

BABERGH DISTRICT COUNCIL CABINET MEMBER UPDATE

From: Councillor Clive Arthey Cabinet Member for Planning	Report Number: CMU18
To: Council	Date of meeting: 21 January 2020

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 In Babergh, performance on planning applications (as judged by MHCLG statistics) for majors in time in the six months to the end of November 2019 was 91% (22 cases). For non-majors Babergh decided 97.3% applications (511 cases) in time. In relation to pre-application advice Babergh provided advice in 143 cases.

3.2 In Mid Suffolk, 85% of majors (47 cases) were determined in time in the six months to the end of November 2019. For non-majors Mid Suffolk decided 97.4% applications (587 cases) in time. In relation to pre-application cases Mid Suffolk provided advice in 184 cases.

3.3 The team continue to focus upon service improvements in both procedures and activities and have established a group of ongoing improvement projects to help bring together Development Management, Heritage and Enforcement activities in an aligned way. Included in this is a programme for Member and Officer training for 2020. This will include training in January to assist Members in their consideration of the emerging Joint Local Plan in planning decision making.

- 3.4 In relation to Heritage matters the service has provided consultation advice in relation to 147 listed building consent applications and 296 planning applications for Babergh, with a mean average turnaround of 15 days to respond. In terms of Mid Suffolk, advice in relation to 101 listed building consent applications and 326 planning applications was provided, with a mean average turnaround also of 15 days. The team are actively looking at potential service improvements including widening the scope of possible pre-application advice to help to recover a greater proportion of operational costs and reduce reliance upon negotiation during the lifetime of an application. This would be expected to improve outcome certainty for applicants and safeguard timely processing of applications as part of any improved service offer.
- 3.5 In relation to Planning Enforcement, the service opened 65 investigations in Babergh in the 3 months to the end of November 2019, and closed 91 cases during the same period. In Mid Suffolk, the service opened 84 investigations in the 3 months to the end of November 2019, and closed 75 cases in that period. In the same period 2 notices were issued in Babergh, and 10 notices were issued in Mid Suffolk. The team are working to reduce backlogs and streamline performance whilst increasing the transparency of our enforcement process. This work will be continuing through Spring 2020.
- 3.6 In June both Councils considered and approved a Housing Delivery Test Action Plan (HDTAP) for publication. A group of officers across Development Management, Strategic Housing, the Councils' Development Team and Strategic Planning Policy are currently working collaboratively to implement the Action Plans (for both Councils). Some examples of progress made to date include the completion of a survey on CIL with results currently being analysed, completion of the first part of the Local Validation List, completion of the first Community Led Housing scheme in Lavenham with the development of further schemes in the pipeline and progress on the delivery of new homes through Council schemes together with work with Registered providers around the delivery of affordable houses through s106 Obligations.
- 3.7 Recruitment and retention of experienced staff remains an ongoing risk to resilient service and performance which has been flagged as a significant risk on the corporate risk register. We continue to take an approach focused on career development to invest in our own staff and a programme of training for 2020 is under development. The Market Factor Supplement for Planning Officers, introduced in 2018, has been extended and is paid to all existing and newly appointed qualified staff.
- 3.8 Neighbourhood Plans continue to make positive progress in both Councils. In Babergh, two Plans received majority 'yes' votes when they went to a local referendum late last year. A report to confirm the formal adoption of the Aldham Plan is being presented to Council this week. The Elmsett Plan has been adopted outside of Full Council and was done so to ensure our compliance with the relevant regulations. Together, they bring the total number of 'made' (adopted) Plans in Babergh up to five. Twenty-two other plans are being progressed across the district, a few of which are now at final working draft stage prior to being published for pre-submission consultation over the next few months.
- 3.9 In Mid Suffolk, the Botesdale & Rickinghall Plan will be formally 'made' (adopted) this week following a majority 'yes' vote at referendum in late November 2019. This brings the total number of 'made' (adopted) neighbourhood plans in Mid Suffolk up to seven.

Of the sixteen other plans being progressed across the district, both Eye and Fressingfield have been independently examined and are now being readied in anticipation of advancement to a local referendum. As post-examination plans, both are also a material consideration in planning decisions locally. Two other plans, Drinkstone and Woolpit, are currently out to submission consultation, and both will be advance to independent examination in late February / early March.

- 3.10 As part of the CIL Expenditure Framework review, seven Joint Member Panel meetings have been undertaken during September, October and November together with the consideration of a report to Joint Overview and Scrutiny in September with the meeting attended by Infrastructure providers from Rail, Health, Bus Passenger transport and Education. Cockfield Parish Council also participated . One 'All Member' briefing was held in September so that views on the current scheme could be captured and another will be arranged in the New year so that outcomes from the work of the Joint Member Panel can be fed back to Members. One of the key changes in circumstances which will have some bearing on CIL expenditure going forward is the publication of the Joint Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP) which sits alongside and supports the Joint Local Plan and sets out infrastructure priorities on a critical, essential and desirable basis

Annual Monitoring Report and Annual Housing Land Supply Position Statements

- 3.11 The Babergh and Mid Suffolk Joint Annual Monitoring Report 2018-2019 was published in September 2019. This document identified that 1,269 dwellings were built across both districts between April 2018 and March 2019 (579 dwellings in Babergh and 690 dwellings in Mid Suffolk). These completions inform the Government's Housing Delivery Test results, which are due to be published in late December 2019. The number of dwellings to be completed from outstanding planning permissions as at 1st April 2019 in Babergh was 4,513 dwellings and in Mid Suffolk was 6,555 dwellings.
- 3.12 The Annual Housing Land Supply Position Statements for Babergh and Mid Suffolk were published in September 2019 following a four-week consultation period. The report for Babergh demonstrates a Housing Land Supply of 5.67 years and the report for Mid Suffolk demonstrates a Housing Land Supply of 5.66 years, both above the Five-Year Housing Land Supply Requirement.

Joint Local Plan Update

- 3.13 The Babergh and Mid Suffolk Joint Local Plan Preferred Options Consultation (Regulation 18) took place between 22nd July and 30th September 2019. The Joint Local Plan is an important document, which will provide the strategy for growth of the Districts, setting out what and where development will take place up to 2036. Residents, local businesses and stakeholders were invited to have their say on the Plan. Approximately 5,500 representations were received during the consultation.
- 3.14 Copies of the document were provided to all Councillors, sent to Town and Parish Councils and were available at the Customer Access Points in Stowmarket and Subury, and at Libraries in Capel St Mary, Debenham, Elmswell, Eye, Glemsford, Great Cornard, Hadleigh, Lavenham, Long Melford, Needham Market, Shotley, Stowmarket, Stradbroke, Sudbury and Thurston.

- 3.15 During the consultation period there were four Town and Parish Council briefings, two events specifically for Neighbourhood Planning Groups, and twenty public drop-in events at local venues across both Districts. Details of all events were promoted through both traditional (print, radio) and social media and posters were made available so that Town and Parish Councils could advertise the events on local noticeboards. The Joint Local Plan Preferred Options document and supporting documentation was available to view on the Councils' website and comments could be made directly through the website.
- 3.16 The joint Council, cross-party, Councillor Working Group met in the lead up to the publication of the Plan and is chaired on an alternate basis by the respective Cabinet Members for Planning. The group has re-convened in December 2019 to reflect on the responses received to the consultation.

4. Future Key Activities

- 4.1 Continuing to determine and advise upon planning applications in a high quality and timely way remains a priority. It is expected that a number of Major planning applications will come before planning committee including market-led proposals for developments along the A14 corridor in line with draft JLP allocations and these proposals and their relationship to emerging and made Neighbourhood Plans will require very careful consideration.
- 4.2 With a number of Neighbourhood Plans reaching submission and examination stage it remains important that we continue to provide effective support to the groups working on them.
- 4.3 The CIL Expenditure Framework review will continue and any revisions will result in reports being brought to Full Council in each respective Council prior to Bid round 5 opening in May 2020. Alongside the review, bids for future infrastructure projects will continue to be received and developed and where appropriate presented to both Council's Cabinet for determination.
- 4.4 The joint Council, cross-party, Councillor Working Group will continue to meet to reflect on responses to the Joint Local Plan consultation and inform amendments to any policies.

5. Conclusion

- 5.1 The service continues to deal 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.