

BABERGH DISTRICT COUNCIL CABINET MEMBER UPDATE

From: Councillor Nick Ridley Cabinet Member for Planning	Report Number: CMU18
To: Council	Date of meeting: 24 July 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 the local Planning Authority;
Ensure Development Management makes good quality and timely decisions; and
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 the Council's 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; and
Liaise with neighbouring authorities to fulfil the Council's Duty to Cooperate.

2. Recommendation

2.1 That Council notes the report.

3. Key Activities/Issues Over the Past Six Months

3.1 Performance on planning applications (as judged by MHCLG statistics) is good, with Babergh delivering 80% of applications classed as 'majors' on time in the three months since the beginning of April 2018. On 'non-majors' Babergh is at 83%. Both of these statistics are broadly similar with performance in the last Cabinet Member report. Work is in progress to develop and customise "Enterprise" application workload management software to operational needs. It is intended that this will enable officers to track and prioritise their workload with greater efficiency once tested and rolled out to the team. The intention is that this will be introduced in the autumn.

3.2 The Annual Monitoring Report has now been published. It identifies a 6.7 year housing land supply against the Core Strategy requirement.

3.3 Staff recruitment and retention has been a challenge and has been flagged as a significant risk on the corporate risk register. An action plan has been created to address the issue which includes looking at apprenticeships, refining the career progression scheme and looking at smarter use of consultants. It also includes looking at pay and to that end a Market Factor Supplement has been introduced, which aims to bring remuneration in line with other nearby Local Authorities.

- 3.4 Neighbourhood Plans continue to be of interest, with fifteen communities actively working towards developing their plans. Aldham and Assington have both recently designated their plan areas.
- 3.5 The Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Expenditure Framework was approved by Councillors in April. The first round of bids has been received and officers are currently screening those applications. Further Member briefings are anticipated later in July.
- 3.6 The Suffolk Design project continues to progress. Hemmingway Design, Design South East and Hudson Architects won the tender to deliver the work. The launch event was held at the University of Suffolk on 9th July. There are two elements to the initiative. These are 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. Further workshops and seminars will be held throughout the remainder of the year.
- 3.7 The next stage of the Joint Local Plan remains an important piece of work. Member briefings were delivered throughout March and April to develop the next draft of the Local Plan with further public consultation expected in the Autumn of 2018.
- 3.8 The Local Development Scheme, which sets out the timetable for the Joint Local Plan, is also being presented at this Cabinet meeting. The revisions to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), which are due to be published at the end of July, have complicated matters but officers are confident that they will be able to meet the revised timeline as long as the actual published version is not too dissimilar from draft documents.

4. Future Key Activities

- 4.1 Continuing work on the Joint Local Plan is a significant priority and the teams are working diligently to meet the emerging requirements of the revised NPPF. A key element of this includes working with neighbouring authorities on Statements of Common Ground as the Plan progresses. In particular, we need to work with those authorities in the Ipswich Housing Market Area (Ipswich Borough, Suffolk Coastal, Babergh and Mid Suffolk) in addressing strategic cross-boundary matters and will continue to progress matters through the Ipswich Strategic Planning Board (formerly known as the Ipswich Policy Area Board).
- 4.2 Continuing to provide support to communities experiencing development pressures and 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 been successful and Officers continue to provide support both through officer time and some dedicated consultancy support.
- 4.3 Refinement of the Councils' CIL Expenditure Framework will be important once the Council has been through the first bidding round.

4.4 There have been a range of challenges relating to workforce capacity as mentioned above. There has been some success and several new starters have been welcomed into the team. A further round of recruitment will commence imminently as there still remains vacancies in both the Development Management Team and the Planning Policy Team.

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. Refining the Councils' approach and governance around CIL Expenditure is also a 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.