

Committee: Environment and Transport, Development Control and Licensing, Resources Committees

Date: 10th June, 16th June and 26 June 2003

Agenda Item No: 9

Title: The Planning Delivery Grant and performance of the Planning Service

Author: John Mitchell (01799) 510450

Summary

- 1 At their meeting of 13th March 2003 Members were informed of the Planning Delivery Grant, which amounts to £246,261 for Uttlesford – the 34th highest allocation in the country. The report concluded: *Officers consider that the priorities that present themselves are:*
- *The appointment of independent consultants to carry out the Best Value Review of Planning Services*
 - *Bringing forward the appointment of new staff following the approved restructuring of Planning Services*
 - *Funding the appointment of temporary staff to reduce “pressure points” in workload*
 - *Improvements in IT*
 - *Staff and Member training*
 - *Outsourcing handling of planning appeals and consideration of outsourcing certain categories of planning applications*
 - *Technical and administrative support for the Enforcement Service.*

The Committee resolved: *that officers prepare a costed improvement and delivery plan for implementing the priorities in paragraph 17 of the report to take maximum advantage of the grant resources available.*

- 2 This report sets out the current position in planning services and how officers consider the Grant should be spent so as to bring about short and long term improvements for the service. It also makes reference to the need for service improvements and recommends the creation of new posts which would have revenue implications.

Background

Current Performance

3 The close of year figures on performance are as follows

Performance Indicator	Govt. Target	UDC Performance
% Major applications determined in 13 weeks	60%	32%
% Minor applications determined in 8 weeks	65%	39%
% All other applications determined in 8 weeks	80%	66%

4 It is apparent that during the last financial year some 1460 hours of paid overtime were worked in development control. This does not include Time Off In Lieu (TOIL) which is approximately half as much again. Although the effect of this is broadly neutral it does indicate that the equivalent of one full time post is being worked as overtime.

Best Value

5 Tentative and informal approaches have been made to a range of consultants and a range of between £50,000 and £75,000 have been put forward. It is emphasised that no formal tendering process has been commenced and these figures are indicative.

6 A comprehensive survey of all the customers of the service will need to be carried out as part of the Best Value review.

Bringing forward posts

7 The recent restructuring of the planning service as it affects Development Control involved the deletion of the posts of Development Control Manager, Principal Planning Officer and Chief Administrative Officer, and the creation of two Team Leaders with an additional 1.5 new planning officer posts in Development Control. These are about to be advertised. The Principal Planning Officer and the Chief Administrative Officer have already left the service and the Development Control Manager retires at the end of October. The 1.5 new planning officer posts are about to be advertised. One of these is currently occupied by an agency member of staff. The workload in the section amounts to some 1800 planning applications per annum. There are approximately 16 staff permanently working on development control matters (including administrative support) each with an average of 112 applications per head. This is high in relation to the national average of 91. It is considered that the 0.5fte post should be increased to be a full time post, at a cost of approximately £15,000 including on costs. The scope for taking on additional planning officers also needs to be further investigated.

8 It is becoming apparent that the amount of work required of the team leaders in the new structure has been underestimated. This now includes fee checking and validation of applications which is proving time consuming, combined with the checking of draft decision notices, both vital and time consuming tasks. There is also a need for a person to carry out day-to-day filing and sundry other issues, including assisting the Head of Service.

Overtime worked by administrative staff over the last year alone justifies a new post. Customer expectations and future business activity across the whole of Planning Services confirm the need for this ongoing support.

IT

- 9 Document Imaging was introduced in the Development Control Service on 1st April. This enables all planning applications and associated correspondence to be held electronically, and will enhance the planning website by enabling planning applications to be viewed on the internet. It will be a significant improvement to the service and its accessibility for the public, as well as benefiting officers. Document Imaging requires all documents, whether plans or related correspondence, to be “scanned in”. It was initially considered that economies of scale after the move to Saffron Walden would obviate the need for duplicate functions to be carried out (such as the handling of incoming and outgoing mail), thus freeing up staff to scan in documents. This has not proved to be the case. The correspondence generated by the planning service is very high and the capacity was not available at Saffron Walden to handle the volumes of mail generated. Planning staff are required to assist in the Mail Room every day and effectively carry out all the functions previously carried out in Great Dunmow. Consequently only the very rudimentary functions of document imaging are carried out, which amounts to the scanning in of new applications but no additional correspondence. Although permanent staff have been trained in, and carry out, document imaging, temporary agency staff have had to be employed to cover for their normal duties at a cost equivalent to approximately £25,000 pa, and to cover for maternity leave. Moreover planning staff seldom have cause to refer to the document imaging system because it is not comprehensive. This is not a satisfactory situation. It is essential that the Council maximises its investment in service enhancements for the benefit of its many thousand customers.
- 10 Officers are working with Remploy to employ a person initially on a contract basis using PDG to carry out full time scanning duties so as to enable document imaging to be comprehensive and usable. This is likely to cost in the region of £20,000 with on-costs.
- 11 With document imaging comes a need to improve the monitors used by Officers to give better definition of plans etc, and to provide terminals for visiting members of the public. Flat screens will need to be purchased at a cost of approximately £269 per terminal, or approximately £10,100.

Staff and Member Training

- 12 The opportunity should be taken to use some of the PDG for training, for both officers and Members. No programme has yet been finalised as appraisals are still occurring but approximately £10,000 could be set aside for this. Members’ views on their training would be welcomed.

Enforcement

- 13 The enforcement service is provided by two staff, with administrative support coming from the administrative support within the area development control

teams. The administrative support does not have as high a priority as in relation to planning applications, where the need to try and process applications within the statutory 8 week period is paramount. It is considered that PDG should be used to employ a new post of trainee enforcement officer who also has responsibility for the administrative functions of the service. The cost would be approximately £20,000 with on-costs.

Outsourcing and use of agency staff

- 14 The Service has outsourced planning appeals and inquiries to consultants for some years now. Part of the savings package to meet the £50,000 target last year was the abandonment of the budget for external consultants. PDG gives the opportunity to remedy this situation. In view of extra work pressures it is not possible for staff to do all this work. The possibility of outsourcing householder planning applications has also been investigated. A budget for this has been estimated at about £20,000 for a full year. It compares with the cost of a planning officer, which at a maximum is about £30,000 with on costs, for an equivalent number of applications. It is stressed, however, that this is not a direct comparison because a case officer's workload includes many more complex items than householder applications. The advantage would be that workload would be taken away from existing staff, enabling more time to be spent on more complex applications. It would enable trained professional staff to spend more time on quality of proposed developments.
- 15 As well as outsourcing officers will continue to use temporary staff, whether from agencies or on short contracts, where it is of benefit to the service. Agency and contract staff will continue to be employed while the document imaging situation is resolved.

16 Proposals for a) Use of Planning Delivery Grant

Item	Approx. Expenditure	Improvement
Consultants for BV Review	£50-75,000	Better service for all customers arising from whole-service review and improvement plan, including planning policy and conservation. It would enable an 'outsider' to examine critically the service and relieve pressure on existing staff who have to continue with service delivery.
Staff for document imaging @ s1-3	£20,000	Improved access to the planning system for all
New screens	£10,000	Better use of document imaging by staff

New Enforcement staff @ s1-3	£20,000	Better service in response to complaints about slow action on enforcement matters. Improved speed of planning decisions with dedicated enforcement administrative function. Aim to increase % cases resolved in three months from 80% to 85%.
Member and staff training	£10,000	Improved understanding of the planning system and better working practices and customer care
Investigation of outsourcing and use of agency/contract staff. Use of consultants for planning appeals and inquiries and for specialised assistance where no alternative budget is available. Possible interim use of grant to assist with funding the two posts below.	£80-110,000	Aim to achieve current targets 2003/04 by turn of year
Total	£190,000-245,000	

b) Items with on-going Revenue implications

Item	Approx. Expenditure	Improvement
New administrative assistant at scale 1-3	£17,140	Removal of administrative functions from professional officers. Justified by amount of overtime worked by DC staff. Better overall service to customers.
Enhancement of one 0.5fte planning officer to 1 full time equivalent planning officer	£15,700	Better service to customers. Improved speed of determination of planning applications

- 17 The proposed apportionment of PDG, together with improvements which have revenue implications, would be of considerable long term benefit while at the same time attacking the present problems which affect the service. The Best Value Review and Improvement Plan would lay down a firm basis for future improvement and consolidation of the service, which additional members of staff, and research of alternative means of provision, would help with the problems of the service as they are today.

RECOMMENDED that the Resources Committee (i) be recommended to agree the use of the Planning Delivery Grant as set out above and (ii) to approve a supplementary estimate for the increase in revenue expenditure also as set out above.

Background Papers: Report to E&T, DC&L and Resources Committees,
March 2003,

Committee: Development Control
Date: 16 June 2003
Agenda Item No: 8
Title: Uttlesford District Council Tree Preservation Order No.6/03,
Bayards, Felsted
Author: Mr B Smeeden (01799) 510466

Introduction

- 1 This item seeks members confirmation of Tree Preservation Order No. 6/03 Bayards, Felsted.

Background

- 2 Notification of intent to fell 1 Oak tree in the grounds of Bayards, Jollyboys Lane North was served on the Council by the occupier of the property. The tree is within a Conservation Area.
- 3 The tree was inspected by the Councils Landscape Officer following which a Tree Preservation Order was served on this subject and one other Oak tree on the site.

Objections and Representations

- 4 Objection to the serving of the Order in respect of one of the trees (Ref:T1) has been received from the occupier. The grounds of objection are summarised as follows: The tree is a stump, although still alive, does not create a visual contribution to the surrounding area.
- 5 The occupier wishes to replace the tree.

Assessment

- 6 The Oak tree (Ref:T1) is an old pollard which is estimated to be of an age in excess of 250 years. Whilst there is restricted new growth the tree remains viable, has significant character and consequently adds to the visual quality and fabric of the Conservation Area. The tree is growing in the front garden of the property and is visually prominent from the public highway.

RECOMMENDATION that the Order be confirmed without amendment.

Committee: Development Control
Date: 16 June 2003
Agenda Item No: 9
Title: APPEAL DECISIONS
Author: John Grayson (01799) 510455

The following appeal decisions have been received recently:

**1 APPEAL BY SMITH BROS
CHAFFIX FARM, BRAINTREE ROAD, FELSTED
APPLICATION NO: UTT/0397/02/FUL**

Appeal against the refusal of planning permission for the change of use of an agricultural building to B1/B2/B8 Use.

<u>Appeal decision:</u>	DISMISSED/ALLOWED
<u>Date of decision:</u>	19 May 2003
<u>Original decision made by:</u>	COMMITTEE
<u>Date of original decision:</u>	10 September 2002
<u>Officers' recommendation to DC CTTE:</u>	REFUSAL

Summary of decision: The Inspector agreed with the Council that B2 general industrial and B8 storage uses would harmful to the amenities of neighbouring residents. However, he allowed B1 light industrial/offices with conditions.

Comments on decision: This is a reasonable compromise which Officers suggested originally. Current dismissal rate on this type of appeal (i.e. industrial + storage) since 1984/5: 54% (30 cases).

**2 APPEAL BY OLIVER-HOARE LIMITED
BARN AT HEMPSTEAD HALL, HEMPSTEAD
APPLICATION NO: UTT/0190/02/FUL**

Appeal against the refusal of planning permission for change of use to a dwelling.

<u>Appeal decision:</u>	ALLOWED
<u>Date of decision:</u>	19 May 2003
<u>Original decision made by:</u>	COMMITTEE
<u>Date of original decision:</u>	12 June 2002
<u>Officers' recommendation to DC CTTE:</u>	REFUSAL

Summary of decision: The Inspector concluded that significant changes had been made to the scheme dismissed on appeal in 2001 to warrant conversion. He described the alterations as sensitive and which would create a reasonably sized dwelling, allowing the barn's simple, utilitarian character and appearance to be preserved. He attached condition, including screening the garden.

Comments on decision: Members visited this site. Officers considered that the building is not of sufficient historic, architectural or environmental merit to warrant residential conversion.

5 of the last 7 such appeals have been allowed during the last 9 months. Current dismissal rate on this type of appeal (i.e. residential barn conversions) since 1984/5: 73% (54 cases).

**3 APPEAL BY MR T KNIGHT
LAND ADJACENT TO GRANTA COTTAGE, STATION ROAD, NEWPORT
APPLICATION NO: UTT/1136/02/FUL**

Appeal against the refusal of planning permission for the erection of 4 dwellings with new vehicular accesses.

<u>Appeal decision:</u>	DISMISSED
<u>Date of decision:</u>	19 May 2003
<u>Original decision made by:</u>	COMMITTEE
<u>Date of original decision:</u>	23 September 2002
<u>Officers' recommendation to DC CTTE:</u>	REFUSAL

Summary of decision: The Inspector concluded that the spacious setting of the adjacent listed building would be largely destroyed by the proximity of the new development. He also decided that the communal car park to the rear would affect the amenities of neighbours.

Comments on decision: Members saw this site when agreeing to approve a revised scheme for 3 dwellings recently.

Current dismissal rate on this type of appeal (i.e. overdeveltd and loss of amenity) since 1984/5: 67% (173 cases).

**4 APPEAL BY MR AND MRS C HANNAH
LAND AT THE GREEN MAN, BRAN END, STEBBING
APPLICATION NO: UTT/0804/02/OP**

Appeal against the refusal of planning permission for the erection of a 4 bedroom 2 storey house with single double garage.

<u>Appeal decision:</u>	DISMISSED
<u>Date of decision:</u>	19 May 2003
<u>Original decision made by:</u>	COMMITTEE
<u>Date of original decision:</u>	30 July 2002
<u>Officers' recommendation to DC CTTE:</u>	REFUSAL

Summary of decision: The Inspector concluded that the proposed dwelling would not constitute infilling, but would result in the intrusion into the predominantly open surroundings south of Bran End, eroding the rural character.

Comments on decision: Only 4 appeals of this type have been allowed out of 29 since Jan 1999.

Current dismissal rate on this type of appeal (i.e. "infilling" on village edges) since 1984/5: 85 % (164 cases).

**5 APPEAL BY MR P MOORE
SPARLING'S FARM, FELSTED
APPLICATION NO: UTT/1140/02/FUL**

Appeal against the refusal of planning permission for the conversion of vacant barns to a private dwelling.

<u>Appeal decision:</u>	ALLOWED
<u>Date of decision:</u>	12 May 2003
<u>Original decision made by:</u>	COMMITTEE
<u>Date of original decision:</u>	3 December 2002
<u>Officers' recommendation to DC CTTE:</u>	REFUSAL

Summary of decision: The Inspector concluded that the barn was of sound construction, despite needing 50% of its fabric being replaced, and the works could not be regarded as re-construction. He decided that the setting of the listed farmhouse nearby would be improved. He required landscaping to reduce the noise from traffic using the A.120.

Comments on decision: See no.2 above. Current dismissal rate on this type of appeal (i.e. residential barn conversions) since 1984/5: 72% (55 cases).

**6 APPEAL BY SIX CONTINENTS RETAIL LTD
LAND ADJACENT TO THE OLD MILL PUBLIC HOUSE, TAKELEY
STREET
APPLICATION NO: UTT/1705/01/FUL**

Appeal against the refusal of planning permission for the conversion of the pub to a dwelling, demolition of flat-roofed extensions, erection of 5 new dwelling and a new access.

<u>Appeal decision:</u>	DISMISSED
<u>Date of decision:</u>	2 May 2003
<u>Original decision made by:</u>	COMMITTEE
<u>Date of original decision:</u>	28 February 2002
<u>Officers' recommendation to DC CTTE:</u>	REFUSAL

Summary of decision: The Inspector concluded that the listed building would be hemmed in by parts of the development and have an extremely cramped appearance. He also considered that the proposal would be incongruous in the street scene by going against the general pattern of frontage development and would intrude into open countryside to the rear, part of the Airport Protection Zone. Overlooking of neighbours and harmful effects on their amenities by the passing of vehicles would also result.

Comments on decision: A revised proposal would be considered more favourably. Current dismissal rate on this type of appeal (i.e. overdevelopment and loss of amenity) since 1984/5: 67% (174 cases).

**7 APPEAL BY MR W BOSWELL
LAND REAR OF CAMBERLEY, CHELMSFORD ROAD, HATFIELD HEATH
APPLICATION NO: UTT/0643/02/OP**

Appeal against the refusal of planning permission for outline application for erection of single storey dwelling with detached garage.

<u>Appeal decision:</u>	DISMISSED
<u>Date of decision:</u>	4 April 2003
<u>Original decision made by:</u>	COMMITTEE
<u>Date of original decision:</u>	23 July 2002
<u>Officers' recommendation to DC CTTE:</u>	REFUSAL

Summary of decision: The Inspector concluded that the principle of a single-storey on this backland site would be acceptable. However, the use of the side access by traffic would affect the amenities of the existing residents.

Comments on decision: Rear access would be considered more favourably.

Current dismissal rate on this type of appeal (i.e. backland) since 1984/5: 57% (40 cases).

**8 APPEAL BY MR G CORY WRIGHT
BONNINGTONS FARM, TAKELEY
APPLICATION NO: UTT/0627/02/OP**

Appeal against the refusal of planning permission for cessation of scrapyards use, the cessation of use of residential mobile home, the demolition of all buildings and the erection of two detached dwellings with garages.

<u>Appeal decision:</u>	ALLOWED
<u>Date of decision:</u>	20 March 2003
<u>Original decision made by:</u>	COMMITTEE
<u>Date of original decision:</u>	21 August 2002
<u>Officers' recommendation to DC CTTE:</u>	REFUSAL

Summary of decision: The Inspector concluded that there would be significant environmental improvements to the character, appearance and visual amenities of the surrounding countryside and enhance the setting of the listed farmhouse sufficiently to justify an exception to Policy.

Comments on decision: Current dismissal rate on this type of appeal (i.e. replacement of rural business uses and farms by dwellings) since June 1999: 44% (8 cases).