

Item 6

REPORT TO PROSPEROUS & ATTRACTIVE COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

29 JANUARY 2008

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF PLANNING SERVICES

PERFORMANCE IN RELATION TO THE PRODUCTION OF CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISALS

1. **BACKGROUND**

- 1.1 At its meeting held on 6 November 2007, the Prosperous and Attractive Borough Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered Performance Indicators relating to its ambitions for the period 1 April to 30 September 2007. As a result of its deliberations, the committee raised concern and requested that further information be presented to a future meeting of the committee with regard to improving performance of the following indicators:-
- 1.2 BV 219 (b) Percentage of conservation areas in the local authority area with an up to date character appraisal.
- 1.3 Concern was raised by Members that a target has been set to appraise 20% of the Borough's conservation areas and last year's performance was 6.7% and current performance is 6.6%.
- 1.4 The purpose of this report therefore is to provide an explanation of the current performance levels and to identify actions to improve the performance of these indicators.

2. **RECOMMENDATION**

- 2.1 That the Prosperous and Attractive Overview and Scrutiny Committee accept the explanations provided in the report to justify current performance levels and the actions proposed to improve performance.

3. **REASONS FOR THE DELAY IN PREPARING CONSERVATION AREA PROPOSALS**

- 3.1 Conservation Area Appraisals and Management Plans are required for the 15 conservation areas across the Borough, the majority of which were designated in 1993. The only conservation area with a complete appraisal is Cornforth that was completed in 2002. This year (2007/08) has seen work continue on conservation area appraisals for Shildon and Bishop Middleham. It is likely that the next conservation area to be

examined in this way will be Whitworth Park, Spennymoor due to anticipated development pressures in and around the area.

- 3.2 Draft Conservation Area Appraisals were prepared by the Forward Plans Team in 2003/04. English Heritage subsequently issued best practice guidance on how to prepare appraisals which the government asked Local Planning Authorities to embrace. This entailed re-visiting all the draft appraisals with a view to having them substantially revised to make them, amongst other things, more user friendly. This is a time consuming and challenging exercise that falls primarily to the Design, conservation, Tree Management and Landscape Team Manager to oversee.
- 3.3 Whilst it would be advantageous to have the Team Manager undertaking conservation area appraisals to the exclusion of the management of all other work carried out by the Team and other work he is responsible for, this is of course not possible.
- 3.4 The work associated with the Cornforth Conservation Area for example did not end with the appraisal. Financial support from English Heritage and three local authorities ensured that a Grant Scheme towards building repairs and restoration could be initiated. The Grant Scheme is to secure good quality repairs and restoration of lost architectural features in many of the buildings surrounding the Green over a three year period as well as compliment the recently completed enhancement works. A great deal of time had to be spent at the beginning of this financial year to prepare the Grant Application and Delivery Plan for English Heritage in order to pursue this initiative.
- 3.5 Similarly, the Team Manager has been overseeing work on railings and the eastern gateway in Bishop Middleham, and project managing high profile works in the grounds of St. Edmund's Church a Grade 1 Listed Building at the heart of the Sedgfield Village Conservation Area.
- 3.6 Additionally, the Team Manager has had to oversee works allocated in this year's capital programme such as at Half Moon Lane, Spennymoor.
- 3.7 Another quite unexpected substantial area of work which had to be done at short notice was the preparation of the Windlestone Hall Planning Statement and Development Brief as a result of the listed hall being placed on the market for sale by Durham County Council. Arguably, the best listed building in the Borough, it was critical to produce a guide for prospective developers in the preparation of adaptation, restoration and development proposals for the hall and the grounds. The statement and brief is currently being converted into a Supplementary Planning Document by the Forward Planning Team working with the Team Manager to be incorporated into the forthcoming Local Development Framework.

- 3.8 Another area of work which has also been seen as a priority in order to enhance the physical environment of Spennymoor Town Centre is the shop front improvement grant scheme. Again, the Team Manager has a pivotal role in ensuring that the details of the shop fronts that require planning permission are up to the requisite standard. This too is a time consuming exercise.
- 3.9 More generally, the team as a whole is responsible for providing specialist advice on planning applications. This internal consultation process is also a very necessary and time consuming activity more particularly with the recent changes to the planning system and the government's emphasis on securing good design in all new developments. It is also widely acknowledged that some of the newer, less experienced staff in the Development Control Team requires more advice and guidance on conservation, design, tree protection and landscaping matters than perhaps would have been the case in the past when the staffing situation was more stable with more knowledgeable officers in the team.

4. **ACTIONS TO REDRESS DETERIORATING PERFORMANCE**

- 4.1 It is clear that the Team has been subjected to changing priorities and differing workloads in recent years to the detriment of preparing conservation area appraisals. It is also clear that the nature and scope of the appraisals has changed involving more work than was originally anticipated. In that sense, perhaps the targets have been too ambitious and over optimistic.
- 4.2 It is proposed therefore that the Team Manager produces a Conservation Area Appraisal Action Plan setting out realistic timescales for the production of the remaining appraisals and that the Action Plan is given priority status in the Team's Work Plan for 2008/9. Reports will be prepared to update Members of the progress attained and presented to Development Control Committee.

5. **OTHER MATERIAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Human Resources

There are no staffing issues.

Financial Resources

There are no budget issues.

Consultation

None required.

Links to Corporate Ambitions/Values

Corporate Ambition: An Attractive Borough

Community Outcome: Improving Towns, Villages and the Countryside

Corporate Plan Aim: To Provide a High Quality, Efficient and Customer Focused Planning Service that Supports Sustainable Improvement of the Built and Natural Environment.

Planning and Technical Services Key Action: To provide an Efficient and Effective Development Control Service.

Risk Management

None required

Health and Safety

No issues identified

Equality and Diversity

No issues identified

Legal and Constitutional

No issues identified

6. **LIST OF APPENDICES**

No appendices

Contact Officer	Bill Katakay
Telephone Number	01388 816166 Ext. 4522
E-mail address	bkatakay@sedgefield.gov.uk
Wards:	All Wards

Examination by Statutory Officers

	Yes	Not Applicable
1. The report has been examined by the Councils Head of the Paid Service or his representative	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. The content has been examined by the Councils S.151 Officer or his representative	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. The content has been examined by the Council's Monitoring Officer or his representative	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. The report has been approved by Management Team	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>