

No	Action Point	Allocation	Timeframe	Update
1	<p><u>Introduction and Apologies</u></p>			<p>Apologies received from: Hannah Albans, Sasha Bainbridge, Ben Hornigold, Shanna Jackson, Emma Nasta, Alex Patrick and Tim Slater.</p> <p>Present: Lee Bevans, Marcel Cooper (MC), Kennedy Durrant, Gareth Edwards, Matthew Hall , Peter Harley , Mark Jones, Councillor Dee Laws (DL), Matthew Leigh (ML), Rachel Mottram, Kirsty Paul (KP), David Rowen (DR), Lee Russell (LR), Greg Shaw (GS), George Stone, Bill Tilah, Jordan Trundle, Natalie Webster, George Wilkinson and David Wyatt (DW).</p> <p>Matthew Leigh, Head of Planning, introduced himself to the forum and explained he had joined the Council last month and was finding his feet and familiarising himself with the Council’s processes. He provided a summary of his 20 years planning experience in the public and private sector.</p> <p>Kirsty Paul, Planning Policy Manager, introduced herself and explained that she had been in post about 7 weeks and had 15 years of local government experience specialising in planning policy.</p> <p>Rachel Mottram, Planning Policy Officer, introduced herself and explained that she started in May and has mostly experience in private practice. She added that she grew up in March</p>

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				but does not live locally at the moment.
2	<u>Review of Action Schedule from Last Meeting held on 14 February</u>			None.
3	<u>Local Plan Update</u>			<p>KP explained that they have successfully recruited and now have 2 new members of the team, herself as Planning Policy Manager and Rachel as the Planning Policy Officer. She advised that the team have been undertaking a lot of work trying to produce a new route map for producing the new plan and other supporting documents.</p> <p>KP stated that they are currently reviewing the plan making to date, looking at the technical evidence and responses to previous consultations. She added that they are also considering any other material considerations that might be documents produced by the CPCA in recent years, also considering what is likely to happen now there is a Labour Government and some of the suggested changes that they may bring in terms of planning policy at a national level but also plan making reforms more widely.</p> <p>KP hoped that the next time the Forum meets she will have a more focussed update on where they are at and share what the pathway forward is going to be.</p>
4	<u>Performance</u>			<p>David Rowen reported that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • there is an 18 day backlog in validation, which has fluctuated over the past few months • a weekly validation backlog update is placed on the Council's website • planning application performance since

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				<p>April 2024 to end of June 2024 is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 100% for Majors compared to last year for the same period which was just under 80% • 87% for Minors compared to last year for the same period which was 51% • 87% for Other applications which is a slight improvement from 86% compared to last year • against the Government's 24 month rolling performance requirement (applications determined within the statutory period or within an agreed extension of time): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 85% for Majors, with the designation threshold being 60% • 73% for Non-Major, with the designation threshold being 70%. Hopefully with the trend of improvement this performance will continue to increase.
5	<u>Invalid Applications Update</u>			<p>ML reported that at the last meeting it was discussed about the Council's plan to introduce a fee for invalid applications. He stated that this now has been progressed and he wants to ensure the benefits of introducing this are felt by the Council but also Forum members as the Council has a low number of applications received that are fit for validation on first receipt and that creates an impact on the Council's ability to validate everyone's applications within the 5 day target.</p> <p>ML stated that they have reviewed the process and members have approved that the following deductions will be made on invalid applications:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £60 on major applications • £25 on all other application types.

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				<p>He stated that this cost will go towards the administrative costs of the application up to and including its return but will not meet the costs that the Council is experiencing.</p> <p>ML advised that the process is to be changed so that the invalid fee is introduced from the 1 November 2024 and the time taken will be recorded and a more accurate fee will be introduced from 1 April 2025. He advised that the Local Validation List will be reviewed and updated to streamline the process and asked the Forum to inform him to any issues or comments during the 3 week consultation period. He added that the new Validation List needs to be agreed by Planning Committee.</p> <p>GS made the point that as a planning consultant occasionally things do get submitted to the Council that have simple errors but having submitted a number of applications in Fenland in the last couple of years he has experienced invalidations for things like a drainage strategy is missing when it has just not been picked up in a document called Flood Risk and Drainage Strategy, there is a blank page in the transport assessment, really spurious things to invalid a planning application and when there is a reconsultation on the validation list there needs to be some sort of clarification on what will constitute an invalidation when things are so minor or getting missed or are errors on the Council's part. ML responded that any errors on the Council's behalf would not result in a fee and it is acknowledged that human error does occur. GS expressed the view that he has worked in the area for over 10 years and Fenland is the hardest place to get a</p>

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				<p>valid planning application through. ML stated that experiences would be useful to know so that it could feed into the Local Validation List review to see if there is something on the list that is not needed anymore.</p> <p>DL made the point that the Council has tried for over 3 years, for everyone's benefit, to reduce the wait time in validation and statistically improvements have not been made, which is not for the lack of trying but there is a lot of information so it maybe needs to be checked on the website when submitting an application the documents that are required and the consultation reports. She stated that the Council actively wants to reduce the wait time and the resources it takes in the Technical Team. DL referred to an agent introducing in their company a £100 bonus so that whoever put the application together would give it to another colleague to proof read and check, which has been a great incentive and has changed their right first time statistics.</p> <p>ML added that the Council is looking to go more paperless so there may be some changes to the Local Validation List that reflect this. He urged Forum members to provide their comments during the consultation as he wants to work together to make sure the list works for everyone.</p>
6	<u>New Government and Impact on Planning</u>			<p>ML reported that this is a moving topic and updated that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Labour have been clear that they intend to implement significant changes to the NPPF • mandatory housing targets are going to be reintroduced • introduction of a taskforce to accelerate

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				<p>stalled housing sites and other ways to stimulate stalled sites</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • an additional 300 planning officers for LPAs • local authorities will be required to produce local plans. <p>He stated that the Kings Speech was held earlier, which has resulted in more clarity on some of the points but he feels there is more information required on some areas and it is interesting time ahead but Fenland is looking to improve its service and has invested in additional resources in the Council's Planning Team so hopefully it will be a service that is able to react to the various changes that are coming, take them on board and work with the Forum to bring forward housing with the District.</p> <p>MC made the point that it is all well and good saying we want to build 1.5 million homes but as a developer they struggle to get skilled trades now and questioned where an estimated 50% of additional skilled labour is coming from. He added that if the Government are only looking at the planning side whether it achieves what they wish he does not know but it is more than just the planning side that delays development. MC referred to a site within Fenland that he has, which has been held up by the Section 278 Highways Agreement as there are Highways Officers who do not have the time to undertake the work they need to do, making the point that it is a far bigger problem than just planning.</p> <p>ML agreed with MC's comments and he is well aware of the lack of resources.</p>

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7	<u>Viability Appraisals</u>			<p>ML reported that when a scheme is submitted and is unable to meet the Section 106 contribution requirements the Council requires a Viability Appraisal to be submitted. He advised that historically the Council has taken on the financial burden of the Independent Viability Consultant reviewing the appraisal and any further cost for negotiations and this is now being reviewed, with consideration being given to passing the cost of the independent review to the applicant.</p> <p>ML stated that how this will be done is not finalised and it is envisaged that a number of options will be presented to applicants/agents.</p> <p>DR made the point that for the last 3-4 years the Council has taken the view, following the Local Plan Viability report in 2020, that to the South of the A47 the baseline position is 20% affordable housing delivery and approximately £2,000 per plot financial contribution and to the North of the A47 not a great deal. He stated that due to the time that has moved on and the fact that there have been viability assessments that have indicated greater than that Local Plan Viability assessment plan position can be delivered it is a possibility that the 20% and £2,000 per plot will need to be reviewed and this will be communicated along with the independent review.</p> <p>MC asked if it would not be possible to give the name of the Council's approved reviewer to applicants/agents so that when they undertake a viability assessment they can use that reviewer and then the Council's review has already been paid for and it would not need reviewing? ML expressed the view if only it was that simple as it</p>

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				<p>is not actually the Council's review it is an independent person that validates the submission. MC expressed the opinion that if the Council trusts that person to review it then they should trust them to write it in the first place. ML responded that the Council would have a selection as the point is it should not be the same person, somebody separate would need to be reviewing and validating the assessment and the Council could be in dangerous territory by promoting a company instead of allowing flexibility. MC stated he is not convinced but every time the Council dips into the pocket of the developer it reduces the profitability and some of the areas in Fenland the profitability is marginal.</p> <p>LR stated that he has several large developments in planning and more recently he has been in discussion with planning officers regarding viability and the North of the A47 situation. He asked if the Local Plan Viability Assessment still holds any weight or is the Council starting afresh? ML responded that they are not starting afresh but a review of the Local Plan gave some direction in the ability to deliver housing and potential viability and a similar period has passed since this was undertaken so the content and information is considered to be significantly out of date and it is likely to be updated as part of the Local Plan work. He made the point that it does carry some weight but there are serious concerns about the validity of the information that formed the basis of this and the Council has received a number of applications recently which clearly indicate that viability is significantly different to the current baseline being used.</p>

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				<p>LR asked does this mean if a developer submits a viability assessment the Council diverts to the baseline? ML responded that the starting point would be looking for a policy compliant scheme and there would need to be a conversation on the applications that are in at present. It will be picked up as part of the review but if agents were going to challenge the policy point the Council would expect a full viability assessment as there are a number of applications in presently that show the information as being out of date.</p> <p>GS asked that if he had an application heading to committee and it is not meeting its full Section 106 contributions but is working on the £2,000 per plot and there is not a viability appraisal could that affect the application getting to Planning Committee? ML responded that he would not have thought so in the near future.</p>
8	<u>Any Other Business</u>			<p>ML stated the FDF has been meeting for a while but there are new officers in Planning and there will be a lot of work coming forward on the Local Plan where officers may want input from the Forum. He asked if anyone had any requests, issues or topics they would like to see brought to the Forum and he would be happy to receive these suggestions via e-mail.</p> <p>KP stated at her previous authority there was a Developer Forum that consisted of landowners, developers, major businesses and anchor institutions and this was used as a way of being able to check and challenge some of the methodologies they were working on with regards to technical evidence and also to make sure the work being developed had a strong market</p>

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				<p>insight. She feels it would be useful to know what kind of appetite there is by this Forum to have sessions that are a little more interactive rather than speaking through individual slides and if there are any topics that the Forum would think useful to focus on at future sessions to ensure that everyone is getting the most out of these meetings.</p> <p>DW expressed the view that this Forum would like to be interactive, he has been experienced within Fenland for a long time and the Forum has proved to be very successful and useful. He stated that what he has heard this afternoon from officers is very welcomed and he is looking forward to working with the Council in the future.</p> <p>DL asked attendees to consider whether they would like to add any new members to the Forum, ie businesses, marketing or landowners.</p> <p>ML reiterated that if any member of the Forum has any topics to suggest to e-mail them to him, even if it is for external organisations to attend a meeting.</p>

Finish: Time Not Specified