

Planning Agents Forum – Jointly creating better quality development for Cornwall - 13 October 2017



St Erme Community Centre, Truro

Notes

Action

1 Introduction and Welcome (Nigel Doyle, Head of Development Management)

DE welcomed delegates to the afternoon's forum and handed over to ND for the introduction. The main points of ND's update included:

- New Directorate – new focus on Growth and Development to create jobs and houses
- Neighbourhood Plans (NDPs) are a critical element of the Cornwall Local Plan – Challenge to agents: Are you engaged with NDPs closely enough?
- Planning is becoming more mainstream – awareness of influence of social media
- How to better deliver the Local Plan
- Importance of community engagement and the Divisional Member
- Emphasis on post-decision monitoring

2 Policy (Louise Wood, Head of Policy)

LW outlined the different sort of challenges faced by the Policy team - longer deadlines, less impetus, lack of understanding – aim to get people involved and keep them interested. Items to note included:

- **Local Plan** – Whilst delivery has increased, still need to over-deliver for the rest of the Plan period. The review of the Local Plan should be done every five years. Next Autumn's Forum policy item will include an update on progress with the Review.
- **Chief Officer Notes** – These are needed for interpretation of Local Plan policies but are taking longer than anticipated. One final review due – aim to issue notes on Air Quality, Holiday Occupancy, Design, Infill/rounding-off at the end of November. Judgement will still need to be used as they are guidance notes. Clarity will be provided for infill for main towns. When people see poorly designed houses, it is difficult to convince people that growth is good – improving quality of design is all of our responsibility.
- **Cornwall Design Guide** – currently being reviewed. Local Plan contains 'Building for Life' guidelines.
- **Development Plan Documents update** – Allocations, Minerals Safeguarding and Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) – Examination in Public due in January/February 2018. Details are available on the website.
- **Neighbourhood Plans** – Many are being submitted and

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processed. Currently 11 Adopted NDPs. The NDP team have a monthly email newsletter – LW encouraged all to get involved and sign-up to receive the newsletter.

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- **Planning for the right home in the right place** – this Government consultation document recommends 10% more than our current housing number.

3 Development Management update (David Edmondson, Strategic Development Manager)

DE's presentation included updates on the performance for Major applications – 90% determination in-time for the last quarter – and thanked everyone for working closely with officers, using Planning Performance Agreements etc. Other main points included:

- **Appeals** – Lessons learnt from appeal decisions are analysed and cascaded to officers and Members.
- **Planning Committee** – Strategic Planning Committee reduced from 21 to 15 members. The number of items going to Strategic is reducing as delegation has increased. Area Planning Committees have new Chairs.
- **Community Engagement and Pre-application Community Engagement (PACE) Forums** – Excellent feedback was received from the first Forum held in St Ives. DE outlined the process; this gives an opportunity for Planning Committee members to see what engagement has been done first-hand as well as gaining the local residents' views at an early stage.
- **Planning Performance Agreement** – Charter relaunched
- **Increase in Planning Fees** – still awaiting confirmation of the date from the Government
- **Current initiatives** include Design Quality, Liskeard/Looe Area team trial, verbal Historic Environment consultation responses for Householder applications
- **Submitting applications online** – Request to agents to enter more information in the description 'drop down' box in Idox to assist both Development Support and Local Councils to more quickly identify documents.
- **Street scenes** – Officers are keen to use them. Request to agents to clearly mark if they are indicative if the site has not been surveyed.
- **Exacom** – S106 monitoring software soon to be available to better communicate how community contributions have been spent.
- **Post-decision monitoring** – DE outlined the importance of improving what we are delivering – Strategic Development team to take on that role for Majors. We need to look at options for ongoing liaison with the local community during the construction period including informing them of Non-Material Amendments (NMAs).
- **Construction Summit 2018** – to be organised by the LEP Construction Strategy Group. Housebuilders are also arranging a Housing Summit on 24.11.17. Information to be available soon.

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- 4 Cornwall Planning Partnership (Sarah Mason, CALC) – SM** introduced the Planning Partnership, formed to work with Cornwall Council with the aim of fewer applications being determined against the views of the local community. Main points to note included:
- Trust is important to parishes – the impact of development is left with local residents once a scheme is finished and the developers have moved on. Need to be sensitive to local communities. “Trust is like an eraser, it gets smaller with every mistake.”
 - Post-decision liaison to be included in the Planning Partnership’s work programme. Suggestions include ‘keeping in touch’ days to help ongoing dialogue.
 - Questions to consider – parishes are the only consultees to be consulted on everything? How many NMAs make a big change?
 - Agents are at the start of the planning process so please have early conversations with parishes.
 - ‘Day in the Life’ interactive planning tool launched this year which receives lots of hits.
 - The Partnership has done lots of work on a pre-app protocol following feedback received at the Small-Scale Agents Forums in July. The protocol document has been revised into guiding principles to encourage those parishes to be able to confidently talk to agents about pre-apps.
 - Comments are submitted by the Partnership on consultations to ensure the Local Council perspective is communicated, eg latest one was on how CIL money should be spent in Cornwall.
- 5 Jointly creating better quality development for Cornwall (Cian Spowart, Steve Kirby, Mark Pearson, Anthony Rayworth, Jackie Smith)**
- **RIBA** – CS’ presentation emphasised the collaborative relationship that is needed across all sectors. RIBA are encouraging more practices to come forward to take part in the Planning Buddy Initiative, working with planners on a reciprocal basis. CS outlined options and best practice for technology and design. Future events include the Cornwall Architectural Lecture on 10.11.17 with Eric Parry, and the Cornwall Sustainability Board Trust on 1.12.17.
 - **Cornwall Council design team** – SK explained their design secondment to the Policy team. The three key policies in the Local Plan in terms of design are 2, 12 and 13 – all should make themselves familiar with those. Design Chief Officer guidance note to be issued at the end of November and should give a clearer steer and consistency in decision-making. Note is mainly aimed at smaller projects – ‘Building for Life’ relates to larger schemes. Context needs to be demonstrated with emphasis on liveability. Cornwall Design Guide is to be simplified/streamlined – review out to consultation over the winter. “Think Cornwall, think landscape, think place.”
 - **Cornwall Design Review Panel** – MP introduced the Panel; membership to refreshed in Spring 2018. Design review needs to

ALL

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be helpful, robust and transparent, be independent of the Council but still have a close working relationship and mutual respect. MP showed some good and poor examples of schemes. Quality of place is about composition of form, how we organise space.

Movement is powerful in the morphology of settlements. It is important to make better use of transport node points, and think about connections – health matters and designing out crime. MP put forward the idea of a 'charter for design for Cornwall'? Other ideas included urban design frameworks to manage gateway developments, A30 protected corridor, more design competitions.

- **Road layout and highways issues** – AR advised many schemes being submitted are not in accordance with the Development Layout Design Guide 2012 and Manual for Streets. Home zones are encouraged – AS showed both good and bad examples eg use of different surfaces and design to keep traffic speeds down. There was flexibility in the adoption standards.
- **Sustainable Drainage Systems** – JS introduced herself as SuDS officer in the Flood Risk team. Design of SuDS – minimum aim is to control water running off the site, desirable aim is to control all types of water flow. Drainage should be the first consideration rather than last minute as it can cause serious problems later on for a scheme. JS showed both good and bad examples of SuDS design including swales, permeable paving, green roofing, attenuation ponds; crate systems being the last preferred option.
- **Design- summing up and actions** – DE outlined the Green Infrastructure/PERFECT project. Complaints are also received from residents whose waste cannot be collected due to the design of the scheme layout. Waste team have produced guidance for developers which will be available on the website soon. Main points noted include:
 - refer schemes to Design Review Panel – both developers and officers can take items *ALL*
 - engage in pre-app discussions and use PACE Forums *Agents*
 - Framework for Place/Design charter (as suggested by MP)? *Agents*
 - provide all details needed for discharge of drainage conditions to avoid delays and unnecessary communications *Agents*

- **Comments/Questions**

Q: Conservation Officers need to be more relaxed regarding contemporary design

Q: Energy efficiency and design – I live in a house with the principal room facing south so needs little input to keep warm. Flat roofs/ roof lights are less intrusive and cost less too. One development in Bude has 30% with gable ends facing south with no windows at all – how can we encourage low energy, low-cost buildings?

A: We can do more in the Design Guide and work with the Cornwall Sustainable Buildings Trust. Energy efficiency input is also available at the Cornwall Design Review Panel.

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Q: Is the Design Guide wanted? (DE)

A: Generally, yes. As architects, we know what we're doing, it can be too prescriptive. DE – We can all develop and learn. CS – Not all are architects. SK – Regardless of scale and complexity, all schemes start from the same point so we hope to inform that process. The review of the Design Guide will use case studies and graphics so less text. MP – I see the need for the design guide – NDPs are not up to inventing their own form of words on design so it will help if they can reference a Cornwall-wide guide.

Q: The Design guide should be about being relevant to Cornwall – vision for Cornwall but not too prescriptive.

A: SM - The parish perspective is more 'what you don't want', than 'what you want'. Need to have something local communities can have ownership of for the next 100 years. Parish consultations and the design process need to be tied closer together. A future action for the Planning Partnership is to aim for a parish representative at the Design Review Panel.

DE/SM

Q: Need to be careful not to have generic, one-size fits all, need to see what's important in the context of Cornwall.

A: Part of the pre-app protocol asks a commitment of developers to do their local research eg NDP, any design guidance for a village etc.

Q: Agree we need action points and to also manage expectation. The issue is viability. Agents need to educate the landowner – we could inform landowners what Cornwall is trying to achieve, get in early on. (Michael Griffin is due to provide viability training for CC Members on 16.10.17 to educate councillors.)

A: SK – another project is the development concept statements which are being progressed and will sit within the site allocations document. All will be on the CC website in due course. In balancing material considerations, we need more importance on design and to educate others.

• **Actions** – noted on the flipchart by DE were:

- Cornwall Design Charter
- Complete details for drainage conditions
- Highways to attend Design Review Panel as advisor
- Local Council's to attend Design Review Panel
- Drainage and highways frameworks
- Sustainable design – residential
- Non-prescriptive design guide (not too generic)
- Holistic approach including town and parish councils
- Ownership/relevant to the community
- Environmental USP for Cornwall
- Managing expectations
- Informing landowners of issue of design
- Concept statements

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6 Planning training update (Peter Phillips, Group Leader – Training)

PP updated on training undertaken this year and actions being progressed. Key points to note included:

- 82 Cornwall Council Members trained in Planning Induction following the May elections; Modular training plan for Members in place for rest of the year – next session on Viability and Deliverability on 16.10.17.
- Local Council training – almost 400 parish councillors completed Planning Induction training; Local Council conferences to include design input – first one is 28.11.17.
- Officers have been doing RTPi training and the Young Planners Group is established. Planning Basics training delivered to Development Support, Business Support.
- PP met with Disability Cornwall to discuss duties under the Equalities Act. One action from the meeting is to explore using the Northern Ireland Equality Commission model “Every customer counts”. Profits are to be made but there is also a social responsibility.
- Agents workshops were done on annexes and Class Qs which resulted in guidance notes being adopted. PP to review these guidance notes in January and will involve agents in the reviews. Policy team held workshops with agents on the four Chief Officer Notes topics in September. Suggestions for future workshops included:
 - Calculating space standards
 - Definition used in General Development Planning Order regarding householder extensions
 - Class Rs

ALL to email PP with any other suggestions please.

ALL

7 General Questions and Answers

Q: How can a more balanced view from communities be achieved when an organised group presents a particular view?

A: We are aware that social media is used but it can also be used to gain feedback from the community positively.

Q: How can local members be prevented from hijacking the process?

A: By having early conversations with the Community and the Divisional Member and bringing in experts to the process, eg SuDS, highways, and demonstrating need.

Q: What are the reasons for why points raised in consultations have not been considered?

A: More work is being done on the quality of planning reports and balancing the weight of comments.

Q: NDPs take so long to produce – schemes get caught up in that process.

A: Agreed – appeal decisions as well, Gonwin Farm for example.

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More guidance is now available on what weight you can give to NDPs.

Q: Regarding NMAs – is it worth splitting out into those Housing-related and Strategic (eg minerals, highways) as we're finding with contentious developments that there is quite a political element whether something is material or not?

A: Need to distinguish between those cases that require a further consent and those that do not. The Government has never given us the definition of an NMA. It is the cumulative nature of NMAs that can cause a breakdown of trust. Agreed to look at this split and talk to Divisional Members and parishes through the Planning Partnership.

DE

Q: You say your performance is 93% of all applications are approved? If we actually speak to an officer, they need to stick to it so we can inform clients and manage impacts. Appreciate things do change but give realistic timescales.

A: Agree – it is all about communication. PPAs help. Work is being done on improving rate of phone call pick-up by officers.

Q: This is more of a problem when an officer says something will be written up for a date and then there is an unexplained delay – raising expectations/false promises?

A: Agreed. Officers are instructed to share likely conditions with you. ALL to let DE know if agents are not getting feedback from the Strategic Development team.

Agents

Conclusion

- DE thanked everyone for attending and confirmed that CPD certificates would be sent out for the morning, together with a request for any feedback for future events/workshops.

The Forum was attended by 93 agents. These notes and presentations from the event will be available on the Planning Agents' webpage at the below web address:

<http://www.cornwall.gov.uk/environment-and-planning/planning/planning-agents-area/>

Further information on the Cornwall Planning Partnership and the Cornwall pre-app protocol and guiding principles at:

<http://www.cornwall.gov.uk/environment-and-planning/planning/local-councils/planning-partnership-meetings/>

Abbreviations for presenters referred to in the above notes are:

ND – Nigel Doyle, DE – David Edmondson, LW – Louise Wood,

SM – Sarah Mason, CS – Cian Spowart, SK – Steve Kirby,

MP – Mark Pearson, AR – Anthony Rayworth, JS – Jackie Smith

PP – Peter Phillips

[Please note that this event counts as 4 hours CPD.]