

FAREHAM

BOROUGH COUNCIL

Report to Planning Committee

Date **10 April 2023**

Report of: **Director of Planning and Regeneration**

Subject: **PLANNING DESIGNATION ACTION PLAN**

SUMMARY

A draft Planning Designation Action Plan was considered by the Planning Committee and Executive during March 2024 and submitted to the Department for Levelling Up, Homes and Communities for approval.

The Action Plan highlighted that Members raising questions on major planning applications in advance of the Planning Committee meeting, and the opportunities for Members to be involved in pre-application proposals, would be subject to further consideration by Members of the Planning Committee prior to implementation.

RECOMMENDATION

That Members note the contents of this report.

INTRODUCTION

1. When the Council was designated in late December 2023, it was required to prepare an Action Plan which identified 'actions that address the areas of weakness that led to the Council being designated.'
2. A draft Planning Designation Action Plan was considered by the Planning Committee and the Executive in March 2024. The Action Plan was submitted to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities for approval.
3. On the 25 March 2024, this Council received written confirmation from the Minister of State for Housing, Planning and Building Safety, that this Council was being de-designated on the 26 March 2024.
4. The letter acknowledged that for the period of the 1 April 2021 – 31 March 2023, 4.2% of the authority's decisions on major applications were allowed at appeal, against a threshold of 10%. In addition to this the Minister acknowledged receipt of the Council's Action Plan. The need to continuing to meet the required threshold and providing updates on the Council's performance and progress against the Action Plan to Departmental Officials, was also highlighted within the Minister's letter.
5. The large majority of the actions set out within the Action Plan have already been implemented. The following report relates to two actions which have not been fully implemented to date.

SUBMITTING QUESTIONS TO OFFICERS IN ADVANCE OF THE PLANNING COMMITTEE MEETING

6. The Planning Advisory Service identified that Members of the Planning Committee should be provided with an opportunity to send potential questions/ issues they are likely to raise, to Officers in advance of the Planning Committee meeting.
7. This would ensure that Officers have time to find all the necessary information ready for presentation at the meeting. The questions/ issues raised by Members, may also prompt the need for a specialist officer to attend the Committee meeting in order to be able to fully respond to a technical matter.
8. With effect from the next meeting, Officers will email Members following publication of the Planning Committee agenda and ask if there are any questions/ issues they would like to raise on the proposals and reports at the Planning Committee meeting. Members will be asked to submit their questions/ issues to Officers by midday on the Tuesday before the meeting takes place, in readiness for the Chairman's pre-meeting briefing.
9. Through submitting questions/ issues in advance, Officers can focus presentations on matters which are of particular interest to Members, helping to streamline meetings and ensuring Members have all relevant information available to them at the time of making their decision. Members will of course be able to continue asking any questions they wish during consideration of planning applications at the Planning Committee.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR MEMBER INVOLVEMENT WITH PRE-APPLICATION PROPOSALS

10. At the present time, the involvement of Members at Fareham in the pre-application planning process is relatively limited.
11. In their publication 'Probity in Planning' (December 2019), the Planning Advisory Service state that 'The Localism Act 2011 (as amended) acknowledges that councillors have an important role to play in pre-application discussions, bringing their local knowledge and expertise along with an understanding of community views.... Councillor involvement can help identify issues early on, help councillors lead on community issues, and help to make sure that issues don't come to light for the first time at committee. PAS recommends a 'no shocks' at committee approach."
12. Officers will make a presentation at the Planning Committee setting out details of how Members could be involved in future discussions on pre-application planning proposals for major proposals.

RISK ASSESSMENT

13. If the Council does not achieve the Government's minimum thresholds in respect of speed of decision making or exceeds the Government's maximum thresholds for quality of decision making, the Government can consider designating the Council as 'underperforming'.
14. If the Council were to be designated as underperforming, applicants would have the choice of submitting applications directly to the Planning Inspectorate rather than to the Council for the type of applications for which the Council had been designated (major or non-major).
15. When applicants submit applications directly to the Planning Inspectorate the planning application fee is also paid to the Planning Inspectorate. This will result in a reduced planning income to this Council.

CONCLUSION

16. Members note the content of this report

Background Papers:

Probity in Planning: Advice for Councillors and Officers making planning decisions (December 2019)

Enquiries:

For further information on this report please contact: Lee Smith, Head of Planning (01329) 824427