

BABERGH DISTRICT COUNCIL

FROM: Chief Planning Control Officer

REPORT NUMBER:

H183

TO: OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY
(COMMUNITY SERVICES) COMMITTEE
DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

DATE OF MEETING: 3 February 2009
11 February 2009

PLANNING PERFORMANCE

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report provides an overview of the number of planning applications and appeals currently being considered by the Planning Control Section and an indication of performance against Government indicators.

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 That the information contained within this report be noted.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 There are no financial implications arising directly from this report.

4. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 4.1 There are no significant risks arising directly from this report.

5. KEY INFORMATION

- 5.1 This quarterly report shows the performance of the Planning Control Service against National Performance Indicator 157: The Determination of Planning Applications and the former BVPI 204: Planning Appeals, which has been retained as a local performance indicator.

- 5.2 Current Government performance indicators require all local planning authorities to determine:

- 60% of major applications within a period of 13 weeks. Since 1 April 2008 the major category has been divided into large-scale and small-scale major developments but for the purposes of this report, they are combined. (A large-scale major application is defined as a development comprising 200 or more dwellings whereas a small-scale major application is defined as a development comprising 10 or more dwellings up to 199 dwellings).
- 65% of minor residential and commercial applications within a period of 8 weeks; and,
- 80% of other applications (which are mainly householder applications) within a period of 8 weeks.

- 5.3 Local planning authorities were also required to monitor the number of appeals allowed against the authority's decision to refuse planning applications, as a percentage of the total number of appeals against the refusal of planning applications. This indicator sought to establish whether local planning authorities were refusing more applications in order to meet development control performance targets. An acceptable threshold was deemed to be 30%.

Applications Received and Determined

- 5.4 Table 1 provides an overview of the number of planning applications that were on hand at the beginning of the last four quarters, the number that were received during the quarter, withdrawn, on hand at the end of the quarter, and actually determined. It also provides details of the number of applications that were determined in accordance with the scheme of delegation expressed as a percentage of all decisions.
- 5.5 As will be noted the number of applications received during the last quarter is 82 less than the previous quarter and marks a continuation of the downward trend that has been evidenced since the beginning of the financial year. In total 943 applications have been received in the period 1 April 2008 to 31 December 2008 in comparison with 1,268 for the same period last year. This represents a decline of approximately 25%. Despite this there has been no corresponding decline in the number of visitors to planning reception or telephone calls received.
- 5.6 The number of decisions made in accordance with the scheme of delegation has remained broadly the same but ideally as a matter of good practice it should be at least 90%. For the year to date the figure is 88.2% (944 out of 1070 cases). There has, however, been no discernable increase in the number of applications being referred to Development Committee.

TABLE 1	01.01.08 to 31.03.08	01.04.08 to 30.06.08	01.06.08 to 30.09.08	01.10.08 to 31.12.08
Number of applications on hand at beginning of quarter.	386	377	286	287
Number of applications received during quarter	439	353	366	311
Number of applications withdrawn	35	38	24	12
Number of applications on hand at end of quarter.	383	286	287	263
Number of applications determined during quarter	407	406	341	323
Percentage of delegated decisions	89.2	88.9	87.4	88.2

Source: General Development Control PS1 Return

Performance Against Target

- 5.7 Table 2a shows the number of planning applications that were determined during the last four quarters in each of the three categories defined by NI 157. Table 2b shows how many of these planning applications were determined within the prescribed period as a percentage of all decisions within the relevant category. Table 2c shows the performance achieved during the year to date in comparison with the national target and the locally defined stretched targets. It also provides an indication of the direction of travel.
- 5.8 As will be noted performance during the last quarter against the national target for the determination of major applications exceeds 60% but has shows a decline in comparison with the previous two quarters. This is attributable to both a decline in the number of major applications being received and the determination of long-standing cases following the completion of related legal agreements. Performance for the year to date as shown in Table 2c does, however, exceed both the national and locally defined targets.
- 5.9 The determination of applications within the minor category has shown signs of improvement during the last quarter but performance within this category for the year to date as shown in Table 2c is still below the national target. Against a backdrop of declining application numbers it is unlikely that this target will be achieved for the year. Nevertheless the improvement made during the last quarter (60.1% to 64.1%) shows a positive direction of travel.
- 5.10 Performance against the target for the determination of other applications has remained relatively static in comparison with the previous quarter and continues to be closely monitored. As will be noted in Table 2c the national performance target has been achieved for the year to date

TABLE 2A	01.01.08 to 31.03.08	01.04.08 to 30.06.08	01.07.08 to 30.09.08	01.10.08 to 31.12.08
Total number of MAJOR applications determined	25	26	13	11
Total number of MINOR applications determined	96	79	84	78
Total number of OTHER applications determined	278	301	244	234
Miscellaneous decisions not included above	3	0	0	0
Total number of applications determined during quarter	402	406	341	323

Source: General Development Control PS2 Return

TABLE 2B	01.01.08 to 31.03.08	01.04.08 to 30.06.08	01.07.08 to 30.09.08	01.10.08 to 31.12.08
Percentage of MAJOR applications determined on time	72.0	80.8	69.2	63.6
Percentage of MINOR applications determined on time	48.9	60.8	60.7	64.1
Percentage of OTHER applications determined on time	80.0	82.1	79.1	79.1

Source: General Development Control PS2 Return

TABLE 2C	Previous Year 2007/08	Year to Date 2008/09	National Target	Babergh Stretched Target	Direction of Travel
Percentage of MAJOR applications determined on time	71	74	60	67	↗
Percentage of MINOR applications determined on time	57	62	65	72	↗
Percentage of OTHER applications determined on time	76	80	80	87	↗

Source: General Development Control PS2 Return/Departmental Records

5.11 In order to improve performance a number of actions and initiatives have been put into place, including:

- The rigorous assessment of applications at the registration stage to ensure that all of the required information is available to assess the submission from the outset thus avoiding potential delays at a later date. For example applicants and agents are now required to provide title details and the heads of terms to legal agreements when applications are submitted to overcome a common reason for delay.
- Revisions to working practices to ensure that all applications which are capable of being registered are on a planning officers' desk within three working days of receipt to maximise the amount of time available to determine them.
- The weekly review of applications by planning officers to ensure that any issues are identified at the earliest opportunity and applicants and agents are informed accordingly with a requested to submit additional information within an agreed timeframe.
- The identification of applications that can be determined at the earliest opportunity.
- The encouragement of pre-application discussions to avoid the submission of inadequate and incomplete applications, and,
- A regular review of long standing applications to assess whether or not they can be progressed.

In addition to the above improvements are being made to streamline the way in which correspondence is handled when it is initially received by the planning control section. Furthermore arrangements have been made to ensure that a planning officer is available on a daily basis to deal with straight forward enquiries.

- 5.12 Over the coming three to six months the improvements to performance that have been achieved during the year to date will continue to be challenged by a number of projects (CAST, LAMP and DIP) that need to be maintained and developed. For example at least 20 working days will be required to test the software associated with the LAMP project. In addition further time will be required to allow staff to become familiar with the new system. This work has to be done in addition to normal day to day activities and has the greatest impact upon the planning support team who aim to register valid applications within three working days of receipt in line with the Babergh service standard and current best practice. While efficiencies are anticipated in the longer-term, it is perhaps opportune that the current down turn in the number of applications received has coincided with the final implementation stages of some of these projects, notably LAMP.

Planning Fees

- 5.13 Table 3 provides details of the income received from fee generating applications over the last four quarters against the projected income for the quarter. As will be noted the income received from planning application fees during the last quarter has been £44,387 less than expected. Income from planning fees for the year to date has therefore been £355,425 against a projected income of £444,000.
- 5.14 As Members will recall fees for the determination of planning applications were increased by Government on 7 April 2008. This was taken into account in the formulation of the budget for the current financial year and an assumption was made that there would be a 10% increase in fee income based upon the number and type of applications received by the District Council. The unprecedented decline in the number of applications received was not, and could not, have been foreseen.
- 5.15 Despite the decline in the number of applications received Planning Control staff remain fully deployed and have been engaged with the testing and development of new software and other initiatives aimed at improving customer service. In this respect even greater priority is being afforded to the validation of applications to ensure that submissions are registered within three working days. This task has become more complex since the introduction of national and local validation requirements which have added rather than reduced the amount of time required to register applications. In addition a number of pre-application enquiries have been received for potentially significant projects as landowners look to reassess their development opportunities in the current economic climate. Furthermore work continues on the Chilton Woods project. The indication at the moment is that staff resources are matched to the work available and no spare capacity exists.

TABLE 3	01.01.08 to 31.03.08	01.04.08 to 30.06.08	01.07.08 to 30.09.08	01.10.08 to 31.12.08
Number of fee applications received	330	385	314	237
Fees received	115,190	112,832.	58,290	69,113
Projected fee income	103,500	113,500	113,500	113,500
Out turn	11,690	(668)	(55,210)	(44,387)

Source: Departmental Records

Appeals

- 5.16 Table 4 provides details of the number of appeals allowed expressed as a percentage of the total number of appeals determined. Three of the applications determined by appeal during the last quarter were in response to a decision made by the Development Committee. The remainder were in response to decisions made in line with the Scheme of Delegation. Although the percentage of appeals allowed during the last quarter has been high the small data set means that wide variations can occur. Overall 17 cases have been allowed to date out of 40, which equates to 42.5%.

TABLE 4	01.01.08 to 31.03.08	01.04.08 to 30.06.08	01.07.08 to 30.09.08	01.10.08 to 31.12.08
Number of appeals allowed.	2	5	3	9
Total number of appeals determined.	9	11	14	15
Percentage of appeals allowed.	22.0	45.5	21.4	60

Source: Departmental Records

6. **APPENDICES**

- 6.1 None.

7. **BACKGROUND PAPERS REFERRED TO:**

- 7.1 None.

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