

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Cabinet

Date of Meeting:	10 th November 2015
Report of:	Caroline Simpson, Executive Director of Economic Growth and Prosperity
Subject/Title:	Priority Planning Applications Team
Portfolio Holder:	Councillor Ainsley Arnold, Portfolio Holder for Housing and Planning

1.0 Report Summary

- 1.1 Cheshire East Council is committed to supporting economic growth and prosperous communities. The planning process plays a major role in both supporting appropriate development and it is essential that the Council has a dynamic and proactive approach to planning which serves our local residents and businesses.
- 1.2 Cheshire East is one of the busiest planning authorities in the Country and is working hard to make continuous improvements in the quality and efficiency of our service, despite the pressures we face in terms of quantity of planning applications and the diversity of our area.
- 1.2 This report is to inform Cabinet about a new initiative in the Development Management Service to fast-track certain key planning applications from initial enquiry to planning decision by providing a seamless service and cutting through unnecessary delays.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 To note the content of the report and the progress made in setting up the Priority Planning Applications (PPA) Team.

3.0 Reasons for Recommendations

- 3.1 It is important for Cabinet to note this new initiative to develop a new revenue stream that enables resources to be provided to deal with the most significant planning applications received by the Council.

4.0 Wards Affected

- 4.1 All wards

5.0 Local Ward Members

- 5.1 All ward members

6.0 Policy Implications

6.1 Positive Impact.

6.2 Improving the delivery of key planning decisions can support the economy of CEC by creating new jobs and houses, give greater confidence to inward investors or businesses that CEC can deal with planning applications in a proactive and efficient way.

7.0 Implications for Rural Communities

7.1 The criteria that define which projects will qualify to be handled by the PPA Team will predominately be in the urban areas but exceptionally will include a small number of schemes that support rural communities.

8.0 Financial Implications (authorised by Director of Finance and Business Services)

8.1 Applications handled by the PPA Team will commonly use Planning Performance Agreements which will provide a mechanism to cover any additional resource costs required to deliver application decisions to a prescribed timeframe.

8.2 It is expected that the additional costs of providing this service will be covered by the revenue generated from it..

9.0 Legal Implications (authorised by Head of Legal Services and Monitoring Officer)

9.1 There are no specific legal implications beyond those dealt with in the body of the report. Planning Performance Agreements are now increasingly common and supported through the National Planning Policy Guidance (PPG) to enable additional charges to be made. Powers exist to charge for discretionary services, which would include providing Pre-Application advice, within Section 93 of the Local Government Act 2003.

10.0 Risk Management Implications

10.1 In the event that the income received from this new initiative does not cover the costs of the additional staff resources the difference will have to be met from budget.

11.0 Background and Options

11.1 The PPA Team has been set up to provide a fast track service for key major projects that meet a defined criteria and help to boost the economy of Cheshire East by creating new jobs and houses. It comprises of a small team of experienced Planning Officers together with prioritised support from Highways and Legal Services to deliver a focussed response that will unlock

progress when it meets a procedural or other blockage. The size of the team can grow as the need arises but at present comprises 2 Planning Officers (with a third due to be added in November).

- 11.2 Where development is concerned the timetable for the delivery of a project can be lengthy and involves many steps outside of the planning process. In development terms the concept of what is 'fast track' will vary from one application to another; in some cases it could be weeks, in others it may be months. The service covers the life of the project from pre-application submission through to the issue of a decision. It is important to note that this process does not guarantee that planning permission will be granted. Each application must be considered on its merits. However, as the process provides for pre-application advice any contentious issues should be identified and addressed at the earliest stage in the process. As ever, whilst officers will provide professional advice on issues and applications, planning committees will need to reach their own view on the material planning considerations of matters that are brought before them for determination.
- 11.3 It is also important to note that the timely progression of planning applications is also dependant on full and early developer and stakeholder engagement with the process. Ultimately the council cannot make exceptions in terms of the rigour of the determination process, the imposition of conditions or the requirements of or terms within a S106 agreement, simply because an application happens to fall for consideration under this process. The key to expediting such matters is early and full engagement in the process by all stakeholders with full recognition of and an appropriate balance between the duties of the Council as Local Planning Authority and the commercial requirements of applicants.
- 11.4 In order to provide the dedicated and prioritised resources needed for this service, the developers are charged an additional fee which is over and above the normal planning fee. This enables the delivery of additional resources which will be funded through the additional income. The fee and the proposed timetable are agreed with the developer on an individual basis via a Planning Performance Agreement. The fee charged relates to the prioritisation of the planning resource required to assess and determine or make recommendations on whether planning permission should be granted. The costs incurred by the Council's legal department in the process will continue to be met by developers outside of the PPA arrangements.
- 11.5 The key outcome that the new service aims to deliver is a planning decision delivered at an appropriate point in the development timetable which is agreed with the applicant beforehand. This and the other desired outcomes are:
 1. Fast-track certain key applications through the planning process from initial enquiry to planning permission by providing a seamless service that is able to dislodge process blockages and cut through unnecessary delays.

2. Accelerate the delivery of key public or private sector development
3. To give investor/business confidence in the Council to process development schemes
4. Be able to offer a 'premium' planning application process which delivers a timely decision that wherever possible meets the requirements of the development timetable.
5. Provide a reliable planning resource to CEC projects that meet the criteria
6. Increased revenue stream to create a self sustaining model for the planning service
7. To unblock complex / challenging development opportunities, which would usually take considerable time to deliver
8. To create an exemplar model for the delivery of planning applications
9. To testbed new ways of working in preparation for future opportunities

11.6 The type of applications that are eligible have been defined so as to be aimed at those type of projects that are of the greatest significance in Cheshire East in terms of generating new jobs and/or new houses. This will include key Council/Engine of the North projects that meet the criteria but the PPA team will not deal with standard (small scale) Council disposals or service area projects or that do not fulfil the criteria. It is anticipated that all EotN projects should qualify and most of the assets disposals. The criteria are:

- A. Employment generating projects creating more than 200 jobs that are new to Cheshire East or will significantly benefit the local economy.
- B. Housing schemes for more than 500 houses
- C. Council disposal applications for major schemes that or unlock other sites or directly deliver new jobs and/or houses directly
- D. Exceptionally, a small number of other schemes (ie rural) that release grant aid

11.7 The type of projects which fulfil the criteria will also deliver additional revenue for the Council in terms of new business rates and Council Tax.

11.8 The concept has been enthusiastically received by developers contemplating major proposals who are happy to pay a premium for a priority service. As a trial, one application for a proposed large warehouse by a major local employer has been dealt with by the team and was reported to SPB within 5

weeks from receipt. At the moment we are also in discussions with developers in relation to developments at:

- New quarry site in Goostrey/Cranage
- Alderley Park
- Reserved Matters for Kingsley Fields, Nantwich

11.9 The PPA Team process will provide the necessary focus on key applications as highlighted. However this is part of an overall package of resource and operational improvements to the Development Management service which will seek to ensure that all applications are dealt with in a timely manner.

12.0 Access to Information

The background papers relating to this report can be inspected by contacting the report writer:

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