



Strategic Planning & Environment

Overview & Scrutiny

Agenda

TUESDAY 10 JANUARY 2017 AT 7.30 PM

DBC Bulbourne Room - Civic Centre

The Councillors listed below are requested to attend the above meeting, on the day and at the time and place stated, to consider the business set out in this agenda.

Membership

Councillor G Adshead
Councillor Anderson (Chairman)
Councillor Ashbourn
Councillor E Collins
Councillor Fisher
Councillor S Hearn

Councillor Hicks
Councillor Howard
Councillor Matthews
Councillor Ransley
Councillor Riddick
Councillor C Wyatt-Lowe (Vice-Chairman)

Substitute Members:

Councillors Birnie, Link, Ritchie, R Sutton, Timmis and Tindall

For further information, please contact Katie Mogan or Member Support

AGENDA

7. DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT EFFICIENCIES (Pages 2 - 7)

Report to follow

Agenda Item 7



Report for:	Strategic Planning and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Date of meeting:	10 January 2017
Part:	1
If Part II, reason:	

Title of report:	Efficiencies in Development Management
Contact:	Graham Sutton - Portfolio Holder, Planning and Regeneration Author/Responsible Officer: James Doe, Assistant Director Planning, Development and Regeneration Sara Whelan, Group Manager, Development Management and Planning
Purpose of report:	To provide an update on plans to improve efficiencies in the Development Management service.
Recommendations	That the report be noted. .
Corporate objectives:	Ensuring economic growth. Providing good quality affordable homes, in particular for those in most need. A clean safe and enjoyable environment.
Implications:	Financial Efficiencies will lead to savings which have been taken into account in 17/18 budget proposals.
Risk Implications	Risk of complaints increasing due to a change in service provided.
Equalities Implications	None arising from this report.
Health And Safety Implications	None arising from this report.
Consultees:	
Background papers:	Housing and Planning Act 2016 Planning, Development and Regeneration Service Plan 2016/17

Glossary of acronyms and any other abbreviations used in this report:	PiP – Permission in Principle
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1.0 Background

1.1 Development Management is one of three regulatory services provided by Planning, Development and Regeneration – the other two being Building Control and Local Land Charges. All three services are characterised by a steady flow of applications made to the Council throughout the year, and with that a series of systems and processes to ensure each service meets statutory and local policy requirements, runs as efficiently as possible and provides good value to the taxpayer.

1.2 The service plan for Planning, Development and Regeneration for 2016/17 contains proposals to improve efficiencies in each of these three regulatory services. This report focuses on the Development Management service (often know as the Planning service). The services it covers and provides are:

- Processing planning and related applications, including listed buildings
- Handling planning appeals
- Planning Enforcement
- Conservation services

1.3 Development Management is provided at a net cost to the taxpayer. About 60% of the cost of the service is offset by planning fee income, which can vary annually according to economic conditions. With this, and the need for the Council to make savings, it is important to minimise the burden on the taxpayer whilst ensuring that a quality service is provided to all customers – be they applicants and developers seeking planning permission, or residents who might be affected by the developments that are proposed.

1.4 This report provides an update on the steps taken so far to improve efficiencies in the DM service and sets out some issues that will require attention and action over the next year and beyond.

2. Efficiencies to date

2.1 Review of systems and processes

2.2 At the heart of activity to improve efficiencies in the service has been the review of systems and processes. Put simply, to ensure that these are cover all actions that are needed to discharge and perform the required service, and to make sure it runs as efficiently as possible. The review follows the principles of ‘systems thinking’, which involves mapping out what current practice and looking for opportunities to do things simpler, faster or more effectively.

2.3 This exercise has taken place and will generate a number of improvements to be implemented over the next 1-2 years. Examples include:

- IT improvements to support ways of working rather than hindering (a lot of time spent indexing documents)
- Further reducing amount of paper

- Trialling mobile devices for site visits
 - Fast tracking cases which do not require consultation
 - Reducing length of delegated reports where there are no objections
 - Planners becoming more multidisciplinary to work with Strategic Planning and Enforcement more pro-actively
 - Remove need for CIL forms at validation stage
 - Managing the appeals work more proactively
- 2.4 Officers are continuing to review all processes and see how best planning applications can be processed. We are visiting other authorities in January to keep up to date with best practice approaches.
- 2.5 Town and Parish Council paperless consultation**
- 2.6 Over the past few years, the amount of paper-based transactions in the service has declined markedly with the introduction of planning applications being made online, and through electronic consultations. One outstanding area is with the Borough's Town and Parish Councils which still receive paper copies of applications for their comments.
- 2.7 Proposals to switch consultation from paper to electronic have been raised with the Town and Parish Councils. This was also a key item at November's annual conference with them in 2016.
- 2.8 From March 13th 2017, the planning service will no longer print A4 plans for Parish and Town Councils. The Council has been liaising with Parish and Town Councils to support them through this process. This includes a buddy approach with a planning officer allocated to each parish and town council, a crib sheet to guide councils through looking at applications online and a budget of up to £750 per Council to choose software/hardware which will enable them to view plans using our website. The Council will purchase the chosen equipment on behalf of the Parish and Town Councils. The Councils will meet any maintenance or replacement equipment in the future and they will take on the Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE) recycling legislation, which sets out certain ways which IT equipment should be recycled.
- 2.9 This new way of working will generate an ongoing financial saving in Development Management but generally means that we can be more efficient when registering and processing planning applications. This change supports the Digital Dacorum vision which is a corporate initiative seeking to reduce the use of traditional channels and contact methods and respond to the '24/7' lives of residents by significantly increasing the level of self-service.
- 2.10 Other changes**
- 2.11 The Development Management team has made changes internally to the way they work and process planning applications that does not directly affect the customer but saves officers time in drafting and signing off cases. Officers are exploring other changes to the way we process applications, which may affect the customer and therefore will consider these in more detail before we implement any changes.
- 2.12 We have changed the scheme of delegation to allow Enforcement Officers to deal with advert and Planning Contravention Notice offences without the need to present the case to Development Control Committee. Other changes have been made which

set out that case officers refusing a retrospective case would serve the enforcement notice at the same time.

- 2.13 A greater emphasis has been placed on Planning Performance Agreements for large scale major developments which has led to a project management approach when providing pre-application advice and encouraging pre-application discussions with Councillor's in a suitable format.

2.14 IT and software improvements

- 2.15 The microfiche records have been dispatched for scanning, this is helpful for officers to work from home and generate copies if required by members of the public.

- 2.16 Development Management has started the tendering process for a new back office system. Planning, Enforcement, Conservation, Land Charges and Building Control currently use Acolaid, an Idox system. Idox has started to reduce its service of upgrades and maintenance to the Acolaid system which makes it a key time to review our contracts. There are a range of providers in the marketplace.

- 2.17 The Council's IT department is currently reviewing how many different IT packages are used across the Council, its aim is to make recommendations on possible efficiencies in reducing the amount of software packages. Therefore the IT department will be involved in our tendering process to be sure that any new system will be in line with our corporate objectives.

- 2.18 It will also be important to be sure that any new system works well with our public access website system, as the Parish and Town Councils, members of the public and all consultees rely on the website to view details of planning applications. The migration of all our data from Acolaid to a new system will be a big project and would need IT support. The new contract should have a similar annual maintenance cost and a good level of support to enable any required changes.

- 2.19 A key aim of upgrading the back office system is to improve the compatibility with the website and provide efficiencies for officers. For example, a reduction in the amount or certainly reduction in time taken to index documents.

2.20 Charging for services

- 2.21 We have completed three Planning Performance Agreements (PPAs) in the past year which has increased our income for large scale major development by approximately £45k. This is needed to recover staff costs and resources which go into supporting large scale major proposal throughout pre-application and the application process. These applications include schemes for major housing schemes and a retail development outside of the town centre.

- 2.22 Pre-application advice charges for all categories were increased in April 2016 and have seen the demand on these services either rise or be constant with last year. Officers are considering increasing the pre-application charge for follow up meetings further as this is currently set at £250. The initial meeting is £3000 and it is considered that the follow up meetings should be increased perhaps annually over the next five years to help to recover costs, as a similar amount of work and resources is required for the follow up meetings as the initial meeting.

2.23 Statutory changes

- 2.24 Government have decided that **Pre-commencement conditions** can only be used with the agreement of the applicant. Once a local authority has communicated to the applicant its intention to impose a pre-commencement condition, there will be a default period of 10 working days for the applicant to agree. This will have an impact on timescales of officers making recommendations within 8 and 13-week statutory dates. This legislation may also affect any pre-commencement conditions suggest by the Development Control Committee. It is not yet clear when this will come into place. The legislation will have its second reading in House of Lords on 17 January 2017.
- 2.25 **Planning performance** requirements are due to change in particular the criteria for designation of a Local Planning Authority. The Secretary of State can designate an authority if they are not performing their function of determining applications as majors or non-majors. The measures will focus on speed and quality (based on cases overturned on appeal). The designation thresholds and importantly the assessment periods are set out below;

Measure and type of application	2017 Threshold and assessment period	2018 Threshold and assessment period
Speed of majors 13 weeks	50% (Oct 2014 – Sep 2016)	60% (Oct 2015 to Sep 2017)
Quality of majors - % of appeals overturned	N/A	10% (April 2015 to March 2017)
Speed of non-major 8 weeks	65% Oct 2014 – Sep 2016	70% Oct 2015 – Sep 2017
Quality of non-major -- % of appeals overturned	N/A	10% April 2015 – March 2017

- 2.26 The most recent publications from government shows that Dacorum had 1.4% of major developments overturned at appeal between Jan 2013 – Dec 2014 (1 appealed and subsequently allowed out of a total of 74 major decisions in the time period). In terms of speed for 24 months to end of September 2016 Dacorum achieved 76.6% of applications within the 13-week date or within agreed timeframe (77 total decisions, 27 in 13 weeks and further 32 within agreed extension of time).
- 2.27 The main change to be aware of above is the new indicator measuring the quality of decisions on non-major applications. We will start to monitor this internally to be sure we are below the threshold of 10%.
- 2.28 Where an authority is designated, applicants may apply directly to the Planning Inspectorate, rather than the Local Authority.
- 2.29 A **Housing White Paper** is expected to be published at some point in January 2017, we are anticipating;
- Increase to planning fees linked to inflation and good performance. This increase has been anticipated for six years, but will require us to perform well in terms of appeals and timeliness
 - Government is considering intervening to boost housing supply perhaps clamping down on the landbanking
 - A response to the CIL review which is expected to include a radical overhaul of the levy, potentially with a much simpler nationally-set CIL levy
 - Proposals to speed up plan making, recommendations include setting a common methodology for strategic housing market assessments and a standard approach to five-year supply calculations

- The paper is likely to look at density in order to protect green belt. The government wants to maximise on the potential in major centres and around public transport hubs to have more dense development.

2.30 There is now a statutory requirement on each authority to provide a Brownfield land register as legislated by the Housing and Planning Act. The regulations, which follow this primary legislation, have not been released and we are still awaiting details about Permission in Principle (PiP) and the exact requirements of a register. Officers are in the process of working up arrangements for this to be put in place.

2.31 Housing and Planning Act Implications

2.32 The regulations are still awaited which will provide clarity and details on Starter Homes, Permission in Principle and approved provider's. However, there was an announcement on 3 January 2017 that the first wave of 30 local authority partnerships will deliver starter homes on brownfield sites throughout 2017. This announcement reconfirmed that units would be sold at 20% below market detail and for first-time buyers between 23-40 years old. No further details on Starter Homes haven been announced in terms of legislation. Hence, until legislation is in place we will continue to secure affordable housing in accordance with our Core Strategy and existing policies.

2.33 No further details have been released on Permission in Principle or the trial of approved providers being able to process planning applications instead of Local Planning Authorities.

2.34 Conclusions

2.35 Progress on efficiencies has led to reducing the amount of paper we are working with and improving our IT software. We have also embedded new ways of working internally which do not directly affect the customer. The next stages will include reviewing our service offer in terms of duty planner service and length of delegated reports. This will require consultation with affected customers.

2.36 We will keep up to date with changing statutory legislation, as this is likely to have an impact on our income, resources and planning decisions.