

Bath & North East Somerset Council

MEETING:	Development Management Committee	AGENDA ITEM NUMBER	
MEETING DATE:	3 rd May 2017		
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER:	Lisa Bartlett, Divisional Director, Development, (Telephone: 01225 477550)		
TITLE:	Annual Report 2016/17		
WARDS:	ALL		
BACKGROUND PAPERS:	Appendix 1 - Compliments		
AN OPEN PUBLIC ITEM			

1. Summary

Overall RAG Status		Performanc e/Targets	Customer Service	Resources	Income	Risks
This Report	Last Report					
G	G	G	G	A	G	A

2. Significant Progress since last report

Member Training Programme

We have organised and run 3 member workshops along with training sessions for members. The events have been very well attended and have involved workshop sessions in relation to Planning Enforcement and Heritage. Parish Councils are also invited and the feedback has been very positive.

We also undertook a Members Tour of completed development on 7th October 2016 we visited 12 sites throughout the district visiting both large scale redevelopment sites such as the former Alcan factory site which is in the process of delivering 169 dwellings, community facilities and green spaces and the Bath Racecourse replacement grandstand to smaller projects such as the community led Wellow playing field park development.

Agent Feedback and Developer Forum

The Agent Forum continues to be well attended with a positive working relationship and positive feedback. One Agent recently commented in writing:-

Keep up the great work and I would be grateful if you could pass on my thanks to the hard working registration team.

In March we held our first Developers Forum to bring together senior leadership from across the council and the development industry to discuss matters of planning, housing and economic development to meet shared objectives. It is based on the West of England Planning Toolkit which refers to partnership working. The forum was very productive and it has been agreed that it will meet twice a year.

Transformation project

There have been important changes in Development this year. Firstly the move to electronic consultations with Parish and Town councils has been well received by nearly all the Parish and Town Councils and has also resulted in a saving on printing and postage budgets we have provided help and guidance to the Parish and Town Councils are required to support this change. We have also changed our site notices to biodegradable wallets and string rather than plastic lamination and cable ties – not only more environmentally friendly but also cheaper. A project has been started to digitise the remaining paper plans (pre 1996) which will result in time savings for staff in the future not having to wait for paper plans to be delivered from Hayden. The plans stored on disk have also been uploaded to the document management system, also improving access to information for all officers.

The Planning Performance Agreement (PPA) process has been reviewed and it proposed that we will move to up-front payments which customers prefer and which will also realise efficiency savings in administration. The new service is going through the Council's decision making process currently and expected to be launched mid-summer

Flexible working/Performance

Surveyors in the Building Control team have worked on site using the first issue of mobile devices (tablets). These have proved potentially very useful but there have been issues with the 3G connection around the district and with the software running on the tablets. A business case is therefore being developed to move to the next issue of mobile devices with a specific App linking into the main Uniform database, to enable on site working which can be undertaken whilst offline with a sync option once back in wifi or mobile range. The aim is to make the surveyors more flexible and efficient with their work on site, to improve performance and Income.

The Service has consistently exceeded all Government performance targets for this financial year despite operating within a challenging and unique natural and built environment. Planning application income levels have been good with £1.2m received in the financial year 2016/17. The number of pre-application enquires made to the service has been growing year on year from 749 in 2011/12 to 827 in 2012/13 and 933 in 2013/14. Pre application income has risen by 144% over the financial year 2016/17. Building Control and Land charges continue to meet their budgetary targets. The project is being supported by the Council's IT service.

Planning Registration times are now consistent with 88% of applications registered within 1 week. There are no backlogs in the Technical Support Team (emails, consultations etc)

Land Charge Searches are now returned on average within 4 days and all are returned in under 10 days.

All building regulation applications are validated within 3 days and 90% of full plans applications received an initial check within 15 working days.

RAG Report has been developed to include Enforcement cases and to project manage major applications. This is monitored by the Divisional Director and Group Manager on a weekly basis to ensure that these projects are dealt with effectively and efficiently and is also used to brief the Strategic Director Place and Senior Members.

Planning Enforcement

The team structure continues to be fine-tuned to focus on planning enforcement performance and customer service and the team has most recently recruited a Senior Enforcement/Planner/

Enforcement Team, enforcement cases are now recorded on the Council's data base. This has allowed for more detailed performance monitoring. The team endeavours to make a site visit within 2 weeks of a complaint. The team are now acknowledging 84% of complaints within 1 week.

Planning Performance Agreements (PPAs)

We first used PPAs in 2012/13 when there were 7 PPAs completed. In the following year 2013/14 we secured 31 PPAs. The adoption of PPA's has risen from an average of 2 per month in January 2014 to an average of 5 per month now with associated additional resources.

The use of PPAs has allowed us to invest resources in junior members of our own staff who are shadowing highly experienced planners thereby up-skilling our own staff at the same time as offering a bespoke work programme to challenging timescales to facilitate development.

Policy Framework

The Placemaking Plan

The Placemaking Plan was taken successfully through a public examination and Minor Proposed Changes have been the subject of public consultation. The Inspector's final report is expected later in spring 2017. It is hoped that the Placemaking Plan should be adopted soon after. Together, with the Core Strategy it will complete the Local Plan for Bath & North East Somerset, replacing the previous version adopted in 2007.

Local Plan 2016-2036 (formerly known as the Core Strategy Review)

The Core Strategy is being reviewed through preparation of the Local Plan which will formally combine the Core Strategy and Placemaking Plan into one plan. The review was launched in late 2016 with a Commencement Paper consultation. The new Plan will identify and allocate development opportunities, including strategic sites at locations identified in the Joint Spatial Plan (see below). Preparation of the Local Plan also provides an opportunity to look again at other policy areas such as renewable energy targets and what infrastructure is needed to support additional development. The Local

Plan will be progressed alongside work on the Joint Spatial Plan, with an Options document anticipated to be published for consultation autumn 2017.

The Joint Spatial Plan

The Joint Spatial Plan and Transport Study are being prepared by the 4 West of England Authorities to cover their combined area of Bath and North East Somerset, Bristol City, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire Councils. The plan will provide a new strategic planning context for all four West of England areas including Bath & North East Somerset. It will set the revised housing numbers for Bath & North East Somerset and an affordable housing target up to 2036. The consultation on the Emerging Spatial Strategy in late 2016 received over 1,500 responses.

Neighbourhood Planning Update

Chew Valley Area has passed its Neighbourhood Planning Examination and community referendum. The Council's Cabinet will consider a report to 'make' the Neighbourhood Plan at its April meeting. The Publow with Pensford Neighbourhood Plan has also passed its Examination and a community referendum is due to take place in May 2017. Finally, a number of other groups are nearing completion of their draft plans. Further information can be found on our Neighbourhood Planning web page.

An interactive map has been created to help people see which areas have or are developing Neighbourhood Plans. The map enables quick access to the plans and relevant websites, and is available on the Council's Services in Your Area. It will be regularly updated to ensure you have easy access to the latest information.

Houses in Multiple Occupation

The Council has started work on reviewing its Housing in Multiple Occupation (HMO) in Bath SPD. The SPD applies to the whole of Bath and seeks to limit the concentration of HMOs in parts of the city. Further information is available on the website. A draft of the revised SPD will be published for consultation later this year.

Housing Delivery

The Authority Monitoring Report shows a new record for housing completions in B&NES of around 850 new dwellings for the year 2016/17. Housing delivery has steadily improved over the last few years as a result of the boost to housing land supply provided by the Core Strategy and the improvements made to the Development Management processes.

Building Control

The Building Control section sends out a customer questionnaire on completion of each project it inspects. The overall customer satisfaction from returned questionnaires is over 98% for the year which is excellent. Comments from customers are added to the Building Control website from time to time. B&NES Building Control had two winning schemes in the LABC West of England Building Excellence Awards 2016

Winner: Best Extension or Alteration to an Existing Home - Copse Road, Saltford

Winner: Best Change of Use of an Existing Building or Conversion - Tythe Barn, Gibbet Lane, Norton Malreward

Training Plans

The service has developed a training plan from which Team Managers split resources between individuals. Team Managers feed requests from individuals through their PDRs into the plan. In order to maximise training opportunities where common training needs are identified the Council undertakes internal training sessions either led by Officers within the Council or by experts brought in.

We have cross trained Enforcement Officers and Planning Officers within the service as planning/Enforcement officers who sit within our Enforcement team.

This has increased the skill base of staff, increased our flexibility as a service to deal with different work pressures.

The Building Control team took on an Assistant Building Control Surveyor as part of their 'grow your own' programme. This has proved successful in the past to bring someone new into the Building Control profession, to strengthen the team and to help with succession planning.

Royal Town Planning Institute

The Royal Town Planning Institute has shortlisted the Environment and Design Team together with Regeneration Team The WaterSpace project's innovative approach has led to the project being a finalist in both the Royal Town Planning Institute's Regional and National Planning Excellence Awards, 2017, in the categories of Spatial Planning and the Natural Environment respectively.

The draft WaterSpace Study, which has been developed with the Canal and River Trust, Environment Agency and Wessex Water is now available to view on our [website](#) and comments are welcome.

Compliments increasing and declining complaints

The service has been recording compliments received and a selection of recent ones are included in Appendix 1. The number of compliments has been increasing in recent months and within the service we have been focussing on customer service training for staff to ensure that this trend continues. Correspondingly the service has received a reduction in complaint levels by 28% in the last year.

Customer Excellence

The service has a strong commitment to professional development. Over the previous 5 years the service has funded 5 Officers to undertake and complete relevant professional qualifications. The Service, as part of the Place Directorate will be seeking to be accredited for a whole Council Customer Service Excellence (CSE) in the Autumn of 2017.

This year DM is piloting a mentoring scheme. 10 officers have had mentoring training and now there are 10 officers receiving mentoring. Feedback so far is that it is working very well and that mentees are very positive about the process. Although it is early days and not due to finish until March 2018 we are already considering extending the programme.

3 Planned Improvements for the coming year Officer and Member Training

The main purposes of the Training Plan for officers are as follows:

- Establish a framework of key training priorities for the Service
- Identify training needs across the Service for the coming year
- Facilitate a structured and fair approach to training opportunities and the apportionment of the training budget
- Outline key training methods to be utilised
- Outline a monitoring framework of training undertaken against this Plan

A project plan has been developed to ensure appropriate training.

Joint Working

Within the Council:- The WaterSpace Study will continue to involve cross department working including Environment and Design, Regeneration, Sustainability, Parks and Transport.

The Bathscape Landscape Partnership Scheme gets underway following a Heritage Lottery Fund development grant in November 2016, Bathscape aims to connect people and communities with Bath's unique landscape.

Over the next few months officers will be out and about discussing Bathscape projects with potential delivery partners to prepare a costed delivery programme to submit to HLF in June 2018.

Whilst the 'on the ground' activity will take place 2018 – 2023 , subject to HLF approval of the Round 2 HLF application, there will be pilots to test ideas during 2017/2018. These include Nature Watch sessions, an outdoor learning site, and a Bathscape Walking Festival that will take place 16th- 24th September 2017.

With other LA's:- B&NES Building Control section already undertakes structural calculation checks, management consultancy and provides surveyors for the out of hours emergency call out service on behalf of North Somerset Council . This generates an additional income for the section.

Innovation Group

Following the launch of the Customer Service Improvement Project a group of officers continue to organise and run an Innovation Group.

The group exists to look at new and innovative ways of service delivery, to support improvements to the service for customers and staff across Development and to provide

a network of support for new ways of service delivery. The group runs a 6 monthly staff awards scheme to recognised significant achievement for those who have gone above and beyond and is proving popular with plenty of nominations each time. We also run a number of events throughout the year raising money for our chosen charity and keeps the [‘latest news’](#) page on the website up to date

The group have also promoted a Health and Wellbeing agenda by working closely with the Sport and Active Lifestyles team to encourage everyone to take part in activity during February. There were some amazing sporting achievements, the Wednesday Walks were set up and are still running.

The group are now moving on to support and promote the use of sustainable travel and are working closely with the sustainable team to encourage everyone to use the pool cars or walk to site visits.

Business Plans/cases and Team review

The Service is preparing to implement a business plans to support the planning enforcement function. In addition, team reviews are underway which will focus on improving performance within existing budgets or to drive income generation. For example, in Development Management a review of the Planning Performance Agreement process is linked with analysis of how we can improve our pre application advice service.

Closer links between Building Control and Planning

We are working to facilitate closer working between the two groups. This will involve building control officers attending the Agents Forum as well as pre application discussions where planning and building control advice can be given at the same time thereby extending the pre application offer to cover the whole design and build process. In addition planning will investigate the possibility of increased face to face meetings with building control so that advice can be given in person and in one go. This will save applicants having to prepare and submit documentation which will save time and money and will also reduce the administrative burden for the service. This should also result in increased building control applications for LABC Building Control applications on line making it easier to submit them

4 Risks to be escalated for decision, action, or information

Risk	Decision/Action Required	Latest date for action/ decision
Insufficient resource to improve pre application advice	Business plans and use of increased income from planning application fees	Sept 2017
Capacity and loss of key staff	Good PDR Process; Review of structure	On-going
Concerns being raised to WHS status from incremental development	Up to date policy framework, pre application advice provided, engagement with heritage bodies, clear reports.	On-going

Selection of recent compliments

“I’ve been meaning to write to you for some months now. You may or may not recall Hill Rise, a modern house on North Road that you were the case officer for back in 2014. It actually got completed a good year or so back after an extensive (and stressful!) remodelling, and even today it brings a smile to our faces when we drive by. Cars and pedestrians now sometimes even stop to gawp and take photos of it! What a wonderful project it turned out to be in the end and I just wanted to say a huge personal thank you to you for having the vision all those years ago to allow such a bold and contemporary structure to be realised on this beacon site in Bath; It won the BANES Best Extension design in the awards that were announced earlier this month and we are now entering it into other awards. Looking back on the process, it sailed through the planning process, unhindered by the conservation issues we sometimes come across in having to ‘force’ the architecture to resemble Georgian Bath in some ad-hoc way.

A bit of an unconventional email, I know, but worth saying I think that you are one of those that helped in the rejuvenation process of taking what was a sad house to what it now is today. So thank you for seeing the vision here and for playing a part in making this happen. I shudder to think how different it could have ended up!”

I just wanted to send a quick email to thank you for your help with my non-material amendment application. Your assistance was much appreciated and the process could not have gone smoother as a result. Thank you.

I wanted to write in and extend my thanks to the case officer. All too often we moan and complain when things don’t go to plan but she has been extremely helpful in making this application run very smoothly. She responded to calls and more importantly done what she has said she will do on time therefore making the whole process very simple, she is a good asset to the BANES planning department.

“The Building Control Surveyor has been very responsive and helpful. I’m grateful with his help many thanks.”

“Customer service was exemplary – courteous helpful and prompt. I have rarely been served as well by any other service provider.”
