

Development & Conservation Portfolio Holder's report for Scrutiny Committee on 12th July 2022

The Services within my Portfolio continue to perform very strongly, and within agreed budgets, when measured not just against our own performance indicators, but also when you look further afield to comparisons in the sector nationally.

The Department is currently fully staffed, with new staff bedding in well in Development Management and Enforcement, and a recent recruitment in Strategic Planning to a career grade planning officer post with a start date to be confirmed.

The Building Control service has now been back in house for a year, following the de-coupling of the partnership with Tonbridge and Malling, which was achieved without any impact on our customers. The service continues to be hugely well regarded, and maintains over 70% of the share of the market, and we have a talented team in place who are currently preparing and adapting to the Building Safety Bill and changes to the Building Regulations. It was great to have a report come to the Development and Conservation Advisory Committee (DCAC) in the Spring to showcase the work that they do, and to raise Member awareness of the services that they provide. They will be incorporated into future Member training sessions to continue that learning.

In Strategic Planning the preparation of the evidence base for the emerging Local Plan is well under way. The most up to date position can be found in the report to DCAC on 5 July

<https://cde.sevenoaks.gov.uk/documents/s48889/11%20Local%20Plan%20Update.pdf?J=3>

We have also refreshed our plan making timetable, known as the Local Development Scheme, to strengthen our plan making position and reinforce our previous strategy, as well as providing greater protection of the Green Belt. Further details of that can be found here <https://cde.sevenoaks.gov.uk/documents/s48888/10%20-%20Local%20Plan%20Timetable%20LDS.pdf?J=3>

Our Design and Conservation function continues to flourish, and we are currently seeking to add further resource to that team to focus on the national design agenda, but more importantly to ensure that high quality development comes forward in our District, which also continues to preserve & enhance our existing heritage assets & Conservation Areas.

Finally in Strategic Planning, we are refreshing our CIL Governance arrangements to lead on improvements to infrastructure delivery for our communities. We were the first CIL charging authority in the County, and one of the first nationally, and bids are currently open for the latest meeting on the CIL Spending Board, which will take place in early September.

In Development Management, performance continues to be excellent. 2158 applications were determined last year, up from 1887 the year before - which was itself a higher volume than the year before that. "Major" and "Minor" applications have stayed fairly consistent, but "Others" (householders in particular) have risen from 1391 (19/20) to 1427 (20/21) to 1716 last year.

The Service operated at full capacity throughout the Pandemic, with nothing having to pause or halt completely. When decisions were challenged at appeal almost three quarters were dismissed, which shows the confidence that can be placed in the decisions being made by Planning Officers at SDC.

We have also continued to see modernisation of our Planning Enforcement function, and it was lovely to also have them present to DCAC in the past year and showcase the service improvements that are being made there. We have never received so many compliments and so much positive feedback on what is perhaps the most sensitive area of planning!

I'd be delighted to take any questions you may have.