

## Full Council, 17 December 2024

### Councillor John Evans: Portfolio Holder for Planning Report

#### **Local Plan**

Our Local Plan is to be submitted to the Secretary of State (via the Planning Inspectorate) on 18 December 2024, as anticipated to and agreed with Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG) Officials, who have been in regular contact with our officers. An update with regards to the Plan's journey, feedback from consultation, and next steps feature elsewhere on this agenda.

It is not uncommon for a local planning authority to experience an increase submitted in major planning applications between Regulation 19 and the examination of its plan. Often, promoters whose sites are included in a draft local plan site allocation decide to submit a planning application quickly, sometimes ahead of the local plan reaching adoption (perhaps seen to be the 'impatient winners'). Similarly, those promoters that did not see their site's inclusion in the Plan may decide to make speculative applications prior to its adoption (likewise, perhaps seen as the 'aggrieved losers'). We are already seeing this type of approach pursued to some extent.

Sir Michael Lyons of the Government's New Towns Task Force (NTTF) recently wrote to the council in the form of a 'call for evidence' to support the NTTF in identifying new locations for major new settlements (settlements of 10,000 homes or more). The council, by way of executive decision, responded to advise that we were soon to submit our Local Plan to government for examination and that it provides for 14,000 new homes on a range of sites of up to 1,500 homes. It meets the district's housing needs in full up to 2041. We have advised that we are not promoting major new settlements within the plan.

#### **Development Management**

Performance of the Development Management & Enforcement teams remains strong. Our 'speed of determining major applications' metric is now at **88%**. This is the highest it has been in some years and is positive testament to the work of our Strategic Applications Team. Our performance on non-major applications remains at **83%**. Officers will be providing additional focus on non-major applications in the new year. Of course, both recorded measures are some way above government targets and compare favourably with those of our statistical near-neighbours.

In terms of the quality of our decisions for major applications (the measure for which the council is designated), it stands at **4.41%** in the most recent rolling two-year period. The threshold for designation is 10% or more. Thanks to the work of our officers and Planning Committee, for the first time since designation we have stayed below the designation threshold for the entire municipal year to date. As such, the council must now consider putting a case for de-designation to the Secretary of State. The Strategic Director of Planning and I, in liaison with the Planning Committee Working Group, intend to start work on an application for de-designation early in the new year.

Both Officers and members of the Planning Committee continue to undertake professional training. Most recently, all Councillors were also invited to attend one of two sessions on Planning Enforcement. This was also extended to Parish and Town Council colleagues and was delivered by our officers at the Council offices in Saffron Walden and Little Canfield. Over the course of two evenings some 60 district, parish and town councillors (and clerks) attended. This format received very positive feedback from a number of attendees and is a format that we intend to reprise in the new year. The training events supplement those provided for members of the Planning Committee over the course of the year, which have included 'Planning Decision-Making', Design Review, Bio-Diversity, and Appeals.

Continuing Professional Education for officers continues to be a matter of priority, and training sessions on 'professional report-writing' and 'decision-making and tilted balance' are programmed for Q1 of the new year. Our Design Officer has also been providing seminars for other planning authorities with reference to our District-wide Design Code.

In Planning Enforcement the team is now using its new performance and case management tracker which was reported on previously in order that cases are dealt with as promptly as possible.

### **Building Control**

You will recall we recently appointed two Trainee Building Control Officers. They recently completed a week of intensive training with the Local Authority Building Control Group (LABC) in Wolverhampton and are both working towards professional qualifications (funded by Apprenticeship Levy monies) on day release while working with our experienced Building Control Team the other four days of the week.

In November, the team successfully complied with an LABC quality management system (QMS) audit and has been included in the new Building Safety Regulator's (BSR) 2024/25 inspection plan for a building safety audit in Q1 next year. This will be led by the BSR, which is part of the Health & Safety Executive and is a new form of audit introduced following the Grenfell Review.

In summary, there is significant, demonstrable progress and improvement across the Planning Directorate.

### **Stansted Airport Matters**

The Strategic Director of Planning has advised colleagues of a Sustainable Development Plan which has recently been proposed by Stansted Airport Limited for use of the airport over the next 20 years. This is to be consulted upon during January 2025 and will be reviewed by STAAP who will be asked to provide recommendations as to responses to be submitted thereto. A meeting of STAAP was held on 18 November and colleagues with a particular interest in the airport and aviation matters might wish to refer to the draft minutes.