



Greater Cambridge Planning Agents' Forum

**Wednesday 17th July 2019
The Council Chamber, SCDC, Cambourne**

8am-10.00am

DRAFT NOTES/ACTIONS

Attended:

Chair: Cllr Tumi Hawkins – SCDC

Sharon Brown (Assistant Director, Delivery)

Emma Davies, Senior Sustainability Officer (Design and Construction)

Joanne Barks, Interim Technical Support/Registration Team Manager)

Cllr Katie Thornburrow (Cambridge City, Trumpington)

Ben Pridgeon – Cheffins

Jenny Page – Turley

David Mead - Planning and Architecture

John Dadge – BSM

Keith Warth - KWA Architects

Mark Hodgson – Savills

Kevin Sherwood - Sherwood Architects

Mike Osbourne – University of Cambridge

Rob Hopwood – Bidwells

Richard O'Connor

Mark Hodgson – Savills

Jamie Roberts – Pegasus Group

Brian Flynn – Carter Jonas

Hannah Wallis – Carter Jonas

Adam Davies – Strutt and Parker

Richard Biddle

Apologies:

Tim Bond

Kate Wood – Pegasus Group

1. Welcome and introductions

2. Actions from the last Forum meeting

- 11th October 2018 – Actions discussed. Minutes approved

3. Briefing on the Greater Cambridge Sustainable Design and Construction SPD Consultation (Emma Davies, Senior Sustainability Officer (Design and Construction))

Power Points Presentation - Attached

Adoption of the document is planned for January 2020.

Questions:

Jamie Roberts, Pegasus Group. Will the status at front of document remain?

Ans: only replaced section on climate change. All other sections will remain. Need to update the website.

Will application have implications to validations list.

Ans: All will be joined together.

Check list for submitting pre application, validation project list – looking at a single validation list. If not will try to make it as streamline as possible.

Local plan policy of Cambs, pre-app. Schemes struggled to meet requirements. Is there an allowance/check list to pick up.

Check list to go out with the initial first letter.

Wording in Section 3 regarding the policy. Look at other approaches that could help us meet our approach.

People using Pasi-house, which we fully support.

4. Shared Service Update (Sharon Brown, Assistant Director, Delivery)

Over the last two years moving forward to bring together two planning service structure. 12 months been working on service design for the other sections. Very pleased to say Phase 2 is now completed.

New service will settle down and start focusing on issues important to you.

ACTION: Chart to be circulated to Agents.

City split within two area teams, keeping the ward structure in the city. Enforcement Team, TSO Team and Operations Team. Policy & Strategy and BNE Team.

Implementation of the new structure will be phased. Development Management and TSOs will be going live with our new ICT system.

Going through process we haven't been able to recruit, using contract and agency staff. We can now go out very shortly, for planners, principle and senior planners.

5. Customer Access – issues arising and under discussion re: ICT Project and other proposed improvements. (Joanne Barkes, Interim Technical Support/Registration Team Manager)

Working on a programme of improvement. One system across both sites. IDOX. Able to input more into the system, will speed up the system.

Programme at moment looking at background, data cleansing, also looking at how we can streamline our processes.

Processes at the moment are very manual. Response times, we have a backlog across

planning applications. We managed to move things on from the front end. Almost in same day/24hr turnaround.

The backlog has moved down the process. Backlog sitting with the planners. Do not email comments to the Planners as they will sit there. Send through to support teams. Will get into the system much quicker.

The systems themselves, about December 2019 is the time we're aiming for. This will provide us with a one stop shop. Use resources more effectively, automate much more.

John: On planning support content: email addresses.

Call contact Centre who will put you through.

ACTION: Send list of contact details.

6. Resources and Recruitment Update. (Sharon Brown, Assistant Director, Delivery)

Q: understand we have been understaffed for quite some time.

Ans: Exit interview meeting, golden hello, relocation package. Looking at recruitment and retention of staff.

Career progression. Streamlined the interview process. Accept CVs now. Issues around salaries, looking at incentives corporately. Events to promote service. Complete environment to recruit in.

Pool of planners in the country is small. Hasn't helped by poaching. Please stop poaching our planners. Expensive to live here.

Rob – Bidwells. We have the same problems as you. What happens if you don't recruit within the next 6months. Pre-app process taking too long. Planning applications expensive to go down this route. Is there another approach to pre-apps. More streamlined.

Ans: Contingency plans. We are looking at additional support. Staff turnover in the city has been quite high. Starting the pre-app project shortly.

Pre-apps we submitted on line and logged more efficiently.

Richard O'connor; 2017 points raised then were an issue. Telephone calls not returned. No progress on pre-apps.

Ans: consolidated Management Team in place. Look at how we deliver our service. In a climate of shortage of planners. Some temps staff are good, others not so good.

Single consolidated pre-app process, ICT upgrade, will be considerable improvements. Looking at project of pre-app project now. What other authorities doing.

Option do we have pre-app days, close the office to work on these. Issues with SCDC telephone problems, issues now fixed. She be able to get through to Officers at South Cambs. If still do, please let Nigel Blazeby and Sharon Brown know.

Keith Warth, KWA: not replying to emails in SCDC. Send a holding response.

Ans: New system when implement it, will receive an automated response. Volume of emails is excessive.

Operations Team, will supply more of the administrative support from the Case Officers.

John Dadge: Anything inhouse, for performance indicators.

Ans: Working with Nigel to look at performance –

Jenny Page – Turley - If officers let them know to respond saying respond in a week or two weeks, then we will leave them alone.

Cllr Katie: I would log calls and create a log of the times tried to call. It's very different being a member working with the officers, can see both sides. We need to look at reducing the number of conditions sent out. Pre-apps and level of information is as much as a planning application.

7. Questions/issues raised by Forum members

Sending communication by post. We would prefer email and not post. Area of saving.

John Dadge: Extensions of time. Are very keen to do this. Application runs well over time/target date. Want to appeal and cannot not because an extension of time has not been agreed. Request extension of time and nothing forthcoming.

Ans: Officers are expected to extend time. NB: Working towards agreeing extensions of time and giving clear reasons for that extensions of time.

JD: would agree an extension on most applications, but when asked nothing is forthcoming.

Ans: Tracing system will be in place, to take this forward with the officer.

Q: Do the council have a policy or a view when they can have amendments.

Ans: We can accept one amendment, but after that, still problems, we hand on to them a little too long. We need to set out the issues and see what can be done.

SB: Consultation responses, uploaded. Amendments, wait until all consultees are in, then look at it.

Q: often the case where it is not clear what objects are. No clear conclusion at the end. Would be helpful to have a concise repose and clear.

ACTION: send letter to SB.

Ans: Looking at a structure for consultee to send a structured response.

Mark: Savills: Submitted application the Grange. Refused. Back in again. One amendment would not be enough. 8 weeks to wait again is too long to wait.

Ans: More compliance conditions, which would clog up our systems. The fee for a condition is small. Future session will invite someone along from Drainage. This is quite a challenging area to navigate through.

David Partnership Planning: Unfair to say fees lower, not our fault, we would be happy to pay a high fee. No opportunity to make amendment. Gets put back.

Ans: challenging for technical, for starting the clock again. Look at this quite carefully. Do not want delays to you getting on site.

David – Multiple conditions, sending in multiple applications.

Michael - Cost recovery, charging for time, worth thinking about technical officer level that could free up time when looking through documents again.

ICT review looking at application flow.

Part of the workflow that is taking this into account.

Richard: Cost increased by 25% to submit plans. (Check...) is that legal, fair? Was £20, increasing August going up to £25.

Kevin Sherwood: Portion of the fee. Take out the application fee and then increased it on major applications by £5. Planning Portal.

Adam Davies: Chat with Central Beds, where you can pay direct to the council and still submit through the planning portal.

Validation process: suggestion was: Try submitting a comprehensive package. Said by the LPA that the submissions some paper. We need guidance or any update on a previous meeting.

Ans: percentage 30% that are invalid. Agents 20% sending letters back are for plans, or fees. Some historic buildings. Doing an analysis at mo to see what is trending.

Q: payment of fee is often divorce. Saying fee paid and showing not.

Ans: There is a lag – between payments coming through the system.

8. Suggested topics and arrangements for future Forums

Rob: Bidwells: what might be coming out of the Council other SPDs or documents are drafting

Discussion on pre-apps. Different developments, look at different pre-apps or separate workshop on it.

ACTION: Staffing list to agents

9. AOB – No AoB discussed

10. Date of next meeting: October 2019 – date TBC (venue: CCC)