



This report seeks to provide Members with updates across a range of matters relating to Planning and Building Control. The updates are in line with those previously agreed for inclusion within this report at the June 2024 meeting of the Policy Development Group.

## **2.0 Updates:**

### **2.1 New National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF):**

- 2.1.1 Further to the release of the latest iteration of the NPPF in December 2024, it remains expected that the Government will consult on a national set of 'core' development management (DM) policies. These 'core' national DM policies are expected to cover generic topics such as viability, space standards, use of renewables etc where consistency in policy is considered helpful and appropriate. Local development management policies may be able to continue where they address local issues. It is understood that the Government believes such changes will simplify and streamline the planning process, speed up decision making and unlock additional housing delivery. Although recent updates continue to hint at imminent release of such draft policies and the consultation, no timetable has been confirmed.
- 2.1.2 Alongside the Development Management policies, a 'streamlined' NPPF is expected with proposals for changes to the planning committee systems for Local Planning Authorities (LPA's).
- 2.1.3 Members may also find it interesting and noteworthy to know that, in a recent article published in 'Planning Resource', it was stated that, since the latest revision of the NPPF (Dec '24), approval rates through Inquiries have more than doubled<sup>1</sup>. PINS statistics also show that the proportion of planning appeals allowed by PINS has reached a seven year high in the first quarter of 2025. It is therefore apparent that the revision of the NPPF is resulting in additional approvals via appeal and this trend is anticipated to continue.

### **2.2 New Local Plan: Plan Mid-Devon**

- 2.2.1 Work to develop the new Local Plan (Plan Mid Devon) continues albeit recent staff departures means that recruitment is required to ensure the team is at capacity and able to progress work in a timely fashion.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.planningresource.co.uk/article/1918498/new-nppf-game-changer-recent-appeal-decisions-says-planning-silk>

## **2.3 Development Management Policies:**

- 2.3.1 The Blackdown Hills National Landscape Management Plan consultation ended on the 19<sup>th</sup> March 2025 and a further report is before this PDG today which seeks a recommendation from this PDG on to the 8<sup>th</sup> July Cabinet meeting that the Blackdown Hills National Landscape Management Plan (Appendices 1, 2 and 3) is adopted.

## **2.4 Development Management:**

- 2.4.1 Performance within Development Management remains strong with 100% of householder applications determined within 8 weeks and 0.2% of minor applications overturned at appeal. (Q4 data.)
- 2.4.2 However, Q4 income remained depressed meaning that the service closed the year £106k down against budget on statutory fee income. This is a slight improvement on the trajectory versus the Q3 data – but is still disappointing, especially as it was considered income could pick up as applicants sought to beat fee increases which became effective from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2025. However, this financial picture does reflect the wider market sentiment and macro-economic conditions with housebuilders, contractors and other Local Authorities also experiencing a downturn in sales/contracts and applications.
- 2.4.3 Although the discretionary fee income is also down against target for the year (£141k versus £175k target), this level of income achievement is still a significant achievement given the wider market conditions and it reflects the proactive work being undertaken by the Development Management team to secure additional income streams – notably through pre-application advice activity.
- 2.4.4 At the time of writing this report, the Tidcombe Hall planning inquiry was underway with the Council seeking to defend the earlier refusal of planning permission. The appeal been scheduled for 4 days and the opening day saw around 70 members of the public attend the inquiry to listen to proceedings and/or participate.

## **2.5 Conservation:**

- 2.5.1 A 'forward plan' of conservation areas to be reviewed has been requested by Members and was briefly referenced at the last meeting of the PDG.
- 2.5.2 Work will continue on this alongside other Local Plan work and the intention is to progress this further once the Tidcombe Hall inquiry has concluded and officer resource is freed up to support the work.

## **2.6 Building Control:**

- 2.6.1 Building Control (a shared function with North Devon Council) continues to perform well, albeit with continuing resourcing challenges and pressures accruing through changes introduced through the Building Safety Act (2024).
- 2.6.2 Q4 data showed 97% approval of full applications within 2 months (versus 95% target and 100% achieved in Q3) and continuity of a strong market share (82% versus 75% target and 81% in Q3.) Market share of new housing completions has dropped back versus Q2 data (17% vs. 29%) but remains below target (40%).
- 2.6.3 Applications numbers, and therefore income, remain low/below target with a trading deficit of £76k across the financial year versus a breakeven target. Again – akin to Development Management - this is reflective of a depressed housing market and low confidence within the construction/development sector as a whole. Poor trading conditions seem likely to continue through Q1 of 2025/26.

## **2.7 Planning Enforcement**

- 2.7.1 The Enforcement services continues with a high/active case load albeit there continues to be churn/change in the live cases as new cases are presented and officers close older/completed cases.
- 2.7.2 The service continues to operate with two officers (a contractor and an assistant enforcement officer.) Multiple attempts have been made to recruit a senior enforcement officer with the most recent attempt (with market supplement applied) occurring since the last report to the PDG in March. Although applicants did apply for the role, no successful appointment was made. The

service will therefore continue with the existing contractor and officer arrangement with the intention to seek to recruit again later in 2025.

- 2.7.3** In addition to this, planning officers continue to support with the resolution of live cases in order to seek to manage and reduce the case-load.

### **Financial Implications**

Financial implications associated with this report are limited – but members are asked to note points relating to financial performance and other implications of matters.

### **Legal Implications**

There are no legal implications arising from this information report.

### **Risk Assessment**

There are no major risks associated with this report.

### **Impact on Climate Change**

The scope of this PDG means it has a significant opportunity to progress positive work around climate, biodiversity and other environmental/sustainability matters. Officers will work to seek to support the PDG in maximising these opportunities.

### **Equalities Impact Assessment**

No negative equalities impacts are expected.

### **Relationship to Corporate Plan**

The work of this PDG will supports a wide range of corporate objectives and the corporate plan as a whole.

## **Section 3 – Statutory Officer sign-off/mandatory checks**

**Statutory Officer:** Andrew Jarrett

Agreed by or on behalf of the Section 151

**Date:** 27.5.25

**Statutory Officer:** Maria de Leburne

Agreed on behalf of the Monitoring Officer

**Date:** 27.5.25

**Chief Officer:** Stephen Walford

Agreed by or on behalf of the Chief Executive/Corporate Director

**Date:** 27.5.25

**Performance and risk:** Stephen Carr

Agreed on behalf of the Corporate Performance & Improvement Manager

**Date:** 28.5.25

**Cabinet member notified:** yes

#### **Section 4 - Contact Details and Background Papers**

**Contact:** Richard Marsh, Director of Place and Economy

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Telephone:

**Background papers:**