

South Cambridgeshire District Council
Planning & New Communities Services



SERVICE PLAN
2011/12 to 2013/14



Approved by:

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Champions:

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Cllr Mervyn Lloynes	Business and Employment
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Cllr Mark Howell	Equalities and Travellers
Cllr Tim Wotherspoon	Design

1. About Our Service

South Cambridgeshire is one of the fastest growing districts in the country with plans for new jobs and homes so the population will grow by around a third over 20 years. The growth has been carefully planned so that large developments will be located sustainably, for instance, on the fringes of Cambridge. We also have a strong track record of delivering affordable housing in villages on 'rural exception sites', and have a positive attitude towards businesses. We are a district of 103 parishes, with many beautiful villages and 83 conservation areas. The number of planning and building control applications fell during 2008-9, but during 2010 there has been an upward trend. The service includes officers with a wide range of responsibilities, skills and experience. We are committed to working closely together and with other services and partners in order to make sure that we deliver the best outcomes for the district.

Our service incorporates:

Planning Policy

Influence land use and transport policies. Prepare and update planning policies and proposals for sustainable employment and housing development, protection of the built and natural environment.

Development Management

Determine approximately 2,500 applications (including major growth sites in South Cambridgeshire) and 1,500 significant amendments to these applications. Defend the Council's decisions at appeal, monitor development and S106 obligations and triggers within the District, as well as High Hedge applications. Our customers range from applicants and developers, to neighbours, interest groups and Parish Councils.

Enforcement

Enforce breaches of planning control by carrying out investigations and gathering evidence. Resolving these breaches through negotiation and if necessary legal action. Also work with partner agencies and teams to resolve complex problems.

Building Control

Enforce building regulations by determining building regulation applications and carrying out site visits to check works at specified stages of development. As well as building safety and accessibility, building regulations are a significant tool for delivering the Government's carbon reduction commitment. Also provide a dangerous structure service.

Design and Conservation

Conserve and enhance the historic, natural and built environment covering landscape, trees, wildlife, and historic buildings. The service deals with listed building and tree applications, and provides conservation and design input to policies and planning proposals to help produce attractive, high quality places.

New Communities

Supports rural life across the district as well as delivering high quality new developments through a multi-disciplinary team. Responsibilities include leading on growth sites, urban design, economic development and tourism, sports and leisure, art and culture, climate change including Sustainable Parish Energy Partnership, community development including engagement, community facility planning and capital grants.

2. Our Performance and Plans to Improve

Our Performance:

1. Planning policies and proposals in 4 Development Plan Documents (DPDs), 3 Area Action Plans (AAPs) and 13 Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) were put in place between 2004 and 2010 to cover the planning period to 2016.
2. Substantial work has been undertaken to develop a Gypsy and Travellers DPD. This has been delayed because the government is due to publish a new approach to planning site provision. Work is continuing to explore new suggestions that arose during consultation.
2. The Development Management service re-structured to make savings and introduced a new planning application database and processing system (APAS) in July 2010. The upheavals of the changes resulted in a deterioration in the time taken to determine planning applications from quarter 2:

N.B. The new IT system was implemented at the end of July.

Month	Applications received	Applications determined	Large Majors Determined in 16 Weeks	Small Majors Determined in 13 weeks	Minors Determined in 8 weeks	Others Determined in 8weeks
August 2010	122	151	N/A	25%	27%	46%
September 2010	151	116	N/A	0%	20%	40%
October 2010	141	106	50%	0%	33%	45%
November 2010	164	137	100%	0%	40%	49%
December 2010	133	129	100%	50%	41%	70%

The figures for quarterly performance against PI targets are shown below:

	Target	Apr'09-Mar'10	1 st Qtr Apr-Jun	2 nd Qtr Jul-Sep	3rdQtr Oct-Dec
Majors-13 weeks	>71%	67%	83%	35%	22%
Minors- 8 weeks	>71%	77%	64%	40%	38%
Others	>86%	83%	71%	52%	56%
Customer satisfaction	>73%	83%	68%	56%	Not available PAS project
Appeals lost	<36%	35%	42%	39%	14%
Letter response in 10 days	>90%	84%	47%	44%	Not available

4. The breakdown of types of applications from August to December 2010 is:
 - 10 Large Majors
 - 23 Small Majors
 - 165 Minors
 - 498 Others including householder applications.
5. In addition, there were 129 applications to discharge conditions and 51 applications for non-material amendments over the same period.
6. Pre-application charging continues to add quality to development. It has exceeded revenue expectations.
7. Building Control considered 98% of all applications for Building Regulation approval within the statutory 5-8 week statutory time limit.
8. The number of applications for Historic Buildings Grants has increased. In the last quarter 3 buildings have been removed from the buildings at risk register which is positive.
9. With regard to the green environment, 100% of tree applications were dealt with in the statutory time frame. We have supported a range of community planting schemes, and the hedge and tree pack scheme is on course to plant 3000m of hedgerows.
10. Accessible wildlife schemes have been included in developments at Over, Trumpington Meadows, Milton and Hauxton. Once these developments commence there will be a significant increase in accessible wildlife space.
11. The Council Action for planting community orchards is on course to deliver the target of 6. The team have worked with groups, parish councils, and tree wardens. Two of the schemes involve restorative management rather than the creation of a new orchard. Three schemes have been supported with grants. We also continue to support projects to conserve, enhance and create other local wildlife habitats.
12. Through working with partners, we have enhanced local heritage sites and supported the Parish Paths initiative.
13. For Enforcement, the number of investigations remains high when compared to previous years. The number of enforcement notices for the period January to December totalled 28, which represents 6.02% against a target of 5%.
14. The Section 106 officer contract was made permanent. He has created a dedicated s106 webpage for developers and Parish Councils. There have been presentations to Parish Councils and training for members on development viability. A new policy has been implemented to secure funding for community facilities; successful s106 audit result.
15. In 2009/10 there were 70 Section 106 agreements signed and this figure will be exceeded in 2010/11. Also, it is expected that more than 30 Parish Councils will receive section 106 contributions this year.
16. The Joint Urban Design Team have worked on: Orchard Park Design Guidance SPD; Urban design guidance for Papworth West Central, NW Cambridge University Site Master plan, Cambourne 950 additional dwellings; Design Code for Trumpington Meadows; Gypsy & Traveller site layout guidance, and provided advice on planning applications as required.
17. Achievements on the major sites include consent for the Country Park at Trumpington Meadows, continuing development at Orchard Park including permission for a new hotel and opening of new Multi-Use Games Area. At Cambourne, progress includes permission for the Sports Centre, start on site of the new fire station and permission for an additional 950 homes.
18. The annual target to increase the number of teenagers taking part in positive activities by 500 exceeded. For example, in sports along, oaralympics events included youth games with 600 children from 20 schools. We also support street football in 5 villages.

19. We have helped a further 11 young athletes under elite athletes award scheme (total now 35 since launch in 2009)
20. We have secured £1m worth of public arts projects on 17 development sites.
21. A Climate Change Action Plan has been drafted and circulated for comments.
22. 8 parishes joined the Sustainable Parish Energy Project.(original target 6), aiming for 25% of district by year end
23. A Young Person's Plan has been approved.
24. Over 120 older people took part in six events to mark 'Cambridge Celebrates Age' throughout October
25. The Economic Development Strategy has been approved.
26. Local business has been supported using £150K dedicated by the Council. Measures have included rate relief, a business grants scheme, a 'Step Up Competition' to bring on new businesses.
27. We have played an active part in shaping and setting up the new Local Enterprise Partnership.
28. The Northstowe Eco-Demonstrator Projects were awarded funding and the retro-fit project will make energy improvements to be made to 15 homes in Rampton Drift.
29. Capital grants were awarded to support village hall improvements at Landbeach and Whaddon, the Elsworth community shop, sports facilities at Castle Camps and Swavesey, and arts equipment for Cottenham and Melbourn.

Key Areas for Improvement

From the above, the key areas for improvement are:

- Improve performance in Development Control and Conservation.
- The Scrutiny Committee Task and Finish group focussing on the planning service is expected to highlight a number of areas for improvement.
- Reduce the number of complaints received; and improve response rate to correspondence.
- Closer working between conservation and development control to ensure that an integrated approach is taken to joint applications.

Our main priorities are shown in the Improvement Plan in Appendix B. Key areas include:

- Bringing forward major sites including 220 homes at Orchard Park, over 1000 homes in North West Cambridge, finalising consents for 950 homes at Cambourne, 600 homes at Trumpington and development at Northstowe.
- Strong participation in the Department for Transport A14 Improvements Work
- Preparatory work for a new Local Development Framework
- Implementing the new fee setting regime for planning applications
- Delivering Gypsy and Traveller sites
- Promoting opportunities under the forthcoming Localism Act
- Engaging with the new Greater Cambridgeshire and Greater Peterborough Local Enterprise Partnership
- Further development of the Sustainable Parish Energy Project
- Delivery of Council Actions

3. The Context for Our Plan

a) External Drivers

The following external factors are likely to influence the service:

- New Homes Bonus
- Localism Bill/Act
- New fee setting regime proposed for planning services
- Creation of Greater Cambridgeshire and Greater Peterborough Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), and wind-up of Cambridgeshire Horizons
- Revised guidance for planning for gypsies and travellers
- Ability of other public bodies such as Highways and Environment Agencies to deliver planned improvements to support growth
- Capacity and prioritisation of public bodies such as Homes and Communities Agency (HCA), Natural England and English Heritage.
- Natural Environment White Paper

b) Our Key Partners

Partnership working is integral to the Planning and New Communities service. Key partners include:

- Parish Councils
- Neighbouring local authorities including Cambridge City Council and Cambridgeshire county Council
- Developers and Planning Agents, including Gallagher's, Countryside, Grosvenor Estates and the Cambourne Consortium
- Partnerships such as: Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Biodiversity Partnership
- National agencies including HCA, Natural England and English Heritage
- Voluntary sector including Cambridge Past, Present and Future
- Local groups such as River Mel Restoration Project, arts bodies and sports clubs
- Social landlords
- The nine Village Colleges in South Cambridgeshire
- Renewables East, Sport England and Living Sport
- Arts Council East
- Greater Cambridgeshire and Greater Peterborough LEP

For our major partnerships, robust partnership arrangements are in place and have been checked through the corporate review of partnerships and corporate partnerships register.

c) Strengths and Weaknesses

<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A planning policy team with a proven record in delivery (secured £1m in PDG in 2009) • Joint working with local communities, Cambridgeshire local authorities and with service and infrastructure providers including joint planning arrangements. • Planning Parish Forums & Agents' Forum • Pre-application protocol and charging • Improved website information including delegated reports • Quality of Building Control service, continuing to hit targets and signing two partners • Award winning services in conservation, arts, sports and community development 	<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor development management performance following introduction of new planning ICT system and restructure • An increase in complaints regarding conservation and development control
<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Localism Bill, New Homes Bonus, new planning fees regime and simplified Local Plan system • Council's Aims and Approaches for 2011/12. • Enhanced pre-application advice and design guidance • New planning IT system will deliver a more linked up and effective service; • Political and other support for volunteering and importance of local places and actions • Current negotiations between HCA and Gallagher's offer potential for new approaches at Northstowe • Taking advantage of the sporting and cultural benefits of the Olympics in the lead up to 2012 	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loss of knowledge and experience through redundancies resulting from savings • Less income from applications and funding gap between removal of HPDG and introduction of New Homes Bonus • Uncertainty about Northstowe, NIAB, the University site and Orchard Park as a result of the withdrawal of the A14 upgrade scheme • Potential resource issues if development progresses at Northstowe • Non-relocation of Cambridge Airport • Loss of interim planning officer support may impact on performance

d) Are we meeting the diverse needs of all our Customers and communities?

Our services impact upon everyone within the District.

How needs are changing

Customer demand and expectations have increased over time. Planning applications have increased over the past year by almost 10%. The Labour government introduced increased requirements for planning and heritage applications requiring greater assistance to applicants.

The population of the district is undergoing a transition. South Cambridgeshire has an ageing population. The percentage of the population aged 65 or above is expected to rise from 14.8% in 2001 to 23.5% by 2021.

Conversely, the percentage of under 20-year olds is forecast to decrease from 25% in 2001 to 22.6% by 2021. The Gypsy and Traveller population is also growing from the last known figure of 1,330 (1% of the total population in the District) in 2005. There is also information to suggest that the District has a high number of migrant workers, but details are not accurate at the current time.

Results of consultation/engagement in the last year

Customer satisfaction surveys are in place for users of Development Control. At present we have discontinued the use of our own survey forms while we participate in a Planning Advisory Service (PAS) benchmarking project including a survey of customer satisfaction.

Conservation survey their customers and feedback is currently mixed. Building Control survey their customers and the response continues to be generally favourable.

Agents' Forums are organised regularly for customers of Building and Development Control. Attendance at both forums continues to grow, and the meetings are mutually informative.

We consult with Parish Councils over every planning application and as we develop projects for arts, sports, sustainable energy and other matters. We hold Planning Parish Forum meetings every six months and approximately 60 people attend from 40 parishes. In addition, there is a Planning Parish IT Forum that had its first meeting in January 2011, and a Northstowe Parish Forum, both of which will meet approximately four times a year.

Community forums have also been established for the growth sites, notably Cambridge North West and Trumpington.

The Duty Officer System provides a direct line to a planning officer for general planning advice. In addition to the Duty Officer System, pre-application charging was introduced on 5 October 2009 to increase revenue and encourage better quality applications. This service provides the applicant with detailed formal advice intended to ease the path of planning applications.

Customer service standards and how these are being delivered

Planning and New Communities will continue to contribute to improvements in customer service to meet the Customer Service Excellence Standard in 2011.

Complaints and how we have learnt from them

There have been significant numbers of complaints particularly regarding development control and conservation over the last year.

The breakdown from April 2010 to February 2011 is:

Stage 1	37
Stage 2	7
Stage 3	1

The largest number of complaints concerned 'processes', and around half of these were upheld after investigation. Other complaints were about delays and staff conduct, including lack of communication.

Lessons include:

- Ensuring planning officers make contact with all applicants or their agents when the case is assigned
- Emphasis on stronger customer focus Decision for planning officers to send letters in own names
- Plan to strengthen performance management
- Agreement to provide two officers for complex appeal hearings.

There were 61 compliments received by the service during the same period of April – January.

e) **Our Resources**

	Estimate 2011/12 £
Capital Primarily for grants	
Planning	135,600
New Communities	248,240
	383,840
Revenue	
Expenditure	
Development Control	1,076,050
Building Control	96,910
Economic Development and Tourism	158,060
Conservation and Museums	222,300
Transport 16,800	
Planning Policy	631,160
New Communities Growth Agenda	1,226,630
Sustainability	101,860
Sports Development	170,450
Arts Development	134,390
Community Development	107,790
	3,942,200
Income	
Planning from Fees and Charges	1,363,030
Cams Horizons Grant	75,650
HPDG from reserves	285,100

The figures above are based on the Revenue Estimates 2011/12.

In October 2010, a new arrangement for setting fees for Building Control was implemented. Under the new government guidance, fees must reflect the actual cost of providing the service and be reviewed annually. It is expected that the government will introduce a similar scheme for planning applications to take effect from October 2011. This is expected to increase fee income by 15%.

In 2011/12, the Council will no longer receive Housing and Planning Delivery Grant because the scheme has ended, and will be partially replaced by New Homes Bonus. Cambridgeshire Horizons is winding up, and will no longer fund posts in the council.

Workforce Overview

Planning and New Communities has a skilled workforce with a wide range of skills and specialist knowledge. As a result of the restructure in Development Control which took place during the summer, twelve employees were promoted (following a competitive process) or assimilated to new posts. There were also redundancies from Development Control and Building Control. Interim planning officers were used to provide support during the restructure and the implementation of the new planning system in development control.

The breakdown of numbers of employees is shown below:

Service Area	Numbers of Employees (some posts are part-time)
Corporate Manager, Office Support Team, Senior Lawyer and s106 Officer	7
Development Control including enforcement	27
Building Control	7
Conservation and Museums	11
Planning Policy and Transport	8
New Communities including Growth Sites and Sustainable Communities teams, and members of Joint Urban Design Team	19

In the 10 months 1st April 2010 to 1st February 2011, 299.5 days were lost to sickness. This is a loss of 3.7% of the total workable hours during the 10 month period, or approximately 4 days per person. The vast majority of ill-health is short term.

Following the implementation of the new organisational structure in New Communities, a programme of team-building training was run for this service. Bespoke leadership and management training was provided for the managers of the service in the early months of 2011. In addition, employees participate in training identified in their personal development plans, and in corporate training including customer service and absence management.

Risk Overview

There are risks facing the service in the coming year that have a short or medium term impact on the ability of the service to deliver on its priorities. However, given the long-term nature of the many projects, there are also significant longer-term risks.

Key risks are listed below, and are managed through the service risk register that is reported to the Executive Management Team every four months. Major risks are managed through the corporate risk register. Control measures are listed in the register for each risk. The key risk areas in the Corporate and Service risk registers are:

STR05 Lack of Development Progress – While there has been progress on Cambridge fringe sites, there is no progress yet at Northstowe and little likelihood of progress at Cambridge East in the immediate future, *leading to* the authority being unable to deliver its housing needs, *resulting in* the Council having to meet the shortfall in the short term from developments in existing villages and head off major planning applications outside the strategy.

STR03 Illegal Traveller encampments or developments – Failure to find required number of site or sites identified do not meet the needs of local Travellers *leading to* illegal encampments or developments in the District *resulting in* community tensions; cost and workload of enforcement action, including provision of alternative sites and/or housing; poor public perception and damage to reputation.

PNC1 Housing Trajectory – similar to STR05

PNC2 Core Strategy DPD review delayed – delay in reviewing the Core Strategy DPD, which only provides a strategy until 2016 *leading to* failure to meet housing and employment needs, and policy revisions to respond to the economic downturn *resulting in* no response to the national climate change agenda and other changes in national planning policy; no provision for ongoing supply of land, a longer term development strategy (normally 15 years) or a strategy for the economic recovery.

PNC5 Staffing restructure with reduced number of employees and new roles leading to loss of service delivery resulting in poor services to communities and poor reputation.

PNC6 Underfunding from application fee income – more and lower fee earning applications *leading to* budget pressures and reduced resource in Development Control *resulting in* the delivery of high quality services being compromised

PNC7 Posts are reliant on PDG and Horizons grant monies – lack of government funding *leading to* cost of redundancy or posts for staff for the council *resulting in* further financial pressure for the authority and/or failure to deliver against development pressures upon the Council