

REGULATION AND PLANNING POLICY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Regulation and Planning Policy Committee of South Norfolk District Council held on Wednesday 30 March 2022 at 11am.

Committee Members Present: Councillors: F Ellis (Chairman), B Duffin, J Halls, W Kemp, T Spruce and V Thomson

Apologies for Absence: Councillors: P Hardy and S Nuri Nixon

Cabinet Members in Attendance: Councillor: L Neal

Officers in Attendance: The Director of Place (P Courtier), the Assistant Director for Planning (H Mellors) and the Development Manager (T Lincoln)

98 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Regulation and Planning Policy Committee held on Tuesday 25 January 2022 were confirmed as a correct record.

99 DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT – IN YEAR OPPORTUNITIES

The Assistant Director for Planning presented the report, which outlined the proposed projects and initiatives with regard to the use of the in-year additional income, savings and efficiencies that would enable the Council to accelerate its progress towards the initiatives set out in the delivery plan.

Members' attention was drawn to the opportunity set out in the report which proposed a temporary increase in the current Development Management capacity. The Committee noted that this would help manage the increased level of work and provide a high-quality service to the Council's customers. The additional temporary resource would backfill vacant posts and create additional resource to the major strategic growth allocations.

The extra resource would enable the team to:

- Efficiently and effectively manage an overall increase in application numbers, including forthcoming major strategic planning applications.
- Manage applications following adoption of the GNLP (site allocations)
- Progress work on a new settlement(s)

- Develop Consent Orders
- Prepare for biodiversity net gain and ecology impacts (including new Nutrients Neutrality impacts) and changes arising from the Environment Act

If approved by Cabinet, the Committee noted that a project plan would be developed detailing how the money would be utilised within the department.

The Development Manager provided members with a brief update on the impact the latest advice on Nutrients Neutrality, received from Natural England, would have on the Planning service. Members noted that officers were reviewing the advice to assess its effect on planning applications going forward. Officers explained that there was a hold on granting to allow for a mitigation strategy to be created. Officers stressed the need for future procedures to be well informed and robust to understand the new advice received.

In response to a question raised, officers explained that every Norfolk local authority had been affected by the recent advice from Natural England.

One member raised a query regarding applications with drainage plans in place, and the Assistant Director for Planning explained that further investigation would be needed when making final determinations. This would include any onsite treatment plans in the applications.

A concern was raised regarding the potential delays in determining planning applications. Officers confirmed that applications were still being processed in respect of all other matters but with a caveat on the latest advice received.

In response to concerns expressed by the Chairman over timescales and costs, the Assistant Director for Planning explained that officers were looking into what was required and would draft an action plan. Turning to the concern raised on whether there would be enough funds to cover the work, officers explained that the £100,000 would help with the initial stages of the work. It was expected that the overall budget would need reviewing over time to accommodate the increase in workloads. The Committee further noted that Cabinet would have the final decision on the further allocation of funds.

One member asked if the Council had sought advice from other authorities on the advice received. Officers confirmed that they had started to engage with similar organisations, which had already undergone the process. Officers were confident that the engagement would help identify options and ways forward for the Council.

Regarding the potential increase in costs and impact on developers, officers explained that the Council needed to create a strategy before any decisions were made.

After concerns were raised over the resilience of the Council's statutory consultees, officers confirmed that the Council had a good working relationship with all of them, and that this would be vital in the upcoming months. Members noted that the Council had already lobbied Natural England to make sure they had enough resources to answer queries on the new advice.

In response to further concerns raised over the increase in extra work for the team, the Assistant Director for Planning explained that officers would report back to the Committee with an update on how the £100,000 allocation would be spent.

The Chairman thanked officers for the update, and it was then;

RESOLVED

To Recommend to Cabinet

Approval of the £100,000 allocation from the Growth and Prosperity earmarked reserved to temporary increase the current Development Management capacity, with priority given to the resource impacts of assessing the advice received from Natural England on Nutrients Neutrality with a project plan being drawn up in the next 2 months.

(The meeting concluded at 11:54am)

Chairman