidding towards other funds for enhancements – eg: WCC tourism fund for Christmas Lights in Warwick.

ED&R facilitated and Organised the Chairman’s (and mayor of Warwick’s) welcome reception for the Japanese Rugby Team. The event was covered by a large number of Japanese and International media outlets that resulted in significant international coverage of Warwick Castle and the surrounding area.

During the year, vacancies on the non-operational estate were limited to those that were unavoidable. The Income generation was in line with revised targets set during the year (allowing for the voids).

#### Any Changes Required to Service Area Plan

### **Part 5 – Managing Planned Changes, Major Workstreams and Projects**

<b>Change/Project</b>	<b>Sponsor/Lead Officer</b>	<b>Budget Impact</b>	<b>Impact on other Services</b>	<b>Milestones</b>
Preparing for and managing the HS2 planning application workload.	Gary Fisher	Dependant of the no. of applications and timing/rate of their submission.	Will impact on internal and external consultees on planning applications	Reports to Executive and Council: June 2015  Point at which applications start to be submitted.

It should be noted that as the service area has been through significant redesigns in 2015/16, there will be additional changes to the Service Area Plan to include Corporate projects and Events.