

Chichester District Council

CABINET

7 September 2021

Development Management Division

Workloads and Resourcing

1. Contacts

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2. Executive Summary

This report outlines the need to provide further resourcing to meet the demand of a greater number, and complexity of, planning applications and to provide further resource agreed as part of Planning Performance Agreements. The report also identifies the need to engage additional temporary resource through Agency, to ensure that the current backlog of applications is dealt with in a reasonable timeframe.

3. Recommendation

3.1 That Cabinet approves:

- i) The creation of a further Senior Planning Officer post in the Major Applications and Business Team at a cost of £45,000 per annum as a result of the demand for Planning Performance Agreements (PPA) with developers on some of the Council's Strategic Development Sites, to be directly funded from an agreement with Graylingwell LLP in the first year and anticipated to be funded through further PPA's in subsequent years;**
- ii) The creation of a further Planning Assistant Post at a cost of £28,000 per annum to deal with the increased workload of the Development Management Service to be funded from reserves for the remainder of the financial year 2021/22 and incorporated into the 2022/23 base budget thereafter.**
- iii) The release of £20,000 from reserves to cover the cost of temporary agency staff to address the current backlog of applications.**

4. Background

- 4.1 Prior to the worldwide spread of Covid-19 the Development Management Division was operating with a number of vacancies in its professional planning staff, due to difficulties recruiting in what was a 'candidate dry' market. May and June 2020 saw a minor dip in the number of planning applications submitted, however this quickly rose to pre-covid levels and is currently approximately 10% higher than the number of applications submitted in 2019/2020. This includes a significant number of both planned and speculative major housing schemes, a number of which have been refused permission, but are now required to be defended on appeal, often through costly and time-consuming public inquiries. It should also be noted that as fee income does not cover application processing costs, the costs of any additional staff resources that may be required is not fully covered by the increased income. The Service has also sought to expedite those applications of a commercial nature that are key to the recovery of the local economy, following the impact of Covid.
- 4.2 It is also the case that the processing of applications has become more complex and time consuming with the greater expectation that the development management process delivers additional mitigation/benefits of development in areas such as climate change and biodiversity, across a wider spectrum of application types than previously required. Linked to these are a number of infrastructure related issues, such as water supply and wastewater disposal. The ever-increasing introduction of prior approval-type applications also requires navigation of a complex assessment process, including the need to reference continuously changing caselaw and appeal decisions to interpret the legislative provisions that control the process. All of these areas engender greater involvement and scrutiny from members as they seek to understand the current complex framework of planning assessment and influence (and in the case of the planning committee make) decisions.
- 4.3 As a result there is a need for greater long-term capacity in dealing with application workloads, but also a need to deal with a significant 'backlog' of applications that has arisen as a result of the issues identified above.
- 4.4 The Council is also attracting significant interest from developers wanting to enter into Planning Performance Agreements (PPA), following the success of recent examples in relation to Phase 1 of the West of Chichester and Tangmere Strategic Development Locations (SDL). These PPAs have proven to be beneficial to both developers, as they benefit from provision of a dedicated resource to progress the examination and processing of their applications in an expedient manner and to the Council in providing the necessary focus to secure significant improvements to proposals and significant community engagement. Developers involved in both Graylingwell and West of Chichester Phase 2 have both expressed an interest in undertaking PPAs for their upcoming development proposals and a draft agreement with developers for Graylingwell is in place for a

dedicated senior planning officer post for 1 year – to expedite completion of that development.

5. Outcomes to be achieved

- 5.1 To secure the necessary resource to successfully implement and meet the requirements of future PPAs, and specifically in the short-term, the Graylingwell PPA, so that permitted schemes are subject to robust assessment to ensure high quality development.
- 5.2 To provide added capacity and resilience in the Development Management Teams to deal with the increase in application numbers and the current complexities present in the assessment process.
- 5.3 To resolve the backlog of applications that has arisen due to previous vacancies in the applications teams.

6. Proposal

- 6.1 The creation of a further Senior Planning Officer post in the Major Applications and Business Team to allow for PPA work at a cost of £45,000 per annum. This would be fully funded in the first year (September 2021 to August 2022) by income from the PPA with Graylingwell LLP. Given the current interest in PPAs, it is anticipated that the post would be funded by additional PPA income in subsequent years, including the potential for a three-year PPA currently being negotiated by officers on Phase 2 of the West of Chichester SDL. If PPA funding is not forthcoming in subsequent years, staffing levels may need to be adjusted accordingly through staff turnover.
- 6.2 The creation of a further Planning Assistant post in the Applications Team, at a cost of £28,000 per annum. This follows the transfer of 0.5 FTE Planning Officer to the Majors Team and would serve partly to back fill that loss of resource from the Applications Team; it would also allow for greater capacity to deal with the increasing number of applications submitted for determination by the Council, and the further workload generated by the increasing complexity of issues that the teams are having to deal with in the processing of applications. The post also offers further opportunity to 'grow our own' planning professionals which in time will assist in filling officer posts with qualified staff. This post will need to be funded from reserves for the remainder of 2021/22 and then be added to the base budget for future years.
- 6.3 Lastly there is a need to deal with the significant backlog of applications, currently awaiting determination, within the applications teams. In order to deal with these expediently it will be necessary to engage temporary external professional assistance through agency planners. It is proposed that £20,000 is released from reserves to extend the contracts of two agency planners until January 2022, to assist with the determination of the backlog of applications in the Majors and Applications Teams.

7. Alternatives Considered

- 7.1 PPAs provide an opportunity to supplement fee income and generate further funding to support staff resourcing. However, they also require the Council to operate in a way which prioritises the assessment and determination of specific major planning applications. The Council is not obliged to enter into PPAs with developers and the alternative would be not to do so, however the proposed planning applications will still be submitted and will be required to be determined in association with the application fee alone. PPAs are therefore an opportunity for the Council to provide an effective development management process with regard to those applications, which in turn will have the benefit of bringing forward housing towards the Council's 5-year housing land supply faster. Confidence in this process by developers is key to the ability to agree further future PPAs and for the Council to deliver on its obligations in the PPA.
- 7.2 Consideration has also been given to attempting to deal with the current backlog of applications within existing resources, without extending contracts with agency planners. Whilst this may be possible in the long run, unless there is a significant drop in applications being submitted to the Council, which is not forecast, it is likely that the backlog will exist for at least a further year on this basis, as there is no capacity in the applications teams to deal with it expediently alongside more recently submitted applications. The repercussions of this are not only dissatisfaction by applicants, but also staff morale, and possibly greater staff turnover in positions that may be difficult to refill, and a greater number of appeals against non-determination, with the added cost that will arise as a result.
- 7.3 It should be noted that the South Downs National Park Authority have agreed to part fund an agency planner to deal with the backlog of work in the CDC South Downs National Park Team for a similar period as proposed for the other two CDC applications teams.

8. Resource and Legal Implications

- 8.1 Whilst it is anticipated additional funding from PPAs will cover the cost of the additional Senior Planning Officer post, there will be a need to include the cost of the further Planning Assistant post in base budget. There are no further resource or legal implications, beyond those set out in the body of the report. There may be an impact on legal team workloads and this will be monitored going forward.

9. Consultation

- 9.1 No consultation has taken place or is necessary.

10. Community Impact and Corporate Risks

- 10.1 The recommendations in this report are important to reducing the risks associated with the ability of the Council to deal with the planning

applications submitted to it, and to be able to work toward a position where it will be able to demonstrate a 5-year housing land supply.

- 10.2 Delays in the determination of planning applications can affect the viability of business as well as people’s choices of how and where they live. It is therefore important that the Council deals with the determination of applications in an expedient manner.

11. Other Implications

Are there any implications for the following?		
	Yes	No
Crime and Disorder		x
Biodiversity and Climate Change Mitigation - Further resources will ensure proper consideration of these matters as part of the application determination process	x	
Human Rights and Equality Impact		x
Safeguarding and Early Help		x
General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR)		x
Health and Wellbeing – Workload levels are currently unsustainable for case officers. The proposed measures will reduce the risk of stress related illness.	x	

12. Appendices

- 12.1 None

13. Background Papers

- 13.1 None