



Report of Councillor Cllr Rebecca Breese Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning, Built Environment & Rural Affairs

Thursday 15th July, 2021

Planning

In terms of the planning for West Northants we are undertaking a process of review and stabilisation in advance of future restructures and the development of new ways of working which reflect best practice and assists in the economic growth in our area.

As with all areas we are bringing 4 authorities together all with differing procedures, policies and resource levels which will take time to settle and resolve. Unfortunately we have inherited a number of issues that we are currently working through that I am aware is challenging for users and stakeholders as well as staff engaged in the process .

I am however working with senior management team in establishing a direction of travel and I can report some improvements already in regard to the timescales in dealing with applications. I look forward to future reports which will provide clarity and progress in respect of the planning process, the work of the committees and the role of members in ensuring that we get the right development that serves our communities.

Development Control:

The number of planning applications received by the planning departments working across the district has increased by more than 30% on this time last year. This represents an unprecedented workload for the department and has unfortunately resulted in delays in both validation of applications, and to some extent, deciding applications. This is a most undesirable situation as failing to meet deadlines can have long term implications for the department in terms of intervention by MHCLG.

The planning department has made some immediate improvements reducing the initial delay from 5 weeks to 2 weeks and we continue to look for further ways in which we can support professional staff in reducing this important target still further.

Whilst we do have some aspects of the service coming together there is still much work to do in agreeing the best working methods that reflect both best practice alongside the existing resources available. With difficulty in filling vacancies in the service and the extra work involved in bringing the teams together we are presently no longer redacting and publishing all comments received about planning applications on our website. This reflects the practices adopted by Daventry District however I know it is not popular and I also know that officers do not feel it reflects the standards they wish to achieve going forward. I have, therefore, requested that it is revisited in three months time when I believe the service will be more stable.

Area Planning Committees

These are up and running and as with any new process there will be the need to refine and monitor the success of the committees ensuring that they provide a consistent approach to decision making, reflecting both the expectations of our communities and partners whilst also providing confidence to developers that we are fair and transparent in reaching our conclusions. I will over the coming months work alongside the Chairs and members of the 4 committees to

ensure we build continuous improvement into the review and any changes will be communicated to Council.

I am also looking at the issues around member call in as this has also been raised, again working with senior officers I will report any changes resulting from this review over as soon as possible ensuring there is clear guidance in terms of procedure and rules going forward.

Enforcement

A priority for many members, there can be intense frustration if we have planning policies, issue planning permissions and then they are not carried in accordance with those permissions. At present SNC, DDC and NB have different enforcement policies and differing levels of officer capacity to respond. Therefore policies are being harmonised and these will provide clarity in terms of enforcement priority and timescales that members can expect action which we will monitor. This will also allow officer resource to be prioritised across the council. It is anticipated a member workshop on enforcement will be held in the autumn

Planning Policy

The Part 1 Local Plan review (also known to longer serving councillors as the Joint Core Strategy, reaches its first milestone in September with a public consultation about options for further growth.

The Policy team continues to prepare for Northampton Local Plan Part 2 Examination in Public, with Hearings due to be scheduled shortly, most likely in the late summer- early autumn, but the date is at the discretion of the inspectors.

Land Supply

The published land supply figures which will be used by Planning Inspectors in planning appeals when applicants are using land supply figures as a justification for allowing a development are:

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| Daventry: | 6.3 |
| Northampton Borough: | 5.6 |
| Northampton DRA: | 4.8 |
| South Northants: | 6.3 |

Councillor Rebecca Breese

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