

MID SUFFOLK DISTRICT COUNCIL CABINET MEMBER UPDATE

From: Councillor Whybrow Cabinet Member for Planning	Report Number: CMU15
To: Council	Date of meeting: 26 April 2018

TO PROVIDE AN UPDATE FROM THE CABINET MEMBER FOR PLANNING

1. Overview of Portfolio

1.1 The role includes the following responsibilities:

Ensure the Council carries out its statutory duties as Local Planning Authority
Ensure Development Management makes good quality and timely Decisions
Ensure that the Council has up-to-date Planning Policies that have a positive impact without unduly restricting development

1.2 These collectively deliver the following outcomes:

Protect and enhance our built and natural environment
Understand what housing and employment sites are needed
Unlock the barriers to sustainable growth
Help create and maintain sustainable communities
Agree where growth goes
Liaise with neighbouring authorities to fulfil our Duty to Cooperate

2. Recommendation

2.1 This report is for information.

3. Key Activities/Issues Over the Past Six Months

3.1 Performance on planning applications (as judged by DCLG statistics) is reasonable, with Mid Suffolk delivering 78% of majors in time since the beginning of April 2017. On non-majors Mid Suffolk is at 73%. As part of this statistic, 76.6% of Householder applications have been determined within the statutory 8-week timescale, which is marginally improved since the last Cabinet Member update in December.

3.2 In respect of the numbers of dwellings where decisions have been issued, as at the end of December, Mid Suffolk had approved 51% of the dwellings before it. The numbers of dwellings with a resolution to grant but which haven't yet had a decision is significant, though it is difficult to give a definitive number because several of these applications are in outline form with exact numbers subject to reserved matters applications. Many of these applications remain subject to negotiations relating to legal agreements but officers are working hard to issue as many decisions as possible ahead of the 31st March year end.

- 3.3 An All Member 'Planning' briefing session was delivered on 8th February 2018. The session updated Councillors on the Joint Local Plan and the emerging Policy context, described the Infrastructure Delivery Plan and provided an update on Development Management activities. The session was well received, and it was heartening to see the support that fellow Councillors have for the work that our Planning teams are doing. Following the success of this event I am working with Officers to see if we can deliver similar sessions more regularly.
- 3.4 Neighbourhood Plans continue to be of interest, with fifteen communities actively working towards developing their plans. Stradbroke has recently completed their pre-submission consultation and Debenham reach the end of their consultation on the 16th March. Over the last six months new Area Designations have been received from Botesdale and Rickinghall, Diss and District (including the Mid Suffolk villages of Palgrave, Stuston and Brome and Oakley), Eye, Fressingfield, Laxfield, Thorndon and Wilby.
- 3.5 An All Member briefing session was provided on 31st January to update Councillors about the current work underway to produce a CIL Expenditure Framework. As part of developing this work Parish Council Workshops were also delivered in Elmswell and Eye on 19th February. This work will progress through Cabinet, and all being well, will be presented to Full Council in April.
- 3.6 Your officers worked on a Suffolk-wide application to the Planning Delivery Fund: Design Quality. I am pleased to be able to report that bid was successful and £300,000 has been awarded from the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). There are two elements of the initiative; to adopt an updated Suffolk Design Guide as supplementary planning guidance, and to develop further the design skills of planning teams and communities working towards Neighbourhood Plans. The letter announcing the award stated that the successful scheme scored highly on the scale and strength of proposal and the commitment to making a step change in the quality of new development to accelerate the delivery of housing growth.
- 3.7 Public consultation on the Joint Local Plan was completed on 10th November. The Councils' public consultation was effective at this first stage of the Local Plan preparation and resulted in 13,960 comments from 1,370 respondents as reported at the Member training event on 8th February. This was an unexpected level of response that presents challenges which the team are working through. The timetable agreed last summer did not have sufficient time allocated to enable officers to satisfactorily address the quantum of consultation responses received. However, this level of response can only be seen as positive and a sign of good community engagement, which will aid production of a robust and mature new Joint Local Plan.

4. Future Key Activities

- 4.1 The next stage of the Joint Local Plan is an important piece of work. Member briefings are arranged throughout March and April to develop the next draft of the Local Plan with further public consultation expected in the summer of 2018. An updated Local Development Scheme, setting out the timetable for production, is currently in development and will be reported to Cabinet in April.

- 4.2 Continuing to provide support to Neighbourhood Planning groups remains a priority. It is likely that several groups will be moving towards their pre-submission consultation soon and it is important that the Council provides appropriate support to them. Recruitment to a dedicated role to support this process has not been successful thus far but Officers continue to provide this support both through officer time and dedicated consultancy support.
- 4.3 Development of the Councils' Community Infrastructure levy (CIL) Expenditure Framework continues and will be reported to Full Council in April. There will be another Member Briefing session during March.
- 4.4 The five-year housing land supply will be discussed at Mid Suffolk's Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 15th March. The Annual Monitoring Report process will also commence at the end of March with the final report likely to be published during June.
- 4.5 There have been a range of challenges relating to workforce capacity. The recent round of recruitment for roles in Development Management saw more than 15 applications. A successful round of interviews was held during March, and announcements will be made shortly on appointments. There is ongoing recruitment within the Strategic Planning team which will not be completed until later in March.

5. Conclusion

- 5.1 The service is currently dealing with high demand on a day-to-day basis as well as several significant projects. It is vitally important to maintain momentum and engagement on the Joint Local Plan. Developing the Councils' approach and governance around CIL Expenditure is also high priority. At the same time, it is important that we retain focus on decisions made on individual planning applications and continue to improve the efficiency and quality of our decision-making processes.

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