

REPORT TO FULL COUNCIL CHESHIRE EAST COUNCILLORS' REPORT



Report Reference C-22-23
Meeting Date 9th January 2023
Agenda Item 6
Prepared by Town Clerk

Cllrs Abel and Gardiner were unable to provide a written report due to illness.

REPORT OF CLLR TONY DEAN

As previously I will focus on the work of my service committee, the Environment and Communities Committee.

ROOT AND BRANCH REVIEW OF THE PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT CONTROL DEPARTMENT

The results of this review were finally reported on at the end of October, after a year of work by the Exec, Director of Place. The final report is now available and it includes a great many recommendations which will be taken forward by a 'Modernisation Board' of senior officers. More importantly in my view is the fact that many changes were made during the course of the review which have helped with the main issue - the immense backlog of undecided Planning applications which had built up over the last few years. Changes such as no longer insisting officers drive out to view every single application site (even small rear extension applications) and streamlining multi-officer decision processes have meant that the department is now reducing the backlog gradually every week. The other major issue identified (perceived lack of enforcement action) is also being addressed by filling vacancies and better training, including Councillor training. Five trainee Planning Officers have been recruited via a video-led recruitment campaign to fill the vacancies that had built up, and agency staff are being temporarily employed to reduce the backlog. As the Councillor who initiated the review, I will remain watchful that the recommendations are enacted and the improvement continues.

HOUSEHOLD WASTE RECYCLING CENTRES (HWRCs)

When the lease ran out on the Congleton household waste recycling centre in 2021 the current administration decided not to continue the work (in which I was involved) of the previous administration to identify a new site and create a new HWRC. The third biggest town in our borough is now without a HWRC and the residents have to travel to Macclesfield or elsewhere with their waste. The extra fuel used and the fly-tipping increase caused by this policy seems to go against our declared strong environmental values and I don't agree with the policy. Having spoken out against the Congleton issue, I am now part of a working group set up to look at the provision of HWRCs across the borough - including a review of the Congleton situation. This is important as we need to ensure our Knutsford centre is safe from any potential future cuts in the service, and that we have spread of HWRCs that adequately meet the needs of residents.

SITES AND DEVELOPMENT POLICIES DOCUMENT (SADPD)

This document is effectively the second of three documents which make up the Borough's Local Plan - the first one is the Local Plan Strategy (LPS), adopted in 2017 and the third and last part of the set is the Waste and Minerals Plan which is being prepared currently. The SADPD contains smaller non-strategic sites for planned development and also modernises our planning policies across the board, getting rid of saved policies from the old Macclesfield, Congleton and Crewe and Nantwich councils.

The SADPD was adopted, after several rounds of consultation, in December by full Council. There are no issues for Knutsford in the document, as it is accepted that the sites identified for development in Knutsford in the LPS are sufficient.

However, in our committee's October meeting it was formally confirmed that a review of the 2017 LPS was also under way, five years after it was approved. Initially it was stated that this review was necessary due to big changes like the building of the HS2 line through the borough, but after I asked the question it was confirmed that the whole document was under review. There is even a theoretical possibility of taking more land out of the green belt for development, although we are told this is unnecessary and very unlikely.

Given the wide scope of this review I have therefore laid the foundations (in the December meeting of full Council) for new environmental concerns to be taken into account for some of the existing LPS sites - notably Danes Moss in Macclesfield and LPS 38 in Knutsford, where the evidence now suggests that the previously planned development should no longer go ahead. I no longer support the development of LPS 38 due to evidenced environmental issues and the now reduced housing requirement for Knutsford.