

## **Member briefing – Planning & Covid-19**

The Council is continuing to offer a planning service at this time, albeit one that is operating in a different and reduced way. The details of this will follow in this briefing and going forward we will continue to keep Members updated on any changes of note.

If Members can reduce their contact with the planning team to those matters that are urgent and require attention at this time, that would certainly help the team and would be appreciated.

I would also add that clearly this is an unprecedented situation and Members will no doubt be aware that planning officers may be redeployed to carry out other duties as necessary, to help deliver critical Council services.

### **Planning Control**

#### **Duty Planner service**

The discretionary duty planner service has been suspended for an initial 12 weeks. Please direct any queries to the Planning portal webpage [www.planningportal.co.uk](http://www.planningportal.co.uk) or there are numerous other websites providing planning guidance. Customers can also speak to a planning agent.

#### **Planning applications continue to be processed**

Planning Control officers are currently working from home, and are continuing to process those planning applications that would normally be dealt with under delegated powers.

Should Members wish to liaise with a planning officer on a particular case, and if they are not on leave or sick, they are available to be contacted. It would be preferable if contact is made by email but they are also available to discuss applications over the phone on their usual work numbers (their phones have been diverted). Failing that please email the case officer and ask to be called, and they will get in touch with you. If there are any problems in contacting

officers please email either Hannah Wood-Handy (South team) or Helen Morris (North team), or if they aren't available then Stuart Ashworth.

If further time is needed to consider and determine existing planning applications in the system, then officers are seeking agreed Extensions of Time (EOT) from applicants. From the 25th March all new applications made include a request for an initial 4 week EOT, to allow more flexibility during this period of restricted movement.

Any decision made within an agreed EOT period is considered a decision in time, in terms of the Government's targets on the time taken to determine applications.

Applicants and our regular planning agents have been made aware of changes to the service, and we have also updated Parish Councils. We will continue to do this.

Planning applications continue to be updated on the Council's website, but not as quickly as would occur normally, due to reductions in staff availability as other Council services may take precedence.

### **Decisions due to go to Committee**

As you will be aware the March & April Planning Committees have been cancelled. If an application is due to go to Committee then in the short-term it will just be delayed until the next available Committee. Should there be a large number of applications required to go to the next Committee, then the Council can hold extra meetings, which has happened in the past at times of great demand.

If the current restrictions go on for a longer period of time, the Government has asked that Councils consider enhanced delegated powers and virtual Planning Committees, however much depends on how long the restrictions will be in place. Further guidance is expected from the Government on this in due course.

The present situation is that new applications will be advertised in the usual way, and the weekly list emailed to Members, so Members will still need to call-in applications within 28 days of the publication of the weekly list in the usual way, and in accordance with the current scheme of delegation.

Consideration is currently being given as to how the Sifting Panel can operate at this time.

## **Planning Policy**

### **Local Plan**

Staff are continuing to prepare the revised draft Local Plan, and to schedule discussion at Task Group when meetings resume. This is a priority for the team. The team are taking advantage of the working at home to concentrate on rewriting the text / plans in the document.

### **Neighbourhood Plans**

Work continues in parishes, and we will respond with comments, but formal consultations or referendums are on hold.

### **CIL**

The CIL system is functioning, and the service continues. The CIL officer is available to contact by email.

### **Planning Enforcement**

Planning enforcement officers are operating a reduced service as they cannot carry out site visits at present. They are continuing to work on cases as best they can, and can still be contacted by email.