

BABERGH DISTRICT COUNCIL CABINET MEMBER UPDATE

From: Councillor Ridley Cabinet Member for Planning	Report Number: CMU28
To: Council	Date of meeting: 23 October 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 That Council notes the report.

3. Key Activities/Issues Over the Past Six Months

3.1 Performance on planning applications (as judged by MHCLG standards) is good, with Babergh delivering 77% of majors in time in the three months to the end of September 2018. On non-majors performance is also at 77%. For Majors we determined 15 applications in the previous quarter and 9 in this quarter which is accordingly more exposed to statistical variation as 1 additional decision in time would have exceeded previous quarter performance. For non-Majors it is likely that staffing challenges have compromised performance. It should nevertheless be noted that MHCLG performance measures run over a rolling two year period and currently are at 87% for Majors for that two year period (target 60%) and 82% for non-Majors (target 70%).

3.2 The five-year housing land supply has been challenged at the Public Inquiry relating to the Boxford appeal. A verbal update on the outcome of this appeal will be provided if the decision is issued between publishing this paper and the Council Meeting.

- 3.3 Despite a successful recruitment round some months ago, and the introduction of a market factor supplement to support the recruitment and retention of qualified Planning Officers, there are still some vacancies in both Development Management and Planning Policy teams. Application caseloads remain accordingly high. Consequently, this has been flagged as a significant risk on the corporate risk register. To support longer term change, we continue to financially support apprentice planners through their professional planning qualifications.
- 3.4 Staff recruitment and retention remains a challenge and has been flagged as a significant risk on the corporate risk register.
- 3.5 I am pleased to see more Neighbourhood Plans coming forward, with nineteen communities actively working towards developing their plans. Boxford, Little Cornard and Whatfield have all designated their areas since my last report.
- 3.6 The first round of bids for Community Infrastructure funding have been dealt with and officers are currently working on the first review of the process.
- 3.7 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 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. Further workshops and seminars will be held throughout the remainder of the year.
- 3.8 The next stage of the Joint Local Plan remains an important piece of work. The new NPPF has placed additional responsibilities on all Councils and Officers are addressing the further evidence required, much of which relates to infrastructure requirements.
- 3.9 The Local Development Scheme, which sets out the timetable for the Joint Local Plan, was adopted in July.

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 requirements of the revised NPPF.
- 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 The second 'bidding round' for CIL expenditure is underway. It opened on 1st October and will close on 28th October with validation and screening during November and December and relevant bids brought to Cabinet in February 2019.

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 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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