

Item 7

REPORT TO PROSPEROUS & ATTRACTIVE BOROUGH OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

23RD SEPTEMBER 2008

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF PLANNING SERVICES

PERFORMANCE IN RELATION TO THE PRODUCTION OF CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISALS

BACKGROUND

At its meeting on the 29th January 2008, the Prosperous and Attractive Borough Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered a report that provided information on the performance levels in relation to the following indicator:-

BV 219 (b) Percentage of conservation areas in the local authority area with an up to date character appraisal.

The purpose of that report was to provide an explanation of the current performance levels, on which Members had expressed concern, and to identify actions to try to improve the situation.

Members will recall the report explained why conservation area appraisals and management plans were required and the progress that had been achieved to date. The report further explained the main reasons for the delay in preparing conservation area appraisals such as:-

- As a result of best practice guidance issued by English Heritage on how to prepare appraisals, the draft appraisals prepared by the Forward Planning Team four years ago had to be substantially revised to make them, amongst other things, more user friendly;
- The work on conservation area appraisals, being a specialist area of work, fall primarily upon the Design, Conservation, Tree Management and Landscape Team Manager to oversee;
- A great deal of time had been spent at the beginning of the last financial year to prepare the Grant Application and Delivery Plan for the Cornforth Conservation Area;
- Similarly, the Team Manager had been overseeing works in the Bishop Middleham Conservation Area and project managing works in the grounds of St Edmund's Church, a Grade 1 Listed Building, at the heart of the Sedgefield Conservation Area;
- The Team Manager had also had to oversee works allocated in the Capital Programme and the Spennymoor Town Centre shop front improvement grant scheme; and
- Another substantial piece of work that had to be done at short notice was the preparation of the Windlestone Hall Planning Statement and Development Brief which is now being converted into a Supplementary

Planning Document by the Forward Planning Team in close consultation with the Team Manager.

At that meeting it was agreed that a short follow up report would be produced in the autumn to monitor progress as a result of the actions introduced to improve delivery of the conservation area appraisals.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Prosperous and Attractive Borough Overview and Scrutiny Committee accept the explanations provided in the report to justify current performance levels and the actions proposed to improve performance in respect of BV 219 (b) (now XBV 219 (b)).

SITUATION TO DATE

It is clear that the Team is less likely to be subjected to changing priorities and workloads to the detriment of preparing conservation area appraisals. The earlier report advocated that the Team Manager produces a Conservation Area Appraisal Action Plan setting out realistic timescales for their production and that the Action Plan is given priority status in the Team's Work Plan for 2008/9. That Action Plan is appended to this report for the Member's information.

Regrettably, the target for 2008/9 of 19.9% has not yet been achieved; the performance level remaining at 6.60%. Although the first quarter percentage has not changed from the previous quarter, satisfactory progress is being made on two additional conservation areas, Shildon and Bishop Middleham. It should be noted, however, that English Heritage has requested a review of the existing appraisal for the Cornforth Conservation Area which was the first to have had an appraisal but was carried out over five years ago. English Heritage has also insisted that Cornforth requires a Conservation Management Plan. Both these exercises are currently underway and are expected to be completed fully in the new calendar year. Clearly, this additional work has taken priority over the other two appraisals as the Council is contractually bound with English Heritage due to the aforementioned Grant Scheme currently underway in the Cornforth Conservation Area.

It is also relevant to report that the potential developers for the Windlestone Hall site have now submitted a substantial document, a draft Conservation Plan, which needs to be thoroughly examined by the Team Leader in close consultation with other officers in Planning and Technical Services.

OTHER MATERIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Human Resources

The improvements to the Building Control Service outlined in this report can be met from existing staff resources.

Financial Resources

The improvements to the Building Control Service outlined in this report can be met from the existing budget.

Sustainability

One of the original motivations for producing a Masterplan for the three priority neighbourhoods was to ensure that they could be seen as sustainable communities in their own right.

Consultation

The members of staff in the Building Control Team are aware of the current performance issues.

Links to Corporate Ambitions/Values

Corporate Ambition: A Healthy Borough.

Community Outcome: Safeguarding Public Health

Planning and Technical Services Key Action: To provide an efficient and effective Building Control Service.

Risk Management

None required.

Health and Safety

No additional implications have been identified.

Equality and Diversity

No additional implications have been identified.

Legal and Constitutional

No additional implications have been identified.

LIST OF APPENDICES

No appendices

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