

June 2023

Restructure and Recruitment

Work continues to restructure the Planning Service and the formal consultation with staff and the unions completes on Friday 23rd June. This will be followed by a period of internal recruitment during July and a dedicated external recruitment campaign to fill any remaining vacancies and to add capacity and resilience into the Service.

West Northamptonshire Local Plan

Work continues to progress on preparing the new Local Plan for West Northamptonshire.

A report setting out the new timetable for the preparation of the West Northamptonshire Local Plan, known as the Local Development Scheme, was approved by Planning Policy Committee on 28th March.

On 3rd May, Planning Policy Officers held a workshop to which all Members were invited to discuss their thoughts on which policies in existing plans work well, where future improvements are required and to identify gaps in existing policy coverage.

Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered a report on the Local Plan at its meeting on 21st June. The report considered how Members would be involved in the plan making process as it develops.

The PAS (Planning Advisory Service) Review of the planning service, undertaken in late 2022, identified that further support was available from PAS to assist in local plan production. This support included a review of the evidence base and a review of the project management work that is underway. The council has taken up these offers of further support and officers attended a joint technical workshop with representatives from PAS. The advice and recommendations contained in the resulting reports will help the council to undertake the next stages of plan preparation.

Neighbourhood Plans

Following a successful referendum, a Neighbourhood Plan was made (adopted) for Harlestone on 21st April.

Planning Policy Committee

In addition to the above-mentioned workstreams, Members debated the government's recent consultation on the proposed changes to planning fees and permitted development rights and agreed a corporate response on behalf of West Northamptonshire Council.

At the Planning Policy Committee meeting on 23rd May Members agreed that consultation could be undertaken on Conservation Area Appraisals and designations for Scaldwell and Holdenby. The consultations will start in mid-June.

Development Management

Planning application caseloads continue to be high, however planning performance across West Northamptonshire has been consistently improving with 85.7% of major applications and 81.85% of non-major applications being determined within agreed timescales during April and May 2023 against a target of 70%. The Service is pleased to report that there is no validation backlog within the legacy Northampton area and that the validation backlog in the legacy South Northamptonshire and Daventry areas is steadily reducing.

A major transformation project was undertaken during March and April to integrate the DEF planning software across the former South Northamptonshire and Daventry areas. This was particularly important to improve service delivery given that our staff dealing with applications in the former Daventry area were reliant on paper files and outdated ICT, which is now no longer the case.

There were several Planning Appeals lodged relating to major developments that were received during January and February 2023 which have since progressed to hearings and inquiries. One of the cases was subject to an excellent result which in turn led to another appeal being withdrawn. In fact, so far this year the percentage of dismissed appeals (including many written representations appeals not listed below) each month far exceeds the national average. Major scale development planning appeals being determined by a public inquiry or hearing are listed below.

Hearings or Public Inquiries subject to decisions:

1) Land South of The Wharf, Bugbrooke, Northamptonshire, Construction of 52.no new dwellings with associated open spaces, roads, and drainage infrastructure.

Appeal dismissed. The appellant had sought to undermine the Councils 5-year housing land supply position for the former South Northants area, which was successfully defended at appeal.

2) Land at Stratford Road, Deanshanger, Outline application for 67 dwellings with all matters reserved other than access.

Appeal withdrawn. After the above appeal was dismissed, officers suggested the applicant withdraw their appeal (as they had been trying to apply identical arguments), which they did.

Hearings or Public Inquires awaiting a decision:

1) Land off Holly Lodge Drive, Boughton, Northamptonshire, Outline application for construction of up to 65 dwellings, Public Inquiry took place Tuesday 18 April to Thursday 20 April.

2) Land at Milton Road, Gayton, Northampton, Northamptonshire, Solar farm, Public Inquiry Public Inquiry took place Tuesday 23 May to Friday 26 May.

Forthcoming Hearings or Public Inquires:

1) Land South of Halse Road, Greatworth, Northamptonshire, Solar farm, Public Inquiry - Tuesday 6 June to Friday 9 June.

2) Land North of Blenheim Rise, Kings Sutton, Northamptonshire, Outline planning permission for residential development of up to 32 no. dwellings with all matters reserved except access.

Including affordable housing, together with creation of new areas of open space, a new access off Hampton Drive, landscaping, and all enabling and ancillary works. Hearing Date: 13 & 14 June

Councillor Rebecca Breese

Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning, Built Environment & Rural Affairs