

## **CABINET MEMBERS REPORT TO COUNCIL**

**23<sup>rd</sup> July 2025**

### **COUNCILLOR ANDREW BROWN - CABINET MEMBER FOR PLANNING AND ENFORCEMENT**

For the period 8<sup>th</sup> March 2025 to 11<sup>th</sup> July.

#### **1 Progress on Portfolio Matters**

In terms of **Planning Policy**:

- (i) The further ***Local Plan Examination Hearings*** took place in the week of 8<sup>th</sup> April 2025. These focussed on the issues raised during the Further Consultation on the Local Plan concluded on 19<sup>th</sup> December 2024. The Hearings took place in our Cromer offices and were be led / chaired by our independently appointed Planning Inspector. For further information see: [Resumed Hearings Agenda](#).
- (ii) The Inspector wrote to the Council by letter dated 8<sup>th</sup> May 2025 to provide an update on his work on our Plan. That letter (see: [Inspectors Post Hearings Letter](#)) included the statement that:  
  
*“(His) overall conclusion is that the Council has made good progress over the last year to address the concerns set out in my letter dated 24 May 2024 and that with suitable **main modifications** (MMs) it should be possible for a sound plan to be adopted.”*
- (iii) It is anticipated that the required ***consultation on the Main Modifications*** will take place during August and September 2025. The most up-to-date position will always be set out on our ‘Local Plan Examination Latest News page, see: [Local plan examination latest news](#)
- (iv) The ***Norfolk Strategic Planning Framework*** (NSPF) is document produced by a partnership of all nine Norfolk local planning authorities. It helps demonstrate compliance with the “duty to cooperate” requirement of Section 110 of the Localism Act 2011. That requires authorities to ‘engage constructively, actively and on an ongoing basis for all strategic and cross boundary planning matters. The first version of the NSPF document was produced and endorsed in 2018 and the most recent version endorsed by Cabinet April 2021. The latest iteration has now been drafted and is ready for endorsement and sign off from the participating LPAs. The intention is to bring a short report recommending endorsement of it to the September Cabinet meeting.

- (v) The latest government funding review resulted in the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) withdrawing funding that has been in place for years to support the development of **Neighbourhood Plans**. As a result, Government funded support that was used by Parish and Town Councils to commission new and support the production of neighbourhood planning work has stopped. We understand that technical support grants that were agreed prior to the end of March 2025 will be honoured. The withdrawal of direct grant funding by HMCLG will affect those neighbourhood plans already in production and those starting out.

In addition, to-date, the Council has been able to claim funding to cover its own costs in relation to Neighbourhood Plan examination and referendum. It is not known, at this time, if this funding will continue or whether it has also been withdrawn. Officers are looking at options that might enable us to provide some financial support for Neighbourhood Plan work – particularly for those already underway – realistically though, if we are able to help, this will be at a significantly reduced level from that that had been in place via Government funding.

In terms of **Development Management**:

- (vi) The **Development Committee** has met three since the last Report and considered 18 applications at those meetings. Those 18 included four major applications – for a variation to an approved scheme for 62 retirement dwellings in Sheringham, see [Development Committee Report RV241351](#) – a 41 apartment retirement living scheme also in Sheringham, see [Development Committee Report PF241229](#) – the Council' swimming pool (etc) proposal at Fakenham, see [Development Committee Report PF242418](#) – and, a solar PV proposal at South Raynham, see [Development Committee Report PF250091](#). The Committee agreed with the officer recommendation in each case and in all four cases the Assistant Director for Planning was given authority to issues permission once section 106 agreements and or conditions are drafted / completed.
- (vii) At the meeting on 27<sup>th</sup> June 2025, Councillors also considered a report on various **Government consultation documents**, namely:
- Planning Reform Working paper: Speeding Up Build Out
  - Technical Consultation on Implementing Measures to Improve Build Out Transparency
  - Planning Reform Working paper – Reforming Site Thresholds; and
  - Technical Consultation – Reform of Planning Committees.

The Assistant Director for Planning was authorised to submit the Council's position to Government in each case. See [Development Committee Paper June 2025](#) for more information.

- (viii) The paper on the **Reform of Planning Committees** caused most discussion. While the Council's formal response will include putting forward numerous ideas for improving the system that the Government are proposing to mandate, Committee decided that the headline part of their previous response on the subject should also be repeated in the response – i.e. that the Council is opposed to one of the core components of the Government's proposal – i.e. the drastic reduction of local democratic involvement in planning that is being proposed.

In terms of **Building Control**:

- (ix) A new arm's length body to Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) is being established with the intention for this to take on the functions of the ***Building Safety Regulator*** from the Health & Safety Executive (HSE). MHCLG stated that these reforms will pave the way for the creation of a single construction regulator, as recommended by the Grenfell Tower Inquiry. Moreover, MHCLG stated that they will establish a new Fast Track Process to enhance the review of new build higher-risk building applications, unblock delays and boost sector confidence - a measure which MHCLG believe will help the delivery of 1.5 million homes and speed up remediation. See [Reforms to Building Safety Regulator](#) for more information.
- (x) The Building Safety Regulator has updated its ***registration classes for Registered Building Inspectors***. This means that the range of permissible works that class 2 Registered Building Inspectors can undertake has been widened. While the changes appear to be being made to support the Government in their ambition to help deliver 1.5m homes this Parliament, it has raised some serious concerns within the sector about people now being able to 'sign-off' works that they weren't deemed competent to do prior to the change being made. Due to the nature of built development in North Norfolk (i.e. only one 'high-rise' building) and the competency levels of our team, this change doesn't really have a practical implication in our area – unlike much of the country.

Finally, on other matters:

- (xi) A successful prosecution has been secured in a ***planning enforcement*** case. In October 2020, the Council served an Enforcement Notice following unauthorised residential use of a building at an ex-youth centre in Trimmingham. The Enforcement Notice mandated that the residential use ceased within the building, which had been converted for residential purposes without applying for planning permission.

The landowner subsequently failed to comply with the Notice, leading to the Council seeking a prosecution. At Kings Lynn Magistrates Court, on 30 April 2025, the Court found the landowner guilty and issued a fine, a victim surcharge and awarded costs to the District Council. The associated website article is available at: [Planning Enforcement in Trimmingham](#).

- (xii) The first two 2025 ***Town and Parish Council training sessions*** on planning matters have been held. These were on 'how to write a good quality response on planning applications (in Stalham on 21<sup>st</sup> May 2025) and on 'affordable housing' (in Cromer on 1<sup>st</sup> July 2025).
- (xiii) We remain on track for our transfer of much of our Land Charges Search function to ***HM Land Registry***. We have made the required amendments to our data sets (more than 7,500 of them) so that they are compatible with the national way of doing things. We remain on course for 'transfer' this autumn.

- (xiv) Finally, the Council has received a GeoPlace **Platinum Award for Address and Street Data**. This is awarded to authorities that have maintained Gold status across all criteria of the Annual Improvement Schedule for 10 out of 12 months up to the end of March 2025. The award citation states that '*this prestigious recognition highlights (y)our dedication to maintaining the highest standards of (address and street) data quality throughout the year*'.

## **2       Forthcoming Activities and Developments**

The next Development Committees are due to be held on 24<sup>th</sup> July and 21<sup>st</sup> August 2025.

## **3       Meetings attended (from May 2025)**

### May

- 2<sup>nd</sup>     Development Committee
- 6<sup>th</sup>     Cabinet
- 16<sup>th</sup>   County Council Forum meeting re Local Govt reform
- 29<sup>th</sup>   Norfolk Strategic Planning Forum at Norfolk CC

### June

- 2<sup>nd</sup>     Cabinet & Business Planning
- 4<sup>th</sup>/5<sup>th</sup> House of Commons visit
- 11<sup>th</sup>   Overview & Scrutiny
- 12<sup>th</sup>   Full Council presentation on Local Govt reform

### July

- 7<sup>th</sup>     Cabinet & Business Planning
- 23<sup>rd</sup>   Full Council

Note: In addition to the above, Cllr Brown attended various Parish Council meetings.