

MID SUFFOLK DISTRICT COUNCIL CABINET MEMBER UPDATE

From: Councillor Whybrow Cabinet Member for Planning	Report Number: CMU7
To: Council	Date of meeting: 21 December 2017

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 DCLG statistics) is good, with Mid Suffolk delivering 81% of majors in time since the beginning of April. On non-majors Mid Suffolk is at 73%. As part of this statistic, 75% of Householder applications have been determined within the statutory 8-week timescale.

3.2 In respect of the numbers of dwellings where decisions have been issued, as at the end of November, Mid Suffolk had approved 64% 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.

3.3 Neighbourhood Plans continue to be of interest, with thirteen communities actively working towards developing their plans.

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 and Thorndon. A Joint Member Briefing session was held on Wednesday 29th November.

- 3.4 The Joint Local Plan consultation began on 21st August and finished on 10th November. Approximately 12,500 responses were received from around 1300 people (including organisations, such as Parish Councils).
- 3.5 Parish Liaison sessions in May and November have included updates on Planning as well as opportunities for Town and Parish Councils to discuss issues with the Assistant Director – Planning for Growth.
- 3.6 Council Officers have also attended other discussion forums, including SALC area meetings, to listen to Parish Councils about the issues affecting them and the ways in which the Council can continue to improve services.

4. Future Key Activities

- 4.1 The next stage of the Joint Local Plan is an important piece of work. The number and range of consultation responses has demonstrated that people have engaged with the process so far, so it is important that the Councils continue to concentrate on ensuring future stages are as well advertised.
- 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 from the beginning of the year though given the nature of these types of plans, the timing of this depends wholly upon the groups themselves.
- 4.3 Developing the Councils' Infrastructure Strategy and particularly the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) spending arrangements will be an important piece of work over the coming few months. This has been subject of discussion at Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee and will also be discussed at the Joint Member Briefing session on 20th December. Plans to engage with Councillors and communities more broadly will be developed over the coming weeks.
- 4.4 The coming months will see a range of major planning applications come before Planning Committee. These are likely to include the Snoasis development, phase 2 of the Mill Lane employment site at Stowmarket and housing developments in Elmswell and Fressingfield, as well as a range of other applications.
- 4.5 There have been a range of challenges relating to workforce capacity. New roles have recently been advertised and recruited to, including the new Corporate Manager Strategic Planning who commences in this role on the 18th December. Other new roles including Senior and Principal roles within the Development Management team, a new Senior officer in the Strategic Planning team (to add capacity to support Neighbourhood Plans) and a new Infrastructure related post, are also in the recruitment process.

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' Infrastructure Strategy and particularly the approach and governance around CIL spending processes are 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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