

7 June 2018		ITEM: 7
Planning Committee		
2017/18 Planning Performance Report		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Not Applicable	
Report of: Leigh Nicholson, Strategic Lead - Development Services		
Accountable Assistant Director: Andy Millard, Assistant Director – Planning, Transportation and Public Protection		
Accountable Director: Steve Cox, Director of Place		

Executive Summary

In 2017/18 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 2017/18

2.1 In 2017/18, 878 planning applications were determined and 81% of those applications were approved. During the period, the Authority also maintained its position within the top 3% of Local Planning Authorities in the Country (339 Authorities in total) in terms of the timeliness of decisions made.

2.2 The performance and approach of the Local Planning Authority continues to be 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. Sustaining a position 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 continued 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.
- 2.4 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.
- 2.5 The service continues to work closely with local planning agents to develop new initiatives to suit the ever changing needs of the customer. This has included a revised pre-application schedule and the introduction of Planning Performance Agreements (PPA's). Through PPA's, the Planning Service allows applicants to set their own timescales for extensive pre-application dialogue and provision can be made for a wide range of topic specific meetings, workshops and Member briefings.

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 2017/18 translate to over £7.8 million to Thurrock's economy. This is a product of 13,620 sq m of commercial floor space, 620 new homes and 232 new jobs.
- 3.2 Furthermore, in the same period the Planning Service negotiated and secured £1,457,708 through s.106 agreements to provide essential infrastructure to mitigate the impact of new development in the Borough. These capital projects are vital in ensuring 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 provision, healthcare facilities, new recreation spaces and highway infrastructure.

4.0 Design Quality and Place Making

- 4.1 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.
- 4.2 During 2017/18, the Planning service continued its positive relationship with

Design Council CABE, with 3 complex development proposals being taken through the Thurrock CABE design review panel. The design review process continues to be 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. Through pre-application dialogue and involvement with CABE, the Planning Service is demonstrably improving the quality of place and enhancing the attractiveness of Thurrock as a place to live and invest.

5.0 Planning Enforcement

5.1 Effective enforcement is important as a means of maintaining public confidence in the planning system. In 2017/18 the Planning Service reviewed its Planning Enforcement Plan and converted the Plan into accessible web content, allowing residents to easily report breaches of planning control and understand the processes involved.

5.2 Enforcement action is discretionary; local planning authorities are expected to act proportionately in responding to suspected breaches of planning control and formal action should be taken only as a last resort. In 2017/18 the Planning Service received 440 planning enforcement complaints and through a robust triage process and pragmatic negotiation with land owners the Service found it necessary to serve only 21 Enforcement Notices, striking the right balance between negotiation and formal action.

6.0 Commercialisation of the Service

6.1 During 2017/18, the Planning Service continued its Managed Service arrangement with Brentwood Borough Council, whereby the Service provides management support to Brentwood's Development Management team. The relationship has continued to be successful, resulting in an improved service at Brentwood (both in terms of quality and performance) and by providing an income stream for Thurrock which protects jobs and services locally.

6.2 The success of the Managed Service arrangement with Brentwood was of interest to others and in late 2017 the Planning Service began working with Basildon Borough Council on a phased improvement plan allowing further investment back into Thurrock's own Planning Service.

6.3 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.

7.0 Conclusion

7.1 2017/18 saw the Planning Service continue to perform to a high level recognised by MHCLG 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 £7.8million toward the Thurrock economy.

7.2 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.

8.0 Consultation (including overview and scrutiny, if applicable)

8.1 N/A

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

9.1 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.

10.0 Implications

10.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Laura Last**
Management Accountant

The planning approvals in 2017/18 translate to over £7.8 million to Thurrock's economy. In the same period, £1,457,708 was secured through s.106 agreements to provide essential infrastructure to mitigate the impact of new development in the Borough. These capital projects are vital in ensuring that the Borough is not burdened by new development but rather it can flourish.

10.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Benita Edwards**
Principal Regeneration Solicitor

There are no legal implications to this report.

10.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Natalie Warren**
Strategic Lead Community Development and Equalities

There are no direct diversity implications to this report.

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

None.

11. **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.

12. **Appendices to the report**

- None

Report Author:

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