

18th May 2017		ITEM: 7
Planning Committee		
2016/17 Performance Report		
Wards and communities affected: All		Key Decision: Not Applicable
Report of: Leigh Nicholson, Development Management Team Leader		
Accountable Head of Service: Andy Millard, Head of Planning and Growth		
Accountable Director: Steve Cox, Director of Environment and Place		

Executive Summary

In 2016/17 Thurrock maintained its position as one of the fastest, most accessible and proactive planning services in the Country. Through developing strong relationships with the development industry, forward thinking and commercial awareness, the Service continued to drive investment and growth in the Borough.

This report provides Members with an overview of the past year in terms of the performance of the Service.

1.0 Recommendation(s)

1.1 To note the report

2.0 Performance in 2016/17

2.1 In 2016/17 987 planning applications were determined and 82% of those applications were approved. Despite a 16% increase in the number of planning applications submitted compared to 2015/16 and the complexities associated with many of those planning applications, the Authority maintained its position within the top 2% of Local Planning Authorities in the Country (339 Authorities in total).

2.2 The performance and approach of the Local Planning Authority is one of the primary factors that developers take into account when deciding whether to invest in a particular location. Indeed, significant investment can either be attracted or deterred by these factors. Ranking so highly in the national tables places Thurrock in an extremely good position to attract investment from

outside of the Borough whilst also providing homeowners and existing business within the Borough with confidence.

- 2.3 Much of the success of the team can be attributed to the proactive and professional culture within the Development Management Team and, in particular, the robust pre-application advice service offered. Through pre-application discussions, applicants are able to hone and develop their schemes with input from the planning officer, Members and relevant teams, leading to the submission of better quality schemes that are 'right first time'. Through pre-application discussions officers and applicants are also able to negotiate head of terms for s.106 agreements prior to the submission of the application and are also able to agree conditions at an earlier stage, again providing developers with confidence and stability to make commercial decisions.
- 2.4 In addition to the pre-application advice offer, the service has developed its Accredited Agent Scheme and by working with planning agents as part of a regular series of meetings has furthered expanded its digital web offer to suit the ever changing needs of the customer. Investment in IT and equipment during this period has also meant that the planning team are better equipped to serve residents and business.

3.0 The value of planning decisions to Thurrock

- 3.1 The economic benefit of positive planning decisions stretches well beyond initial building works. New homes and commercial development brings people, spending, council tax, business rates and drives the market to provide further development. Taking all together, the positive decisions made in 2016/17 translate to over £113 million to Thurrock's economy. This is a product of 325,797 sqm of commercial floor space, 638 new homes and over 2500 new jobs created.
- 3.2 Furthermore, in the same period the Planning Service negotiated and secured £3,695,975 through s.106 agreements to provide essential infrastructure to mitigate the impact of new development in the Borough. This capital is vital to ensure that the Borough is not burdened by new development but rather it can flourish. The s.106 agreements secured a range of packages including education and healthcare facilities, new recreation spaces and highway infrastructure.

4.0 Design Quality and Place Making

- 4.1 During the period the Council adopted its first ever Design Strategy and also went out for consultation on a new Residential Alterations and Extensions (RAE) Design Guide. These documents mark a new age for Thurrock and lay the foundations to secure higher quality design in Thurrock.
- 4.2 Alongside the design guides, during the period 6 proposals were taken through the Thurrock CABE design review panel. The design review process

has been incredibly valuable to applicants as it exposes their schemes to a panel of industry experts who are able to help shape and refine schemes alongside the planning officers, prior to submission. All Council schemes are taken through the CABI design review panel as part of their pre-application assessment and two recent Council schemes (Bruyns Court and St Chads) have won design awards.

- 4.3 It is vital that new development in the Borough is of the highest design quality and the Planning Service is committed to shape schemes to create quality places in Thurrock and challenge schemes that do not meet the standard. Through the publications of design guides, engagement with developers and the partnership with Design Council CABI, perceptions of the place have already started to change and Thurrock is beginning to be seen as a destination not just of opportunity, but of increasing quality.

5.0 Commercialisation of the Service

- 5.1 Owing to its reputation and proven track record, the Planning Service were approached by Brentwood Borough Council in 2016 and asked to carry out a review of their Development Management service. Over the course of the year, this initial task and finish project developed into a formal 'Managed Service' arrangement whereby Thurrock manages Brentwood's Development Management team. This service has been of interest to others (in London, Hertfordshire and Sussex) and is an element of a trading offer that could be further rolled out in 2017/18 (either as a 'stand-alone' or as the start to a broader service delivery offer).
- 5.2 Crucially, these trading opportunities offer a way by which the Service can positively contribute to the Council's wider financial Strategy, without having to cut jobs and services locally.

6.0 Conclusion

- 6.1 2016/17 saw the Planning Service continue to perform to a high level recognised by DCLG performance tables as being amongst the very highest performing authorities in the Country. Through a modern and proactive approach to service delivery and relationships with the development Industry, the team has maintained its strong track record and has secured significant investment within the Borough, contributing £113million toward the Thurrock economy.
- 6.2 Furthermore, by championing design quality, the Service has started to demonstrably change perceptions of the Borough. The track record and reputation of the Service has also created commercial opportunities to expand and strengthen the Service for the benefit of Thurrock's residents and businesses.

7.0 Consultation (including overview and scrutiny, if applicable)

7.1 N/A

8.0 Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

8.1 No direct impacts arising from this report, but more widely the Service makes a significant contribution to the delivery of the Council's growth and regeneration ambitions.

9.0 Implications

9.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Sean Clark**
Head of Corporate Finance

The financial benefits of positive planning decisions and commercialisation are covered in the report.

9.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Vivien Williams**
Principal Regeneration Solicitor

There are no legal implications to this report.

9.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Rebecca Price**
Community Development Officer

There are no direct diversity implications to this report.

9.4 Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder)

None.

10. Background papers used in preparing the report (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

- All background planning documents including application forms, drawings and other supporting documentation can be viewed online:

www.thurrock.gov.uk/planning. The planning enforcement files are not public documents and should not be disclosed to the public.

11. Appendices to the report

- None

Report Author:

Leigh Nicholson

Development Management Team Leader