

Questions from the Parish Briefing on Planning – 30 November 2023

Name	Question	Answer
Ann Ranshaw, Weedon Bec	Where can we find a copy of your 'customer performance standards' ?	Its available on the WNC website at Customer Experience Strategy West Northamptonshire Council (westnorthants.gov.uk)
Brian Hughes Crick Parish Council	Can details of the Committee Structure be sent with the slides and org chart	See attached slides
Roger Clarke - Gayton Parish Council	Why has the planning department been allowed to become so depleted? I speak as a former Planning portfolio holder with SNC when the management plan you have described was already in place. S many talented 'planning officer' have left since the new formulation of Council!	The change to a Unitary did result in many staff leaving, there is no single factor to explain this. In September 2023 the Planning Service commenced a large-scale permanent staff recruitment campaign following an internal restructure. The permanent recruitment is still on-going; but at the time of writing the Planning Service now has new officers in post for the following development management positions (almost all of the posts it advertised in the Autumn of 2023): - 5 technical support posts (Admin posts tasked with validation/other key support tasks) - 1 Permanent Head of Development Management - 2 Experienced Principal Planners - 1 Major Project Officer - 5 Senior Planners in Area teams- 4 Planning Officers in Area Teams and 3 Graduate Planner Posts (this in

		addition to a small number of planning policy, ecology and S106 officer posts).
Steve Roper, Cold Ashby Parish Council	Are the recruitments permanent recruitments	Yes (no new agency staff in above list).
Clive Hockley, Hinton in the Hedges Parish Meeting	It just sounds like there are now loads of people trying to implement these changes how many are actually dealing with planning applications?	The North and South Area Planning teams were carrying a lot of vacant posts as of June 2023 (over 1/3 vacant posts, but some agency cover). As of mid-June 2024 one team has 15/15 officer posts filled (including a new starter in early June), the other (also 15 staff when full compliment) has one vacant post and one staff member on maternity leave. There is no longer use of any agency staff in the two area planning teams.
Ann Ranshaw, Weedon Bec	What are the agreed timescales for responding to planning applications and when they are exceeded what updates/explanation will a parish receive?	There is a standard 21 day consultation period (if revised plans are received the 2 nd consultation is normally 14 days). If comments are received within 21 days they are automatically taken into account. We won't delay determination for late comments, but will take into account any late comments received before determination.
Nicola Butcher, Cold Higham Parish Council	Are there any stats that demonstrate the impact extensions of time have had? How many are running to 8 weeks/13 week stat times?	Validation performance was increasing use of extensions of time in 2023/early 2024. In effect if it took over 3/4 weeks on average to validate an application this was creating a surge in agreed extensions of time. Additional recruits joined the

		<p>technical support team through January 2024, by April 2024 average validation timeframes were under 10 days, by June 2024 under 5 days. Its clear this has proportionality reduced use of AET's (validation is not the only factor which affects use of AETs, but we identified it as possibly the single biggest factor). We now have robust plans in place to ensure quick validation of applications (maintaining staffing levels being key to this). It should be noted that sometimes applicants/agents want an AET rather than a refusal (e.g. To revise plans or do extra survey work).</p>
<p>Jeff Servant, Wootton Parish Council</p>	<p>What % of applications are currently being decided within the statutory 13 week period?</p>	<p>Over 80% of majors are being decided within 13 weeks and over 80% of non majors in 8 weeks (this is in time and with agreed extensions of time, which is how the Government measures these statistics.</p>
<p>Tony Hewitt Holcot Parish Council</p>	<p>Is there any statistics on the pre apps this seems to where there are major delays</p>	<p>We re-launched the pre-application advice service (full service) in mid April 2024, it is too early to share statistics.</p>
<p>Alison Benson, Hackleton Parish Council</p>	<p>When does the 8-week turnaround on minor applications begin? I am aware of an application submitted early September which has been validated and issued a number but still doesn't even appear on the portal or the weekly list</p>	<p>The issues we had in late 2023 and early 2024 with delays to applications being validated have now all been resolved. Since early April, we have been validating applications within 10 working days and this enables planning officers to complete their work to issues decisions within the timescales as set out by legislation.</p>

		<p>If you ever need an update on the status of validation of a planning application (E.g: You are aware an application is lodged but are concerned you have not had a consultation letter) you can contact the planning technical support manager: David.simmons-lindill@westnorthants.gov.uk or 01604 526541</p>
<p>Jean Morgan Evenley Parish Council</p>	<p>Could SG please clarify if pre-app advice given to applicants (when it is reintroduced and given in past) is publicly available? Would it be discoverable via a Fol Request?</p>	<p>A definitive answer cannot be given on this question as any FOI response is decided not by the planning team but by the FOI team. That said pre-application advice is normally exempt (and not just at WNC, but for most Councils*). A full pre-application advice service generally leads to better planning outcomes for both residents and applicants, applicants know a planning application when lodged is subject to full public consultation; but they may wish to confidentially run through some aspects of planning pre-application advice.</p> <p>*It should be noted that numerous pre-application advice proposals never subsequently progress to applications (Re: If we published them all on our webpages it would unnecessarily upset thousands of WNC residents).</p>

Alison Reynolds - Roade Parish Council	when a development has gone through appeal are all previous comments & objections from PC's residents etc forwarded across or should these be resubmitted?	Yes they are. All comments are sent to PINS (Planning Inspectorate).
Alison Benson, Hackleton Parish Council	Can planning officers please update parish councils more regularly. We have an application from July 2022 outstanding within the parish and we keep asking the officer for updates. The last response we got was 10th October saying they hoped to make a recommendation next week but still we hear nothing despite regular chasing. Thank you	Now we have more officers we expect them to respond better to requests for updates.
Clive Hockley, Hinton in the Hedges Parish Meeting	At present the officers report and the decision notice show up on the register at the same time. Several times in the recent past there have been factual errors in the officers report but the parish is unable to point them out because once the decision notice is published no one can add additional comments. Could there be at least a weeks gap between the two being published to enable errors to be corrected?	No, unfortunately we have to publish the decision the same time we make it. Unfortunately this is not a request we can assist with. AD (James Rodger) comment: I will normally get directly contacted (or forwarded mails from my managers) on any comment from a Parish Council raising a red flag in this regard; fortunately there has been a reduction in the number of such comments I have seen over the past 18 months; this is undoubtedly because of staffing changes/improvements over the past year.
Kate Gardner, Harpole Parish Council	Probably not one for today but perhaps something we could pick up with Stephanie at a later date - what recourse does a PC have that feels they have been down and overlooked during the planning process for large developments?	We would suggest contacting a senior planning manager to discuss.
Kate Gardner, Harpole Parish Council	Where do we direct applications for S106 funds - for example when S106 funds have been allocated to offsite infrastructure?	section106@westnorthants.gov.uk

Brian Hughes Crick Parish Council	Will the new Local Plan consider policies in current local plans and retain them where possible or will this be a completely fresh examination.	RICHARD
RONNIE IRVING, King's Sutton Parish Council	How does the service build up housing needs data. We don't seem to hear much about this.	RICHARD
Brian Hughes, Crick Parish Council	Will the Strategic Land Availability Assessment system still exist and will past assessments be retained?	RICHARD
Alison Reynolds - Roade Parish Council	will changes to local plan affect our Neighbourhood development plans?	RICHARD
RONNIE IRVING, King's Sutton Parish Council	On 5 year land supply issues - when will the legacy figures be amalgamated into one average?	RICHARD
Clive Hockley, Hinton in the Hedges Parish Meeting	An aside seems to have said that the housing needs analysis for the new Plan is completed. Were the parishes involved because we certainly weren't?	RICHARD
Brian Hughes, Crick Parish Council	If the Local Plan changes policies in a major way NDPs will out of date as they will not comply with the new Local Plan policies. How will this be dealt with? Will all the made NDPs need to be rapidly updated. This will be costly in time and resources.	RICHARD
Liz Hart - King's Sutton Parish Council	Will Village Design Statements still carry any weigh?	RICHARD
Brian Hughes, Crick Parish Council	Can the requirement to submit a planning application for work to trees in a Conservation Area be reviewed? It seems over complicated in many cases where the work is minor in nature.	We are currently reviewing tree application processes in a project with the Councils transformation team and will update later in 2024 via NCALC.
Brian Hughes, Crick Parish Council	Can the WNC mapping showing planning applications be configured so that it works again ion Parish Council websites	Danny - That's something we've spoken to WNC about and it is on the wish list.

	provided by 2Commune?It is annoying that the previous system is no longer available.	This is under development with our software suppliers. We have engaged (and paid) for the system changes needed to deliver this function to all PC's and we expect it to be available in later summer 2024.
Jim Simpson - Newnham Parish Council	The former system used by DDC had a function you are currently unable to replicate in the new WNC Planning system. The legacy DDC system was able to allow connection to external companies (at a cost to the Council) and that data was used to create maps and links to help parish councils.	This is under development with our software suppliers. We have engaged (and paid) for the system changes needed to deliver this function to all PC's and we expect it to be available in later summer 2024.
Angela Weller, Blisworth Parish Council	Cllrs have said that it is difficult to get information from the planning website - could we have a little bit of a training slot on how to navigate the planning website.	We would be happy to arrange a session (through NCALC) for anyone wanting to learn about how to navigate our web pages.
Clive Hockley, Hinton in the Hedges Parish Meeting	How might 'training' be covered for non-NCALC members?	JAMES RODGER (ACTING ASSISTANT DIRECTOR FOR PLANNING) HAS SAID HE WISHES TO CO-ORDINATE PARISH PLANNING TRAINING THROUGH NCALC (MONTHLY, AS PER JAN-APRIL 2024), SO I WOULD ENCOURAGE NCALC MEMBERSHIP
Angela Weller, Blisworth Parish Council	Can you ask Stephanie to actually state whether the Neighbourhood Plan is actually legally binding?	RICHARD
Cllr Graham Ferrie Tiffield Parish Council	Would it be possible for the HENA to be made available to interested parties as soon as possible?	RICHARD

end