

UPDATE ON DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT AND PLANNING ENFORCEMENT SERVICES

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1 Purpose

- 1.1 To provide members with an update on the progress of the Council's Development Management and Planning Enforcement services.

2 Recommendations/for decision

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| 2.1 | That the Environment & Living Scrutiny Committee note the contents of the report and associated presentation. |
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3 Supporting information

AVDC is a growth area for planning and we have seen a regular significant increase in the workload of the Development Management team over the last few years.

- 3.1 This already challenging planning environment is exacerbated by the impact of national projects such as HS2, East West Rail and the National Infrastructure Corridor and the associated planning applications.
- 3.2 The increasing workload is best perhaps best illustrated by the large number of major applications that the Council has to decide. These have more than doubled since 2013 and the category of applications that AVDC receives are often for large numbers of houses or high investment retail developments.
- 3.3 The nature of major applications are such that they are often complex and controversial with both developers and objectors likely to be very vocal where actions of the Development Management team are perceived to not be to their advantage. This creates a challenging working environment where actions and of planning officers are subject to intense inspection from all sides and decisions are often challenged both informally and formally.
- 3.4 The increasing number of planning applications received also impacts the Planning Enforcement service where the number of complaints is high and has increased year on year over the last three years. Complaints regarding breach of planning consent are received from residents across the Vale. However in some areas there is a geographical increase that likely reflects the high level of development activity in that particular area and where developments have been particularly controversial at planning stage.
- 3.5 Like all Councils, AVDC has to contend with the national shortage of skilled Planning and Planning Enforcement Officers. Although a wide range of innovative non- traditional recruitment arrangements have been piloted within the service, recruitment in to senior planning roles has moved more slowly than we would have liked. As a consequence, the service has continued to make a reduced, but still significant, use of planning consultants and agency staff to support our slowly increasing number of permanent planners.
- 3.6 Despite the challenges identified above, AVDC continues to be one of the best performing Councils in terms of deciding planning applications on time, far exceeding both current and proposed Government targets.
- 3.7 The introduction of Account Managers to field planning enquiries from developers - and Parish Liaison Officers to provide the same service for Parishes - also allows valuable Planning Officers and Enforcement Officers to focus on processing and determining applications and investigating potential

breaches of consent whilst allowing stakeholders to access information quickly and easily.

- 3.8 There is still room for improvement, however, and the management have implemented an ongoing continuous improvement programme to further optimise the efficient use of the available resource and make the best of opportunities presented by emerging technology.
- 3.9 A new modern computer system – called “Built Environment” is being introduced to the service in 2018 to provide an up to date back office system combined with a flexible web-based enquiry system that representatives of the parishes will be involved in developing. Members will shortly receive an invitation to a workshop on this new application to see early demonstrations of the software and to discuss how they can make best use of it when it is introduced.

The presentation at committee will explore the issues raised in this report in more depth, provide the committee with the latest performance information and allow members to ask questions about the management of the Development Management and Planning Enforcement service.

4 Options considered

- 4.1 None

5 Reasons for Recommendation

- 5.1 Development Management and planning Enforcement are high profile services that impact considerably on the environment of the Vale.

6 Resource implications

None

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