

South Cambridgeshire District Council (SCDC) Planning Agents Forum

20th October 2014 8.30 am – 10.30 am

1.	<p>Welcome and introductions</p> <p>Cllr Robert Turner welcomed everyone to the meeting and introductions were made.</p>
2.	<p>Update on the Planning Service</p> <p>Jo Mills provided a number of updates:</p> <p>2.1 Staffing</p> <p>Several posts are to be advertised shortly including a Business Manager, Project Officer (Site Delivery Fund), Right to Build Project Officer., two Principal Planning Officers and an Interim Development Control Manager.</p> <p>A Team Leader and an Historic Buildings Officer have recently been appointed for the Consultancy Unit and will be in post by January 2015.</p> <p>2.2 Right to Build Vanguard</p> <p>As part of the Right to Build Vanguard, SCDC has secured £50,000 of government funding to support people wanting to build their own property in South Cambridgeshire.</p> <p>Over the next year, SCDC plan to secure at least 100 plots for self or custom build homes, and will create an online register to match prospective self-builders with appropriate sites. The Right to Build scheme will support people to design and build their own homes – often at a lower cost than buying an existing property. The new scheme will still mean anyone looking to build their own home will need to go through the same planning application process.</p> <p>Agents may have clients will land they wish to register or who wish to build self-build homes.</p> <p>Action: JM agreed to share details of the bid with agents (To be circulated with the minutes).</p> <p>2.3 Use of Article 4 Directions to Support Village Pubs: forthcoming consultation.</p> <p>SCDC will shortly be consulting on a whether or not to use Article 4 directions in respect of our village pubs. The consultation will consider whether a blanket Article 4 Direction should be implemented to stop any pub being demolished without consent, whether extra protection from a change of use should be given and also the length of time the direction should be put in place for.</p> <p>2.4 Major Sites Delivery Fund.</p> <p>The fund's objective is to facilitate the start-on-site of major housing schemes. SCDC successfully bid and has been awarded £50,000 over two years which</p>

<p>2.5</p>	<p>will be used to bring forward the recruitment of a Business Excellence manager and project officer. Their roles will be to strengthen programme management of major applications and drive development of a business like culture matching the needs of the customer to work programmes with appropriate resources, fees and time allocation.</p> <p>Design Enabling Panel: The Panel has been in place for 8 months and meeting on a monthly basis with each meeting considering 2-3 schemes, following a site visit.</p> <p>Positive feedback has been received from those who have used the panel. The panel will be formally reviewed early in 2015 with a report presented to the Portfolio Holder in March 2015.</p> <p>Agents asked that the review involves a session with those that have used the Panel, but perhaps a separate session with agents and architects more generally so they can understand more about what the Panel is looking for. Action: Jane Green to include this within review in early 2015.</p>
<p>3.</p>	<p>Pre-application service and Planning Improvement Plan</p> <p>John Koch gave a presentation on the changes that have been introduced to the pre-application advice service. (Copy attached).</p> <p>By way of background, SCDC receives approximately 900 pre-apps each year for a variety of schemes. Giving pre-application advice means that any issues are identified at the earliest possible opportunity and can be addressed before a formal application is made. Fees reflect time spent on the pre-application proposal.</p> <p>Changes to the process include all pre-application submissions will be formally acknowledgement, cases are allocated daily and within 8 working days the case officer will phone the agent to discuss the proposal, clarify precisely what is required and agree a timescale for response.</p> <p>It was requested that the new standards of service go on the Council website.</p> <p>As part of the review we have looked at our fees, they currently do not adequately cover the officer time spent on schemes. As such we will be looking to increase these once the new process is fully in place and being effective delivered.</p> <p>Agents welcomed the proposed introduction of a 'one- off 'pre-application meeting'.</p> <p>Agents indicated that they were looking for consistent, proportionate and reliable advice at the earliest opportunity, which will be carried through once an application is made. They wanted to see officers focussing on the right things (not just matters of detail), and being empowered to make decisions</p> <p>Concerns raised by agents about the current planning service included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor communication – unreturned calls/emails. • Poor relationships between Members and planning officers witnessed at Planning Committee meetings.

	<p>Agents also asked whether it would be possible for planning officers to try to notify agents when they are going on site.</p> <p>Jo Mills requested that Agents email her with details of any particular cases of concern.</p> <p>Cllr Turner stated that Planning Committee is not politically motivated. As portfolio- holder and a former chair of the Planning Committee, he is supportive and respects the advice given by Officers. The committee recognise that they do need to have a 'proper' planning reason is required in order to refuse an application.</p> <p>Officers clarified that weekly surgeries do still take place within development control to discuss cases with significant cases discussed every 2 weeks.</p> <p>Progress on the current service will be monitored and reported to the PFH in February, after another meeting with agents in January.</p>
<p>4.</p>	<p>Update on Local Plan and 5 year housing supply</p> <p>The draft Local Plan was submitted in March. The first block of hearings will take place from 4th November and will focus on legal requirements, development strategy, housing and employment need, infrastructure and viability. The second block of hearings early in 2015 is likely to include green belt and transport before moving onto other issues.</p> <p>SCDC will not be challenging the Waterbeach decision where the Inspector took the view that the Council could not currently demonstrate a 5 year land supply.</p>
<p>5.</p>	<p>Topics and dates for future Agents' Forum meetings</p> <p>Suggested topics included: Local Plan Design Enabling Panel Performance Information S106</p> <p>The next Agents Forum meeting will be held on 12 January 2015.</p>
<p>6.</p>	<p>AOB</p>