

Committee: Ordinary Council	Date: 13 October 2021
Subject: Planning and Licensing Committee Chairs Update	Wards affected: All
Chair: Cllr Jon Cloke	
Report of: Phil Drane, Corporate Director – Planning & Economy	For information

PLANNING DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT

Applications and performance

1. The number of applications received so far this financial year, using the broadest measure (i.e. relating to all types of applications), is the highest since 2014. This reverses the trend of more recent years of gently declining figures since 2018. Currently the increase is 33% up on the same time last year. Likewise, the number of applications in the narrower measure of applications (full, listed building consent etc), is also the highest since 2014 and is also 33% up on the same time last year. Both increases are at a lower rate than in previous months, but reflect an increase already being felt twelve months ago.
2. The newly named Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (previously Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government), recently published planning application statistics for the first quarter of 2021/22 (April to June 2021). Overall, the situation at a national level reflects what we have experienced locally. Applications are up 45% when compared with the same time last year.
3. The previous committee chairs update at Ordinary Council on 28 July 2021 reported on the latest annual planning application statistics for all local planning authorities in England (2020/21). Brentwood Borough Council ranked 16th nationally and third in Essex according to the top performing authorities ordered by percentage of applications decided within statutory timeframes (100% & 99%), and then total decisions. As above, it has also been reported that the number of planning applications received has been increasing for some time. Consideration is being given on how to maintain high performance with the increasing numbers of applications, along with expectations for new applications on larger and more complex schemes as a result of Local Development Plan allocations. This links to the corporate objective for 2021/22 to “establish an ‘account management’ approach to major and commercial planning applications”. In order to identify appropriate resources and processes to maintain high performance, work continues on the “gearing up for growth” project. Members will be updated on the progress of this project.

Decision making

4. Since January 2020, 39 applications have been determined by the committee. 15 of these have been contrary to recommendation (38%). Seven of those applications were recommended for approval but refused, eight with recommendations for refusal were approved. A further application for listed building consent was refused on officer advice as the associated planning application had been refused contrary to recommendation. It is acceptable in principle for the committee to disagree with an officer recommendation, particularly where matters are finely balanced, though it would be expected to be a rare occurrence. This can have an impact on the pre-application service and the confidence of applicants, as well as appeals performance. Therefore, it is important that it is kept under review.

Appeals

5. As regularly reported, the Secretary of State operates a 'quality' measure of planning decisions. Like the measures for speed, these are assessed as two types – Majors and 'non Majors'. The measure assesses the number of allowed appeals as a percentage of all applications of that type determined by the planning authority in the previous two years. This assesses the decision failure rate, what the Government may consider to be poor or bad decisions. The threshold for concern is 10 percent, i.e. the loss rate should not exceed this level.
6. Currently three major appeals have been lost in the qualifying period that ends in December 2021. This is just under the ten percent threshold, based on 31 major application decisions. The applications relating to those appeal cases were determined in 2019 (two) and a non-determination appeal (one) submitted last year and determined earlier this year. If no additional Major appeals are lost this year the number will stay below the threshold.
7. Looking at appeals on a more basic allowed/dismissed level, the percentage of appeals lost is currently just over 50%. However, this is not the measure that the Government considers to be important.

PLANNING POLICY

8. An update on the Local Plan examination Main Modifications consultation and Dunton Hills Garden Village project is provided in the Policy, Resources and Economic Development Committee chairs update. This includes the recent receipt of an outline planning application for the majority of the site allocation at Dunton Hills Garden Village.