

21st March 2024

Restructure and Recruitment

The Planning Service restructure has been completed and the internal recruitment process closed in September, this phase of the restructure has successfully resulted in several posts being filled internally across the different planning service teams.

The dedicated external recruitment campaign, which went live on 18th September 2023 has resulted in the majority of vacancies being filled within the Service. There are four new starters during March and one in April in the Area Planning Teams, which will take them close to full compliment. Recruitment has been completed in the technical support team, which in turn has enabled an improvement in validation timeframes. There is currently a further recruitment drive in order to fill the remaining posts within the structure; in particular, the 3 vacant Major Project Officer posts in Development Management. It is hoped to complete this final part of recruitment to the restructure by May/June.

The Head of Service – Development Management post has been filled and the successful candidate (Simon Ellis) took up the post on the 12th February 2024.

Consultation with the legacy Northampton team has commenced in order to finalise the move of the entire Planning Service to the Towcester office in the coming months.

West Northamptonshire Local Plan

At its meeting on 14th March, Planning Policy Committee recommended the Local Plan for consultation. This is now an item on the agenda for this evening's meeting. Subject to agreement from members, this will now be published for consultation over an eight week period starting in April.

Neighbourhood Plans

The Arthingworth Neighbourhood Plan has been made following a successful referendum on 8th February.

Heritage

At its meeting on 30th January, Planning Policy Committee agreed to the establishment of a local list of historically important buildings for West Northants. Assets that have previously been endorsed by the former Northampton Borough Council and Daventry District Council now form the foundation of that list. Members also agreed an approach and a single set of criteria for assessing potential additions to the list.

Planning Enforcement, S106 and CIL

The planning enforcement team is currently serving a number of planning enforcement notices related to unauthorised developments. The team is actively working with the Councils Communications team to publicise that the Council is taking robust action against breaches of planning control (A mid to late March time-frame for press releases).

Briefing sessions occurred in early February of Councillors and then Parish Councils on work being undertaken to improve collection of CIL and S106.

Development Management

Planning application caseloads continue to be high, however planning performance across West Northamptonshire has remained high with 89.2% of major applications and 83.7% of non-major applications being determined within agreed timescales during October 2023 to January 2024 against a target of 70%. Whilst a dip has occurred from the last quarter this figure still presents an overall improvement for the Authority for the year to date.

A number of Major scale development planning appeals being determined by a Public Inquiry or Informal Hearings are listed below.

Public Inquiries awaiting a decision or subject to a recent decision:

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

Decision by the Planning Inspectorate was to allow the application. This decision has been challenged by a private individual in the form of a Judicial Review (JR). The outcome of the JR is awaited.

- 2) Land at Milton Road, Gayton, Northampton, Northamptonshire, Solar farm, Public Inquiry Public Inquiry took place Tuesday 23rd May to Friday 26th May 2023.

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

- 3) Land North of Bedford Road, Great Houghton. Outline application for up to 24,000 sq.m of employment floorspace. Public Inquiry took place 21-30 November 2023.

The appeal was dismissed.

Forthcoming Inquiries:

- 1) Development of up to 24 First Homes (amended plans), land east of Northampton Road, Roade, Northamptonshire.

The Informal Hearing took place on Tuesday 27th February 2024

- 2) Outline Planning with all matters reserved to provide Later Living Accommodation (Class 2) as three integrated types of accommodation on a site off the main entrance to Whittlebury Park.

The Informal Hearing starts on the 8th May 2024.

Councillor Rebecca Breese

Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning, Built Environment & Rural Affairs