

**Greater Cambridge Joint Planning Agents Forum**

**6th February 2017**

**South Cambridgeshire Hall, Cambourne**

**8.30am – 10am**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **1.** | **Welcome and introductions**  Cllr Turner, Planning Portfolio Holder, SCDC introduced himself and explained chairing the meeting will alternate between himself and Cllr Blencowe. The following introductions were made.  Sarah Dyer – City Development Manager (Cambridge)  Sharon Brown – New Neighbourhoods Development Manager (Cambridge)  Jane Green – Head of New Communities (SCDC)  Caroline Hunt – Planning Policy Manager (SCDC)  Sara Saunders – Planning Policy Manager (Cambridge)  Bridget Fairley – Executive Support Manager (SCDC)  **Apologies**  Stephen Kelly – Joint Director Planning and Economic Development  Julie Baird – Head of Development Management (SCDC) |
| **2.** | **Notes of previous Forum meetings and matters arising**  No further matters were raised. |
| **3.** | **Planning Shared Service update**  Greater Cambridge will bring together Cambridge and South Cambridgeshire planning departments. There are already shared services involving Legal/IT/Waste.  A Shared Service Project Board has been formed to provide programme management support with 4 objectives:  1. Create and deliver an effective programme for Greater Cambridge.  2. One planning service to build capability.  3. Professionalism, high quality outcomes.  4. Alignment of processes to streamline service and work streams.  A revised pre-app charging scheme will be implemented as a priority with the same fee across both Councils.  Agents requested that timescales for dealing with applications were consistent and stated that the Cambridge Planning team were generally quicker in responding to emails and phone calls.  One aim of Greater Cambridge is to identify strengths and weaknesses from both Councils and amalgamate the best from each department with a focus on performance.  Will move towards one planning service with one validation team. Looking at learning from other shared services and learning from them. |
| **4.** | **Local Plan Examination update**  Have been in examination for 3 years. Currently waiting for the last programme of hearings which will hopefully be completed in summer and adopted by the end of the year. In the middle of South Cambs hearings – housing policies, community and environment policies. End of March will look at strategic sites including rural areas and omission sites.  Are joint issues to also look at with Inspectors moving forwards. City Deal has placed a commitment in producing a joint local plan in 2019.  Cambridge student accommodation response has been submitted to inspectors. |
| **5.** | **Questions raised by Forum members**   * SCDC and City urban design review panels - clarified that there are 3 panels – 1 for strategic sites and 2 design panels. Will be an alignment of processes but is not a priority and will be covered in the 2nd tranche. * Staffing – structure charts were circulated. SCDC back log team successfully reduced number of outstanding cases. Waiting to hear outcome of bids for additional resources. * Heritage advice – 1.2 officers working on historic buildings at SCDC. 0.5 post at Cambridge vacant. * Update on planning apps on SCDC website – Neighbour representations will be on website from next week. * Affordable housing – SCDC adopted Local Plan currently states 2 dwelling threshold however in practice using 3 dwellings as threshold and 40% target. Inspector set out points around issue. Local circumstances may justify different approach. Invited Council to submit comments on the issue. Will confirm SCDC condition on submitted policy and position for live planning applications in due course and will be available on the website. Will look at inspectors findings but haven’t reached any conclusions. View is different in some other Local Authorities as do not pay until 10 dwellings. |
| **6.** | **General Questions**   * Issues regarding accessibility of officers. On average 50 cases per officer in SCDC. 2700 - SCDC / 1400 – City per annum. Cultural differences between Cambridge and SCDC in response times. Suggested there is autonomy for officers and confidence to be able to give their opinion. Core hours for answering calls or report writing was suggested. Some agents have found improvement in service but no back-up on holiday. Happy to pay more for better service. Recommended documents on website to reduce email/phone calls. * Validation – sometimes have to phone officer to find out what is wrong with application as not always clear. Email to explain issues instead of letter would be more efficient. Sometimes the application does contain the requested information. Validation response times have improved at SCDC however there is a high level of incomplete applications. * Appeal decisions used to measure quality of decisions. Currently looking at how Planning Committee perform at SCDC. Don’t have 5 year land supply. Inspectors will take this into account. * No SCDC Planning training timetabled until after elections. Will include sustainability and 5 year land supply. Planning Committee may go against officers recommendations. Training has been provided for Parish Councils in making decisions but will always be included as part of democratic process. Play valuable role in knowing what is happening in community. * Will look at length of time planning departments keep records as appears to be different in each Council. * In South Cambs have been 480 houses built in 2016 yet permission granted for more. |
| **7.** | **Suggested topics and arrangements for future Forums**  Topics and preferred times for future meetings to be emailed to [tanya.rhodes-pitcher@scambs.gov.uk](mailto:tanya.rhodes-pitcher@scambs.gov.uk)  Will be a Greater Cambridge Joint Open Day on 20 March. Venue will be Cambridge (9am – 12pm) in the morning and Cambourne in the afternoon (1pm – 5pm). It will primarily be aimed at the public to provide the opportunity to learn more about the planning process but agents are welcome to come along. |
| **8.** | **AOB**  No further issues raised. |
| **9.** | **Date of next meeting**  The next Forum meeting will be held in Cambridge and will be a late afternoon/early evening slot. |