

Overview & Scrutiny Committee

September 2017

Development Services - Policy and Development Portfolio Holder Update

Service Plan Performance

Development Management

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, which is a pattern that has continued over the last few years.

The proportion of successful appeals against officer and committee decisions has reduced slightly from the previous year. Since 1st April 2017 there have been 15 appeals, of which 9 have been dismissed. This may be in part because officers are now more proactive in tracking those decisions and learning from them. Officers prepare regular reports to planning committee to give an opportunity for officers and members to review and learn from the decisions and hopefully reduce the number further.

The number of enforcement cases on hand throughout the year has reduced from an average of approximately 160 open investigations to an average of 130. Officers are proactively working to ensure that cases are handled as speedily and effectively as possible and where cases require no action are responded to quickly.

The householder 'drop in' service which provides free pre-application advice on domestic extensions, etc. and was introduced 2 years ago continues to be well received and predominantly fully booked on a weekly basis. We are also exploring the opportunity of extending this and providing a similar service for businesses in Leamington town centre.

The charging regime for the provision of non-householder pre-application enquiries has now been adopted permanently after a successful trial last year and an additional permanent full time Planning Officer is now in post to lead on this area of work. The income received is currently just exceeding the cost of providing the service and this is being closely monitored.

The Land Charges Kiosk service continues to operate from 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 remains high.

The Government is continuing to press ahead with proposals to move land charges to become the responsibility of the Land Registry and officers are in ongoing preliminary discussions with the Land Registry to bring this forward as speedily and smoothly as possible in 2018.

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. In particular the procedure for publicising planning applications has been brought into line with statutory requirements and the Council's website is being updated to ensure that this is clearly explained for customers.

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. Work is continuing apace to prepare for the introduction of CIL later this year, the income from which will be monitored in a similar way and which is likely to significantly reduce the proportion of contributions being received through section 106 agreements.

Building Control

Warwick Building Control is now an established joint service with Rugby and Daventry Councils. The workload remains at a fairly constant level, with strong competition from Approved Inspector's, Warwick Building Control continues to receive positive feedback from clients responding to the customer satisfaction questionnaire, with a very high level of satisfaction. Income is currently up by 7% higher than this time last year.

Policy and Projects

The Local Plan has now been given the green light by the Inspector. His report finds that, with modifications, our Plan is sound and can be adopted. This provides the framework to deliver around 17,000 dwellings between 2011 and 2029 as well as around 140 hectares of additional employment land. A report for adoption will be considered by Council on 20th September. Alongside this, the Council can now make the case that it has a 6.62 year supply of housing land which may be used in supporting the refusal of applications for housing on sites that are not allocated in the Plan.

The 2017 annual monitoring showed that a record 1098 dwellings were completed during 2016/17. This continues the trends from recent years that has seen a steady increase in the rate of housebuilding across the District in support of the delivery of the Local Plan.

Allied to this, the service has continued to evolve and improve the Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP). The Local Plan inspector has indicated that he is satisfied that the IDP provides a clear basis for planning infrastructure to support the proposed development. The service is now moving towards ensuring this is delivered and putting in place a number of steps to achieve this including a focus on infrastructure that is needed within the next 5 years, the introduction of a CIL charging schedule to sit alongside Section 106 funding and direct work with infrastructure providers to ensure projects are funded and delivered in a timely manner.

The delivery of the Local Plan and the IDP is also being supported by the appointment of two Site Delivery Officers one of whom is focused on working with infrastructure

providers, developers and communities to the south of Warwick and Leamington and the other to start similar work in Kenilworth.

Two Neighbourhood Plans have now been “made” (adopted) in the District – Whitnash and Barford. A number of other neighbourhood plans are progressing well including Kenilworth, Leamington, Budbrooke and Leek Wootton.

The HS2 Project Officer has set up a formal process to deal with applications for related works. Warwick District was the first designated authority in the country and is also the first authority to start to receive those submissions. We also continue to assist areas that are significantly affected by HS2 by liaising with the public and parish councils and ensuring that they understand the process.

Risks

Risks to the service area are as follows:

Local Plan not being adopted will impact on our ability to defend appeals or resist applications outside the green belt and inability to progress needed development in the green belt (it should be noted that this risk is now significantly reduced due to the local plan being found sound)

Failure to allocate Gypsy and Traveller sites resulting in potential for G&T sites being set up in inappropriate locations

Failure to adopt a Community Infrastructure Levy charging schedule thereby restricting the funding options we have to support infrastructure

Lack of marketing Building Control service resulting in further loss of business to Approved Inspector’s

Volume of work – increase in number of planning and building regulation applications

Difficulty in recruiting professional experienced staff generally

Work Volumes: The volume of work generally remains at a high level and whilst all staff continue to work as effectively and efficiently 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. Furthermore, there is currently a restructure in Development Management taking place to address some capacity issues.

Workforce Planning

During 2017 there were significant difficulties in recruiting experienced professional staff. Whilst this has changed more recently, we are considering ways of developing staff so that we ‘grow our own’ expertise in the service 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 having recently achieved a professional qualification supported by the Authority. Another example is the recruitment on an annual basis of a gap year student to assist with specific areas of work where they can gain experience of working within a Planning Team with the hope

that they may decide to pursue a planning career. This initiative is now in its second year.

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 eligible for more senior roles when they become available. For example, Assistant Building Consultants in Building Control have commenced a training programme through the Local Authority Building Control body, and the officers at Building Consultant grade are pursuing full membership of an approved body such as CABE or RICS. This should then put Warwick Building Control in a suitable position for succession planning as it is known that there is a shortage of qualified surveyors in the industry

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

Finance

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

The additional work to progress the local plan has required the Planning Reserves being topped up. There has been a need to carry out some short pieces of work to strengthen our evidence for the local plan examination.

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. Warwick Building Control Audit January 2017 actions have been progressed. They have been recorded on August 2017 Highlight report which will now be produced quarterly in preparation for Project Board Meetings. Conservation and Design audit and Planning Policy audit actions are also being progressed.

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

Work Streams and Projects

Warwick Building Control:

During the year, we have progressed the new structure for Building Control following the merger of the three Councils services. We have transferred Rugby and Daventry ICT systems onto WDC's IDOX system, which was a major migration process, which has been very time consuming and costly. This project has required further actions and should be completed October 2017.

The Building Control service is established and well recognised by local Architects and Builders, who continue to use the service as we are competitive, cost neutral and reactive. 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, 6no extensions to the Art Block, Radcliffe House, and further pre application discussions on 12 new residential blocks. We have established relationships with NAC and securing repeat business. . Rugby School has over £30 million to spend over the next few years and we are working closely with them. We have established good relations with Stratford District Council BC and have pursued projects under cross boundary working which has retained the work and avoided the project going to an Approved Inspector. To promote the service we have put on seminars for local clients and re-launched WBC in June 2017 and presented WBC to local business forum. Staff are encouraged to chase new business and WBC always attends pre application meetings.

Finally, we have been improving performance information systems to monitor the allocation of work more effectively.

Development Management:

Development Management is currently going through a re-structure to provide a structure that is able to meet the increasing demands on the service, in particular the increase in number of planning applications. The new structure will be done in two phases and provides growth in the service.

There is a need to continually improve the electronic delivery of the services we offer in Development Management as it is a very customer facing service.

Alternative Service Providers within Development Management: The Housing and Planning Act 2016 has introduced the trialling of alternative providers for a period of up to five years 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. However, this also means choice to customers, so we will be in direct competition. If we are to shape the service so that it is more efficient and effective, we need to be streamlining what we do so that we are competitive for the future changes.

Although the future of this national initiative is unclear, we are nevertheless mindful that should it come forward, we would wish to be in a position to secure as large a share of the market as possible and potentially tender for work in other nearby Council

areas. For that reason, work to develop the effectiveness of the service is and will remain a priority.

Work will also commence shortly on the designation of the canal Conservation area. We are currently recruiting to the post.

Policy and Projects:

A number of neighbourhood plans are expected to reach adoption during the year including Kenilworth, Budbrooke and Leek Wootton.

In terms of the Local Plan, the focus in the year ahead will be on delivery including supporting the comprehensive delivery of major sites, the funding and delivery of infrastructure and progressing Supplementary Planning Documents. Specifically, it is expected that progress will be made on the delivery of sites to the south of Warwick, the preparation of a Development Brief for land East of Kenilworth. Support for the preparation of planning applications for sites to the south of Coventry and adjacent to growth villages will also be provided. In terms of infrastructure, examples of projects which officers will be actively involved with over the next year are: plans to improve to the Europa Way corridor, improvements to the A46/Stoneleigh junction, the relocation of Kenilworth School and the delivery of the Tach Brook Country Park. Linked to this we will be seeking to adopt the Community Infrastructure Levy Work to allocate sites for Gypsy and Traveller pitches is also an important focus. Work to introduce Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) is also underway and/or planned including parking standards, affordable housing SPD, a review of the Residential Design Guide, Open Space SPD and the Canal-side Development Plan Document.

Any Changes Required to Service Area Plan

None at this stage