

September 2023

Restructure and Recruitment

The Planning Service restructure has been completed and the internal recruitment process closes on Friday 15 September. A dedicated external recruitment campaign goes live on 18th September to fill the remaining vacancies and to add capacity and resilience into the Service. It is hoped that there will be a positive response to the campaign and that most posts will be filled by Christmas.

A submission to the Planning Skills Delivery Fund was submitted on Monday 11 September to secure £100,000 of funding for the appointment of temporary Development Management and Technical Support staff to support backlog clearance and upskilling, particularly in relation to ecology and the Council's future BNG (Biodiversity Net Gain) obligations.

A presentation on progress with the actions arising from the PAS (Planning Advisory Service) Peer Review was provided to Members by the Assistant Director on 13 September. This highlighted what has been achieved to date during 2023 and those actions remaining alongside timescales for implementation.

West Northamptonshire Local Plan

Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered a report on the Local Plan at its meeting on 11 September. The report considered progress on the plan and how Members would be involved in the plan making process as it develops. Following the completion of the remaining evidence base workshops are to be scheduled to ensure Members are briefed and engaged in policy development.

Neighbourhood Plans

The Nether Heyford Neighbourhood Plan goes to referendum in the parish on 07 September. The Arthingworth Neighbourhood Plan is currently being examined with a public hearing due to take place on 04 October. Draft plans for Great Oxendon and for Semilong and Trinity are currently being consulted upon (closing dates 24 September and 18 October respectively).

Planning Policy Committee

In addition to the above-mentioned workstreams, Members debated the government's recent consultation on the proposed introduction of use classes for short term lets and associated permitted development rights and agreed a corporate response on behalf of West Northamptonshire Council. They also endorsed the work of the Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMO) Member Working Group and recommended to Cabinet the approval of the associated Action Plan.

At the Planning Policy Committee meeting on 26 June Members agreed that the Nether Heyford Neighbourhood Plan should proceed to Referendum.

Development Management

Planning application caseloads continue to be high, however planning performance across West Northamptonshire has been consistently improving with 100% of major applications and 96% of non-major applications being determined within agreed timescales during June and July 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 with the expectation that this will be resolved by the end of the year.

Following the major transformation project undertaken to integrate the DEF planning software across the former South Northamptonshire and Daventry areas in March and April, this has now been extended and rolled out in August to include the former Northampton area. There is now one single WNC (West Northamptonshire Council) DEF system operating for the Planning Service.

The Major scale development planning appeals being determined by a public inquiry or hearings are listed below.

Hearings or Public Inquiries subject to decisions:

- 1) 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.

Decision: Dismissed

Hearings or Public Inquiries awaiting a decision:

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

Called in by the Secretary of State for the final decision.

- 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 Inquiries:

- 1) Land to the East of Brington Road, Flore Northamptonshire, Outline planning application of up to 45 dwellings, to include 40% affordable dwellings (7 one bed

homes, 5 two bed homes and 6 three bed homes), infrastructure and open space. (All matters reserved other than access).

Hearing in October (12th October 2023).

- 2) Land North Of, Bedford Road, Northampton, Outline Planning Application (all matters reserved except access) for the development of up to 24,000 sqm (GEA) of employment land (Use Classes E(g), B2 and B8) with new vehicular access, associated parking, highway infrastructure and other ancillary works. Application accompanied by an Environmental Statement.

Hearing in October (21st November 2023).

Councillor Rebecca Breese

Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning, Built Environment & Rural Affairs