

As we look forward hopefully to finalising the Local Plan it seems timely to take a look back at 2018.

As we all know staffing remains difficult due to the proximity to London and the lure of the Private Sector but performance of the Development Management team remains strong. The year-end County figures will be published in April time, but it is highly likely that the team still determine more applications than any other in Kent. In the calendar year SDC received 2,213 applications - not counting all the details and notifications that also have to be considered - with 85% of those being granted. Applications were generally dealt with quickly with all performance targets being met, and over 92% of householder applications were determined within 8 weeks, which is good for our residents.

It continues to be the case that the vast majority of applications are determined under delegated powers, where either the Case Officer recommendation is in line with the view of the Town or Parish Council, or Local Members are happy with the proposal. Less than 2% of all applications were determined by the Development Control Committee, and indeed on a couple of occasions in the past year the meeting was cancelled due to the lack of any items to consider.

SDC received 78 appeal decisions during the year - which is only 3.5% of the total number of applications that are dealt with - and 71% of those were dismissed. Our target is 75%, but this performance is largely the product of small numbers.

SDC pre-application service continues to be popular, with 504 enquiries received last year. With an ever increasing focus on early discussions it remains the best opportunity to provide help and certainty to potential applicants, and to advise on developments before their formal consideration.

There has been real progress in Planning Enforcement recently and whilst still with its challenges, has seen a marked increase in action being taken against those who breach planning regulations and do not wish to remedy what they have done. A total of 50 separate notices were served last year, including 25 Enforcement Notices, 15 Planning Contravention Notices, and four S215 Notices. In addition, five Injunctions were secured in the Courts which amongst other things prevented unlawful mobile homes being placed on land, prevented caravans moving on to sites, and prevented buildings from being constructed without permission. That early intervention can easily go unnoticed, but SDC's success has prevented significant distress to our residents, and the need to spend additional time and money to rectify unlawful actions had they been completed, and as we know and have seen elsewhere, that can sometimes take years.

Additional resource has also been allocated to the enforcement team in the past month, with Rebecca McDonald working as a compliance assistant, and Steve Whitehead who has joined initially on a years' contract from a senior enforcement position at Dartford.

Last year also saw the second meeting of the CIL Spending Board, where a further £2,031,500 was allocated to 6 projects across the District. That brings the total amount allocated to £3,291,824.00. In addition, we have now provided Town and Parish Councils with over £1.8m to date to spend on infrastructure projects to benefit their local communities, with similar amounts likely to be generated in the year ahead. The next CIL Spending Board is likely to be in early Summer, which will follow a review of the Governance and Operating arrangements that were considered by the Planning Advisory Committee last week.

And so on to the Local Plan. SDC completed the third and final consultation on 3 February. Overall we received approximately 3000 responses, to add to the 15,000 from the previous Issues and Options consultation and 8,500 from the consultation last summer, which is a significant level of engagement in the plan. The evidence base that has been compiled over the past few years has now been applied to over 500 promoted sites, and we have distilled the allocations down to a number that meets our housing need in full for at least the next 12 years, delivers our employment and retail needs in full for the duration of the plan period, and also enables infrastructure providers to deliver the infrastructure needed now, and that needed to support future growth. Housing numbers in the Plan are though below the District's full need calculated by Government to be 698 new homes per year. There is a risk that an examiner will expect us to find sites that meet that in full, but we think the plan is sound and strikes the right balance between delivering growth and protecting the Green Belt, and that is the argument we will be advancing.

Once we have submitted the Plan following an extraordinary meeting of Council in March we are in the hands of the Planning Inspectorate, but all Members will have the opportunity to come along to the examination in public, and speak if they wish to. We will provide more details on the timetable for that as it becomes clear.

Planning will always be difficult. We know there is more to do and Richard and the team are always happy to hear your suggestions and listen to your feedback, so please get in touch.