

10 June 2020		ITEM: 7
Planning Committee		
2020/21 Planning Performance Report		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Not Applicable	
Report of: Leigh Nicholson, Assistant Director of Planning, Transport and Public Protection		
Accountable Assistant Director: Leigh Nicholson, Assistant Director of Planning, Transport and Public Protection		
Accountable Director: Andy Millard, Director of Place		

Executive Summary

In 2020/21 Thurrock, despite the challenges of the pandemic and unexpected changes in working practices, 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 continues 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. Recommendation:

1.1 To note the report

2. Performance in 2020/21

2.1 In 2020/21, 883 planning applications were determined and 73% of those applications were approved. During the period, the Authority consistently determined application 'in time' and also maintained its position within the top 1% of Local Planning Authorities in the Country in terms of the timeliness of decisions made (339 Authorities in total).

- 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 high 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. Through Planning Performance Agreements (PPA's) the Planning Service allows applicants work with officers to set timescales for extensive pre-application dialogue and provision can be made for a wide range of topic specific meetings, workshops and Member briefings.

3. 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 approved planning decisions made in 2020/21 translate to over £27 million to Thurrock's economy. This is a product of 91,750 sq.m of commercial floor space and 505 new jobs. Decisions of the Authority have been made to permit 877 new homes. Whilst last year's decisions will have a significant positive impact on the local economy, it should be noted that these figures are lower than recent comparative years; the global pandemic has undoubtedly impacted on the economy and build out of approved schemes. However, the number of applications received so far in 2021/2022 is well ahead of the figures for 2020/21 and the team anticipate a welcome recovery for the year going forward.

3.2 In the same period the Planning Service negotiated and secured £1,259,955 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. 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 20120/2021 the Planning Service continued its relationship with the Design Council (formerly known as CABE) with a number of development proposals being taken through the Thurrock 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 the Design Council, the Planning Service is demonstrably improving the quality of place and enhancing the attractiveness of Thurrock as a place to live and invest.

5. Commercialisation of the Service

5.1 During 2020/21 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.

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. Planning Enforcement

6.1 The planning Enforcement team plays a critical part on the work of the Development Management Service. During 2020/2021 the team received 493 cases and closed 454 cases. With existing cases 'on hand' the team is currently working on circa 250 live cases.

- 6.2 Officers in the Enforcement Team play a critical role in checking allegations of breaches of planning control, assessing the harm arising and determining whether enforcement action is justifiable and whether pursuing action is in the public interest. The Planning Enforcement Officers also work collaboratively with other enforcement functions of the Council to ensure that the Council's collective powers are deployed to best effect.
- 6.3 The team seek to resolve as many cases as possible and serve Notices and take formal action only where a negotiated solution cannot be achieved.

7. Conclusion

- 7.1 2020/21 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 progressive approach to development management the team has maintained its strong track record and has secured significant investment within the Borough, contributing £27 million toward the Thurrock economy.
- 7.2 Furthermore, by championing design quality, the Service is demonstrably changing 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. Consultation (including overview and scrutiny, if applicable)

N/A

9. 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. Implications

10.1 Financial

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

The planning approvals in 20/21 translate to over £27 million to Thurrock's economy. In the same period, £1,259,955 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: **Tim Hallam**
Deputy Head of Law (Regeneration) and Deputy
Monitoring Officer

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.

12. Appendices to the report

- None

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