

BABERGH DISTRICT COUNCIL CABINET MEMBER UPDATE

To: Council	Report Number: CMU2
From: Cllr Clive Arthey Cabinet Member for Planning	Date of meeting: 22 November 2022

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;
Ensure Heritage and Planning Enforcement functions are efficient and effective; and
Ensure the Building Control service is delivered effectively.

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

3.1 The Joint Local Plan has continued to progress through its examination and a revised Local Development Scheme (LDS) was agreed at last month's Council meeting. Officers have been scoping and drafting a range of Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD's), addressing affordable housing, biodiversity and trees, wellbeing and health as well as sustainable construction. The scope of these are fully detailed in the LDS.

3.2 At this month's Cabinet meeting Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funding of more than £185,000 was allocated to community projects. As well as the Council's own CIL expenditure, since the beginning of the year more than £880,000 has been allocated directly to Town and Parish Councils across the District through Neighbourhood CIL Payments.

- 3.3 The CIL expenditure framework has also been revised following meetings of the cross-party working group and was approved by Council in October. One of the main changes was the increase in the threshold for community projects to £100,000.

This year has also seen a positive and pro-active approach to CIL debt recovery with more than £245,000 of outstanding CIL debt recovered. These cases can be complicated but I am pleased by the work our debt recovery officer, Debby Osak, is doing which demonstrates our commitment to collecting all CIL contributions that are due. CIL is a known up-front cost for developers and we will take robust action, through the Courts if necessary, to secure it. Parishes experiencing growth need their CIL to provide the necessary infrastructure to accommodate that growth.

- 3.4 Moving to the development management side of things, performance on planning applications (as judged by MHCLG statistics) for 'majors in time' in the year to 21st October 2022 was 79% (19 cases). For non-majors Babergh decided 96.2% applications (599 cases) in time.
- 3.5 Up to the summer the Development Management team continued to experience a high volume of applications, but this has slowed a little in recent months and planning fee income is now below forecast. Income from pre-application advice is delivering against forecast and Planning Performance Agreement income is above forecast.
- 3.6 Our Heritage service has provided consultation advice in relation to more than 280 applications since the beginning of the year. 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.
- 3.7 In relation to Planning Enforcement, the service has received reports of more than 250 planning breaches since the beginning of the year and has closed over 200 investigations over the same period. A cross-Council, cross-party, working group has met several times over the course of the year to revise and update the Councils' Joint Local Planning Enforcement Plan and I am pleased by the progress we are making.
- 3.8 The recruitment market has been challenging across the planning service in line with the national picture. Officers continue to explore new approaches to attracting the right candidates and we continue to 'grow our own' by offering development opportunities to prospective candidates. This has helped with some recent recruitment into the Enforcement team.
- 3.9 Neighbourhood Plans continue to make positive progress. Several plans have been 'made' including at Boxford, Little Cornard and Long Melford. Bentley will be at referendum in December. Leavenheath and Stutton are both awaiting examination, Lawshall is at consultation and Holbrook, Sproughton and Wherstead have recently submitted their draft plans.
- 3.10 Building Control have been addressing the introduction of new Regulations in July along with preparing for changes necessary to address the new Building Safety Act.

4. Future Key Activities

- 4.1 The next formal stage of the Joint Local Plan will be the public consultation on proposed modifications to the plan. We await feedback from the Inspectors of the plan before we can move to this stage.
- 4.2 Bids for CIL expenditure will continue to be worked on, with the next round of funding anticipated in May or June next year.
- 4.3 The revised Joint Local Planning Enforcement Plan will be completed and adopted in the early part of next year.
- 4.4 We will continue with everyday activities associated with planning applications across development management, heritage and enforcement.
- 4.5 With a number of Neighbourhood Plans at submission and examination stage it remains important that we continue to provide effective support to the groups working on them.

5. Conclusion

- 5.1 Overall our Planning Teams continue to deal with high demand on a day-to-day basis. Most importantly, we must maintain momentum and engagement on the Joint Local Plan to ensure the timely adoption of Parts 1 and 2. We must provide for the infrastructure requirements of communities, and we will continue to focus on decisions made on individual planning applications to improve the efficiency and quality of our decision-making processes.