

CABINET MEMBERS REPORT TO COUNCIL

November 2021

COUNCILLOR J TOYE - CABINET MEMBER FOR PLANNING & ENFORCEMENT

For the period September 2021 to November 2021

1 Progress on Portfolio Matters.

General overview.

This month has seen the COP26 conference and the Council's Virtual Green Build event. Those events continue to highlight the challenges of carbon reduction, bio diversity and climate change. Planning and development will maintain a significant role to play in delivering on a sustainable future, alongside other Council services.

It has been a busy time in all areas of the planning portfolio, plenty of key planning decisions are being made, moving our new local plan forward and consultation on new Bills and Regulations with Central Government.

It is a good opportunity to give my thanks to officers for their continued, dedicated, hard work and our members for their support of this portfolio area.

New Structure:

With the introduction of a new Directorate an opportunity arose to review the structure of the Portfolio to enable better service delivery.

Geoff Lyon has moved to manage the Development Management & Major Projects teams, bringing the Service lead under a single lead.

Mark Ashwell continues in his role as Planning Policy Manager, and will also take interim control of the Conservation, Design and Landscape Service for 18 Months. We are viewing our services under the newly adopted team plans, our aim will be an agile service that reflects the coming changes for Planning and responds well to the Design challenges laid down by Government.

Officers will be interviewing for a Planning & Building Control Manager this month. That post will work with the service managers to deliver process review, encourage efficient and timely working practices, support the software system and manage our Planning Processing Team / Technical Support Officers.

I believe this new structure will respond well to the challenges we face and help to deliver an effective service.

Development Management & Major Projects Performance

I am pleased to report that our latest figures for speed of decision stand up to month end October 2021 are continuing to improve, from a low point in late Spring / Early summer 2021. Detailed reports are provided to Development Committee on these matters, as such I would direct any detailed consideration to reporting on matters of speed and quality of decision to the Development Committee.

Officers and I will continue to monitor and explore performance and customer service improvements as part of ongoing improvements under our agreed Action.

Major projects:

The S106 legal agreement for the Outline planning application for up to 950 dwellings (Use Class C3), employment development (Use Classes B1/B2/B8), a primary school and children's nursery (Use Class D1), a hotel (Use Class C1), local retail (Use Classes A1/A3/A4/A5) at north of Rudham Stile Lane & east of Water Moor Lane, Fakenham, Norfolk, NR21 9QU, for The Master Fellows & Scholars of Trinity College Cambridge was completed and planning permission issued in October. Officers have subsequently met with Fakenham Town Council to confirm the potential s106 mitigation that will be available and the delivery of future reserved matters applications.

Planning Policy & neighbourhood planning

The Planning Policy and Built Heritage Working Party (PPBH) continue to work towards publication of the plan for Regulation 19 Consultation. Key documents are being refreshed before consultation is undertaken, and final housing allocations have now been agreed. Our expectation is for consultation to commence in January 2022.

PPBH received a report in October detailing that the Council will continue to meet a 5-year Housing Supply (5.22) and will pass the Housing Delivery Test (104%) as detailing in the NPPF.

Building Control

Preparations are underway to introduce a mobile working app for the building surveyors expanding upon the introduction of our new software system and moving towards a "paper-less" process for our service. This will benefit from reduced printing and also process efficiencies delivering savings and environmental benefits. Pilot projects will run in the new year with Spring 2022 as our Go Live.

Workloads remain high, applications are around 10-15% above expectations for year to date, income similarly follows this trend. Market capture remains high at around 86% of business in the district, (National average is 65%). 100% of decisions are issued in time with 95% of all cases are valid for inspection within 5 days.

Our Service Manger and Senior officers attended a national conference on the Building Safety Bill this month and are cascading leaning to the team.

Enforcement

The team have 394 current live cases with 44 pending closure.

External consultancy support is available to boost capacity in the team.

The web based complaint reporting process went live on 8 November, this will give greater continuity in reporting of complaints and enable quicker review / validation of investigations. The team will be supported by our administrative officers inputting the complaints into the software system, enabling time to be maximised on investigation and updating interested parties.

Mobile working options are being reviewed, and similar options to those available in Building Control will be made available to ensure efficient practices for our investigations. I will update future meetings on progress with this project.

Staffing

Development Management – 2 Planning officers have joined the service since last reporting, ensuring recent vacancies are now filled.

Major Projects – James Mann will leave the Team leader role this month, I regret the recruitment campaign has not been successful in finding a replacement for James. Please see below for my findings on the National Picture for Planning recruitment.

Enforcement – Kevin Peacock will be promoted to team leader in December. Interviews are underway this month to back fill this vacancy.

Challenges for Recruitment in Panning - a National Overview

2 Forthcoming Activities and Developments.

Planning Policy & Build Heritage Working Party – 6th December 2021

Development Committee – 16th December 2021

3 Meetings attended

Cabinet
Planning Policy & Build Heritage Working party
Development Committee
Parish councils
Broads IDB
Norfolk Rivers IDB – Visit to Scarrow Beck conservation work.
Meetings with developers and residents regarding future plans.
Code of conduct Training
RSN Seminar – Rural town centres, High streets and Village Hubs
Portfolio Meetings.

4 Recruitment of Planning Officers.

At the last development committee, I said that I believed there is a national shortage of planners and equally increased workloads. There are articles online from regional publications which share that view.

e.g.

[Cheshire East battling to clear a backlog of planning applications | Knutsford Guardian](#)

In the Autumn 2021 issue of planning from planningresource.co.uk there is an article about planning recruitment. In their it has that more than half of respondents are finding it hard to recruit professional planners 55%. It is almost equally as hard to recruit team leaders at 43%. As part of the plan going forward we are recruiting at the trainee level which is what 79% of authorities do.

Workloads at other authorities are also equally as high as in North Norfolk, which compounds the issues raised by recruitment. Officers continue to work to find the best way to fill vacancies in a way that we have the necessary skills and specialisations. As mentioned previously we have 2 new planning officers and this is a good result given the difficulties surrounding recruitment.

This information reinforces the incredible effort put in by Officers to achieve the figures shared at Development committee as this has all been done on the back of a major systems update.