

Overview & Scrutiny Committee

March 2018

Development Services

Policy and Development end of year report

Service Plan Performance

Development Management

This part of the service 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% for 2017/18. There also continues to be significant schemes submitted resulting in sustained high levels of fee income, significantly exceeding income for 2016/17 and continuing the pattern of income growth over the last few years.

The proportion of successful appeals against officer and committee decisions has reduced slightly from the previous year. This may be in part because officers are now more proactive in tracking those decisions and learning from them. Officers also prepare regular reports to planning committee to give an opportunity to review the decisions and learn lessons.

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. This is because officers are proactively working to ensure that cases are handled as speedily and effectively as possible and for example that as part of that, cases where no action is needed are dealt with quickly.

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. This new approach has enabled a more responsive approach to sending invoices to developers for payments and data relating to payments due and received are now prepared on a quarterly basis.

CIL was implemented in December 2017. At the time of preparing this report, no income has been received from CIL. However it has the potential to deliver in excess of £15m towards community infrastructure in 2018/19.

The householder 'drop in' service which provides free pre-application advice on domestic extensions, etc. and which was introduced 2 years ago continues to be well received and predominantly fully booked on a weekly basis.

The charging regime for the provision of non-householder pre-application has now been adopted permanently after a successful trial and an additional permanent full time Planning Officer is now in post to lead on this area of work. The income received is currently 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 continues 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 as possible in 2018.

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

Building Control

Warwick Building Control is now an established joint service with Rugby and Daventry Councils. The workload remains at a fairly constant level, despite strong competition from Approved Inspectors. Income levels continue to improve and are forecast to significantly exceed predicted levels for 2017/18. This reflects the success the service has had in maintaining market share. During the year Warwick Building Control has developed a marketing campaign and staff continue to be proactive in promoting the service. The service continues to receive positive feedback from clients responding to the customer satisfaction questionnaire, with a very high level of satisfaction.

Planning Policy

The Local Plan was adopted in September 2017. This provides an up to date and robust policy framework for planning decisions and also provides the basis for proactive work to deliver development and associated infrastructure. Specifically the Plan provides the framework to deliver around 17,000 dwellings between 2011 and 2029 as well as around 140 hectares of additional employment land. Following adoption of the Local Plan the Council can now demonstrate 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.

Following the adoption of the Local Plan, an updated Local Development Scheme has been prepared setting out the plans to prepare a range of supplementary planning documents. Work is already progressing with new parking standards and an updated Residential Design Guide already agreed for consultation.

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 is putting in place a number of steps to achieve this including a focus on infrastructure that is needed within the next 5 years, undertaking detailed infrastructure planning to enable the Regulation 123 list to be put in place and directly working with infrastructure providers to ensure projects are funded and are 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 and agreement to appoint a third. These officers are focused on working with infrastructure providers, developers and communities to bring forward timely and high quality development to the south of Warwick and Leamington, Kenilworth and south of Coventry respectively. In particularly significant progress has been made towards the preparation of a Development Brief for East of Kenilworth. Associated with this, the service has led a success £9.6m bid to the Housing Infrastructure Fund to support the relocation of Kenilworth school.

Two Neighbourhood Plans have now be "made" (adopted) in the District – Whitnash and Barford. Two further plans (Leek Wootton and Baginton & Bubbenhall) have completed their examinations and will be subject to referenda in the coming months. A number of other neighbourhood plans are progressing including Kenilworth, Leamington and Budbrooke.

Development Services has a permanent part time officer working on HS2, to ensure that the authority is fully engaged with the process and is in a position to deal effectively and appropriately with the related submissions which have now started to arrive . 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:

- Challenges in delivering the high level of growth proposed in the Local Plan to ensure the housing trajectory is achieved and a 5 year housing land supply is maintained
- Failure to allocate G&T sites resulting in potential for G&T sites being set up in inappropriate locations
- Failure to effectively work with partners to plan for infrastructure delivery including accessing the necessary funding
- Failure of the Building Control service to maintain market share resulting in further loss of business to Approved Inspector's
- 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 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 professional staff. 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 has recently achieved a professional qualification supported by the Authority. Another example is the recruitment on an annual basis of a gap year student to a Planning Assistant role to assist with specific areas of work where they can gain experience of working within a Planning Team and potentially express interest in returning as a qualified Officer in the future. A third example has been the appointment of a successful apprenticeship role in Building Control. The service is looking to expand this approach by funding professional training for two⁹ further planners and bringing in further apprenticeship roles.

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. By "growing our own" staff within the service, we will have staff able to step into more senior roles when they become available. Warwick Building Control Officers at Assistant level have commenced a training programme through LABC, and the officers at Building Consultant grade are pursuing full membership of an approved body either CABE or RICS this should then put WBC 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 2.5% saving on discretionary budgets in 2015/16 and for 2016/17. It is anticipated that both Development Management and Building Control will achieve their income targets for 2017/18.

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: The contracts register is up to date and is monitored on a six monthly basis (moving to a quarterly basis for 2017/18).

Audits: An audit of Development Management has been completed within this part of the service during 2017/18. This achieved a substantial rating. A further audit of Land Charges is currently being undertaken.

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 transferred Rugby and Daventry ICT systems onto IDOX which was a major migration process and very time consuming and costly for the joint Building Control service. Daventry's migration is completed. Rugby data has proven to be more involved as data was stored in different formats, all data has now been moved across, although there remains further work to ensure this is easily accessible through IDOX.

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. 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. Work has recently picked up in Daventry area due to the BC service being more robust, and the competition not servicing their clients effectively. We have established good relations with Stratford District Council BC and have pursued projects under

cross boundary working, this 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 launched WBC in June 2017, presented WBC to local business forum. Staff are encouraged to chase new Business and WBC always attend pre application meetings.

Development Management:

Across Development Services there is a need to continually improve the electronic delivery of the services we offer, in particular for development management and building control as they are very customer facing services.

During 2018/19, the Development Management service will continue to “bed-down” the restructure that was implemented earlier this year. Associated with this this, the 20% increase in planning fees has been introduced. This will enable the service to strengthen resources in a number of key areas including enforcement, discharge of conditions and monitoring. All these roles are important in growing the capacity of the service to focus on delivery of high quality and timely development.

Another key work-stream during 2018/19 will be the designation of the Canal Conservation Area. Detailed assessment is well advanced and it is intended to bring forward proposals to designate the Conservation Area in the Autumn of 2018.

A further development during 2018 will involve firmly establishing the CIL collection process. This process has now been implemented as liable applications work through the system, the process will be tested and refined with the support a the recently appointed CIL officer. It is expected that the first CIL receipts will come through during 2018/19.

Policy and Projects:

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 and 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 apply CIL receipts to the updated Regulation 123 list Work to adopt new parking standards, and the Residential Design Guide will continue along with other tasks agreed as part of the Local development Scheme.