

Councillor Evans,

Portfolio Holder for Planning

Report for Council 5 December 2023

Local Plan & Planning Policy

Since my last update, the Council voted to publish the Regulation 18 Draft Local for public consultation. The consultation commenced on 3rd November and runs until 18th December 2023. This is in excess of the six-week consultation period required by law. The consultation was advertised in the local press by way of full page advertisements, on the council's website and via social media. Copies of the documents were placed in the district's libraries and published online. Our Local Plans Team also held four exhibitions in different locations across the District from 13th to 16th November. These were attended by some 700 residents in total. The officers, and a number of district councillors, attended and spoke with residents. Senior officers have also attended Area Parish Forums to speak with Parish colleagues about the draft Plan.

In the week of 20th November, and in order to sustain further communications on the local plan, we sent out an information booklet to every registered address in the district. Further newspaper advertisements will now follow along with a series of consultation reminders provided online.

By the time of my next quarterly update, we will have reviewed the responses to the consultation. This will be a huge task and will take place throughout January and into February. The council must then consider what changes need to be made to the plan before publishing a final draft (Regulation 19) for consultation next summer.

Our newly appointed Urban Design Officer is currently reviewing responses to the recent Design Code consultation. We are working with the Department of Levelling up, Housing & Communities to secure further central grant funding to further refine the Code and put it to practical use.

Development Management

Over the last quarter our Planning Business & Administration Team registered and validated more than 700 planning applications and issued decision paperwork for more than 800. This small team also supported two s62a hearings, a number of appeal hearings, a public inquiry and dealt with an estimated 2,400 emails, letters and phone calls. The team also supports our Building Control and Street Naming & Numbering services.

It is also the responsibility of this team to ensure our internal systems are updated to reflect the national changes to planning application fees. Fees for major planning applications increase 35% and 25% for minor applications from 6th December.

In terms of performance the Development Management Team is issuing 83% of major and 85% of non-major planning applications within target timescales (far

above the government's target of 60% and 70% respectively). It has also further improved on its 'quality of decisions' metric for non-major applications, with only 1.67% of appeals being allowed by inspectors.

In terms of quality of decisions for major planning applications (the metric for which we are designated) the latest statistics place us at 12%; over the 10% threshold for designation. As far as perception by government is concerned, the council is still losing too many of its major planning appeals. In other words, refusing applications that government considers should have been granted permission. While we remain above the threshold, it seems less likely that the Secretary of State will de-designate the council and re-instate its full planning powers. Moreover, Uttlesford receives a high number of major planning appeals compared to similar councils. Defending appeals also brings with it significant resourcing implications. In the last 24 months, we have defended 17 major appeals compared to Braintree's 11, Sevenoaks, Kent's 9 and South Cambridgeshire (with a population almost twice ours) defending 14.

In October we published our updated five year housing land supply position. The council can demonstrate a 5.14 year supply of new homes. This will assist decision making and our position on appeal.

In November, our officers, led by our in-house Conservation Officer, supported the council in designating our 34th conservation area at Smith's Green, Takeley. We will now move on to supporting progress on a CA for Stebbing Green.

Enforcement

Since September the Planning Enforcement team has successfully defended two enforcement notices at appeal. It recently issued a 'stop notice' on a major developer on a site Saffron Walden as it appeared the developer was proceeding with works without first discharging its planning conditions. It issued a further notice on another developer pursuant to the creation of earth bunds seemingly without planning permission.

The Planning Enforcement Team was also involved in the recent Off-Airport Parking Summit which was attended by nine parish councils, and various agencies such as Essex Highways, NEPP, Trading standards, Essex Police and UDC Licensing, and Economic Development. The team is currently contributing to the council's call for a multi-agency response to the problem of unauthorised off-airport car parking by enforcing against car park operators acting unlawfully.

Building Control

Over the past quarter we have received more than 2,000 building regulations applications and initial notices and continue to exceed performance targets in responding to and dealing with them. So far this quarter our experienced team has also processed a record number of 'Partnership Applications' (applications for work on sites outside our district) amounting to 242 fee paying applications. These assist in bringing additional revenue into the council.

As ever, the team will be on call over the Christmas period (including Christmas Day) should there be any incidents resulting in dangerous structures (e.g. bridge strikes, house fires, building collapses etc) in order to help keep our residents safe.