

## **PLANNING POLICY AND CONSERVATION TEAM RESOURCES**

### **1 Purpose of Decision**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to consider the configuration of staffing in the Planning Policy Section of the Planning Policy and Conservation Team. Changes in recent months have taken the Planning Policy Section from a strong position whereby it was able to publish a draft Rushmoor Local Plan for consultation in the Summer of 2015, to a position whereby remaining staff resources are extremely stretched when set against existing and future workloads. This report sets out a potential way to address these staff resourcing issues, and seeks Cabinet approval for these changes.

### **2. Existing and Future Workloads**

- 2.1 The principal tasks on which the Team is working include:
- The preparation of a new Local Plan for Rushmoor, which is the core project for the team;
  - Town Centre regeneration and master planning projects, including significant input into, and support for the preparation of, the two town centre Supplementary Planning Documents and the Activation Aldershot work;
  - Work on preparing and supporting Local Enterprise Partnership Funding Bids;
  - Acting on “Duty to Cooperate” as required by the Localism Act, with the requisite need to attend many meetings and work with partners on cross boundary strategic planning issues;
  - Implementing the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area (TBH SPA) Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy, including Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) land searches and acquisition projects;
  - Determining (and potentially implementing) a way forward in respect of the Community Infrastructure Levy;

- Preparing timely policy observations on planning applications and pre application enquiries, which is integral to the Council's Development Management process.

2.2 These projects will need to remain the focus of attention in the near future, and in particular, the preparation of the new Local Plan is a key priority for the Council. In order to ensure its timely delivery, this report focuses on the team's staffing requirements to the end of the financial year 2017 – 2018, i.e. to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2018.

### **3. Corporate Context**

3.1 The work of the Planning Policy and Conservation Team is important to the Council for a number of reasons:

- The completion of a new Local Plan for Rushmoor is one of the Council's key strategic objectives;
- The Local Plan provides a planning framework for delivery of new homes and the protection of important employment sites;
- The delivery of new homes supports continued income from the New Homes Bonus, and the protection of employment sites supports potential income streams from business rates;
- The Local Plan provides a planning framework to help facilitate the regeneration of the town centres, which in turn will help improve and support the Borough's local economy;
- The work of the team is the catalyst to identification of Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace to mitigate the impact of net new residential development on the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area;
- The provision of comments on the compliance of planning applications with planning policies is integral to the Development Management process, and helps to facilitate development in the Borough;
- The team provides support for, and preparation of, bids to enable the Council to tap into Local Economic Partnership funding streams, which are a growing source of funding for key infrastructure improvements in the Borough;
- The administrative support in the Team provides cover for the specialist Conservation, Arboricultural and Biodiversity Officers whilst they are generating income for the Council through the shared service agreement with Hart District Council.

- 3.2 In this context, it is noted that the Council has identified some priority work areas, and the preparation of a new Local Plan for Rushmoor is one such priority. Moreover, there is recognition that some work areas will need to grow to deliver the required outcomes. As part of this, the use of fixed contract posts is acknowledged as an appropriate way to resource workload peaks.
- 3.3 In addition, work is currently underway to formulate a staffing solution to enable a coherent approach to town centre regeneration and economic development. Whilst this work is in its early stages, it is still relevant to the context of shaping the Planning Policy Section's capacity, mindful of the intrinsic links between the various work areas.

#### 4. Staffing changes in the Planning Policy and Conservation Team

- 4.1 Recent changes to staffing in the Planning Policy Section entail:
- Loss of temporary additional six hours per week for joint Planning Policy and Conservation Manager post as a result of the resignation of one half of the job share;
  - Resignation (in June 2015) of temporary full time Senior Planner post (contract was in place to June 2016);
  - The ending of funding of Principal Planner additional hours (this is currently 4 additional hours per week until 31 March 2016)
  - Loss of capacity of part time Senior Planner due to long-term sickness absence;
  - Unsuccessful recruitment process for Graduate Planner;
  - Vacancy for Administrative support from December 2015;
  - Ongoing and increasing demands on the full time Senior Planner's time to assist with Corporate town centre regeneration work.
- 4.2 The existing configuration of posts in the Planning Policy Section is set out in Table 1 below.

<b>Post</b>	<b>FTE/hours per week</b>	<b>Status</b>
Planning Policy & Conservation Manager	1 FTE	Filled
Principal Planning Officer	22 hours per week (0.6 FTE)	Filled
Senior Planning Officer	1 FTE temporary to June 2016	Vacant
Senior Planning Officer	1 FTE	Filled
Senior Planning Officer	22 hours per week (0.6 FTE)	Filled
Planning Graduate	1 FTE	Vacant
Tech/Admin Support	0.5 FTE	Vacant

**Table 1: Planning Policy Section – existing posts**

## 5. Proposed Staffing Solution

5.1 Taking into account the context set out above, in order to meet workload demands to 31 March 2018, a suggested configuration for staff resources in the Planning Policy Section of the Planning Policy and Conservation Team is set out in Table 2 below. The main changes from the existing position are:

- The vacant temporary Senior Planning Officer post (currently funded to June 2016) is deleted;
- The vacant Planning Graduate post is deleted and replaced by a permanent FTE Planning Officer;
- The existing permanent FTE Senior Planning Officer post is deleted and a two year fixed term FTE Senior Planning Officer post is introduced;
- The permanent part time Principal Planning Officer's hours are increased from 22.5 to 30 hours per week;
- A new permanent FTE Principal Planning Officer post is created with a 50:50 split between Planning and Regeneration projects.

<b>Post</b>	<b>FTE/hours per week</b>	<b>Existing/New</b>
Planning Policy & Conservation Manager	1 FTE	Existing
Principal Planning Officer	30 hours per week (0.8 FTE)	Existing but extended hours
Principal Planning Officer	1 FTE 50:50 split Planning: Regeneration <sup>1</sup>	New
Senior Planning Officer	1 FTE fixed two year contract	New
Senior Planning Officer	22 hours per week (0.6 FTE)	Existing
Planning Officer	1 FTE	New
Tech/Admin Support	0.5 FTE	Existing

**Table 2: Planning Policy Section – proposed configuration of posts**

5.3 Whilst the Local Plan workload will be at its peak over the next two and a half years, beyond this time, the workload of the team will still require appropriate resourcing to continue to deliver the planning policy element of the Planning Service, which has important linkages with Corporate work. The two year fixed contract Senior Planning Officer is proposed to help meet the workload peak that will arise as a result of preparing and completing the new Local Plan. The remainder of the proposal is for permanent staffing resources, although many of these posts are already in place (as set out in Table 1 above), but are either extended or reconfigured.

<sup>1</sup> Note that this assumes 50% funding from a Corporate Regeneration budget

- 5.2 Mindful of the existing posts and current vacancies in the team, and the complicated mix of full, part time, and additional temporary hours, an estimate of the savings versus costs has been made to demonstrate the net financial implications of this configuration. A mid-point has been taken on the salary scale for each post, so the figures are indicative rather than precise, and do not take account of inflation/pay increases, but on balance, represent the average anticipated costs, including on-costs.
- 5.3 The net financial implications of this configuration for the period to 31 March 2018 are set out in Table 3 below.

<b>(Part) financial year</b>	<b>Net financial implications</b>
1 October 2015 – 31 March 2016	£1,167 (saving)
1 April 2016 – 31 March 2017	-£31,438 (cost)
1 April 2017 – 31 March 2018	-£21,245 (cost)
1 April 2018 – 31 March 2019	£0,205 (saving)

**Table 3: Indicative net financial implications of proposed changes to staffing structure**

- 5.4 For the period from 1 April 2018, a further saving would accrue as the fixed contract Senior Planning Officer (SPO) fixed contract post would no longer be in place. Hence, for the period 1 April 2018 to 31 March 2019, the net reduction in cost would result in a small saving from the existing staffing position.
- 5.5 It is important to note that the figures set out above in Table 3 assume that 50% of the new Principal Planner post (including on-costs) will be funded from a Corporate Regeneration budget. The net cost of this (including on-costs) is approximately £25,800 per annum.

## **6 Conclusions**

- 6.1 In order to sustain delivery of the workload of the Planning Policy and Conservation Team, investment is required to enable the delivery of key projects to help deliver the Council's purpose and priorities. The Planning Policy Section configuration set out in this report will deliver the staff resource required to develop a strong future planning policy framework for the Borough, which is critical to support the Borough's town centre regeneration priorities and the continued delivery of housing and economic growth to meet and support local needs, and revenue through the New Homes Bonus.
- 6.2 Were this investment in the staff resources in the team not to be made, the implications of this would be that the capacity of the Planning Policy team would not be sufficient to deliver the preparation of the new Local Plan in a timely manner. This would reduce the Council's ability to deliver

elements of its purpose and priorities, potentially impacting negatively on the regeneration of the Borough's two Town Centres and the delivery of new homes (and the commensurate New Homes Bonus that would accompany this). Failure to deliver a new Local Plan may also result in the threat of Government intervention in the Plan making process.

- 6.3 Hence, whilst there is a small short-term cost to this proposal, on balance, this will be outweighed by the benefits accrued through the continued regeneration of the Borough's Town Centres, and the delivery of new homes in Rushmoor. Moreover, the nature of the staff resourcing proposal whereby it includes the use of a two year fixed contract for one full time Senior Planner post means that over time, the costs should result in a small saving per year beyond 31 March 2018, when set against existing costs.

## **7. Next Steps**

- 7.1 Following consideration and approval of this report by Cabinet, work will be undertaken with Personnel Services to ensure that all due recruitment processes are adhered to.

## **8. Recommendations**

- 8.1 **It is recommended that Cabinet approve the proposed changes to staffing in the Planning Policy and Conservation team to the configuration as set out in Table 2 of this report.**

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