



**South  
Cambridgeshire  
District Council**

**REPORT TO:** Scrutiny and Overview Committee

11 February 2014

**LEAD OFFICER:** Jo Mills, Director of Planning & New Communities

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## **Conservation Service Review**

### **Purpose**

1. To provide the Scrutiny and Overview Committee with an update on the Conservation and Urban Design Service Review. This will help guide implementation of the new structure and associated processes and procedures to be in place by 5 May 2014 and the subsequent priorities and ways of working for the new team.
2. This is a not a key decision.

### **Recommendations**

3. It is recommended that Scrutiny endorses the general approach for implementing the new structure, the vision and ways of working and subsequent priorities for the new team.

### **Reasons for Recommendations**

This report is brought to the Scrutiny and Overview Committee to:

Provide an update on progress of the Conservation and Urban Design Review at the early stage of implementation of the new structure, following an earlier update at a previous meeting on 7 November 2014. At which, the Scrutiny and Overview Committee “**AGREED** to consider this item early in 2014 as an opportunity to discuss service priorities during the transitional period and suggest ways in which to move the service forward.”

### **Executive Summary**

4. On 7 November 2014, Scrutiny and Overview Committee noted the drivers and objectives of the Conservation and Urban Design Review to:
  - Conserve and enhance the quality of the environment in South Cambridgeshire;
  - Deliver a service that is agile, customer focused and able to meet new demands;
  - Be as cost effective as possible.
5. Members were advised that an – in house model was subject to formal staff consultation. This comprised of a consultancy unit with officers who provided specialist urban design, historic buildings, ecology and landscape design advice to internal and external customers. That the tree service will be located within Development Control team.

6. The new structure and final recommendations were discussed with the Councillor Wright in December 2013. The Scrutiny and Overview Committee agreed to consider this item in early 2014 to give Members an opportunity to discuss service priorities during the transitional period and suggest ways to move the service forward.
7. The draft vision and ways of working below have been developed by a rigorous process involving internal and external customers and members as well as staff. This will be tested by the new team when in place to encourage ownership.

**“To achieve a consistently high standard of service by striking the right balance between quality, timeliness and customer satisfaction.”**

By:

- Working as a multi-disciplinary, consultancy team, providing specialist advice
  - Providing advice which adds measurable value for our customers and the new and existing communities and environments we create, preserve and enhance.
  - Focusing on continuous improvement by understanding customer requirements and measuring our success at achieving it
  - Putting the customer at the heart of everything we do
  - Being proud of what we have achieved and promote what we do well
  - Aligning our resources to where they are needed most and developing innovative ways to make best of our resources and also to generate income
  - Recognise the need to continually learn, develop and adapt, and be ready to share best practice
  - Work collaboratively across teams, services and partners organisations and actively engage the community to help us deliver
8. We are now recruiting officer to the new team, who will have the relevant competencies to embed the new ways of working as well as specialist professional expertise to deal with the priority for the new service, which is the shaping of our new communities. This work will gather pace as the LDF progresses through the Examination process later in 2014. This is in addition to work needed to conserve and enhance our landscape and built assets, which whilst secondary to creating new communities (due to associated risk) is also extremely important.
  9. Implementation of the new service will be carried out in three phases to ensure that we lead manage and monitor the process effectively. The phases and deliverables are as follows:

**Phase 1: Creating a sound foundation (up to start of new service 5<sup>th</sup> May 2014)**

- Recruiting the new team
- Preparing a clear set of processes and procedures to instill a consistent approach.
- Guidance and training for DC officers.
- Service Level Agreements.
- Professional supervision.
- Initial communication with agents, stakeholders.

## **Phase 2: Launching the team and developing the detail (May 2014 – October 2014)**

- Launch of the new Service
- Test the vision and ways of working,
- Create a team plan
- Develop customer standards,
- Engagement with stakeholders
- Priority partnership projects will include Green Deal and setting up a Design Review Panel.
- Training and development of the team.

## **Phase 3: review and adapt (October 2014 – April 2015)**

- 6 month and annual review of the Service
- Create a marketing and promotion strategy
- Create a charging structure including for pre-applications

### **Considerations**

#### **10. Vision and Ways of working**

11. Our draft vision is

**“To achieve a consistently high standard of service by striking the right balance between quality, timeliness and customer satisfaction.”**

12. This which reflects the direction of travel previously presented to the Portfolio Holder meeting for Planning and Economic Development in October 2013 and presented to Scrutiny in November 2013. It also echoes what our customers said was important when we consulted them at the informal stage of the Review.

13. The vision has also been subject to formal staff consultation in December 2013 and as such it's ownership by the new team is critical, they will be encouraged to test and develop it further, if necessary.

14. We have defined a number of ways of working which will shape the new service and support delivery of the Vision. They relate to the change principles which were endorsed by Members at the Portfolio holder meeting for Planning and Economic Development in October 2013 and are:

- Working as a multi-disciplinary, consultancy team, providing specialist advice.
- Providing advice which adds measurable value for our customers and the new and existing communities and environments we create, preserve and enhance.
- Focusing on continuous improvement by understanding customer requirements and measuring our success at achieving it.
- Putting the customer at the heart of everything we do.
- Being proud of what we have achieved and promote what we do well.

- Aligning our resources to where they are needed most and developing innovative ways to make best of our resources and also to generate income
  - Recognise the need to continually learn, develop and adapt and be ready to share best practice.
  - Work collaboratively across teams, services and partners organisations and actively engage the community to help us deliver
15. Strong leadership is key to the success of the new team, as such we have positioned team under the Head of New Communities. An early task for the Lead consultancy officer will be to work with the rest of the team to develop a clear set out outcomes they will achieve. These will flow from the vision and be aligned to the “ways of working”. They will be included in the team plan along with details of improvement projects, performance measures and budgets and income.

### **Implementation**

16. The new service will be implemented in 3 distinct phases to facilitate effective management of the process and in incremental development.

#### **Phase 1: Creating a sound foundation (up to start of new service 5<sup>th</sup> May 2014)**

17. Under the leadership of the Head of New Communities, we are **developing the infrastructure for the new service** to fit within the draft framework we have outlined above (i.e. the vision and ways of working)
18. We are currently working on **putting the new team in place** which is identified in the attached structure. We will seek to appoint those with the specialist professional skills to reflect the demands on the service but also the competencies to work in the way we have defined.
19. We will be developing a **clear set of processes and procedures** to develop a consistent approach in dealing with all service requests from both internal and external customers. This will provide clarity for all involved and will enable officers to deal with things in the most efficient and effective way possible. We will seek to cut out duplication, focusing effort where it is most effective and generally simplifying the way things are done. We will promote our processes so customers are clear about how we do things.
20. To make most effective use of our resources and improve customer service, we think it will be advantageous for Development Control to deal with some less complex applications and enquiries without the needing input from specialist officers. We are committed to providing the support to enable them to achieve this and giving our customers confidence that their needs are being met. We are developing a training Programme for DC officers which provide them with the tools to make informed decisions and increase their confidence. We will provide them with **guidance** for common developments such as barn conversions, making clear an agreed Council stance on specific issues to provide certainty and consistency for customers as well as officers. **Training** will compliment guidance and will take officers through the process of dealing with specific customer queries and applications, what questions they need to ask themselves when assessing proposals and when to involve specialist officers. The training will take the form of role plays and cover issues such as achieving effective site visits and the importance of developing relationships with agents and other stakeholders in achieving successful outcomes for applications.

21. We will work with our internal customers to develop their skills in commissioning services, including achieving practical outcomes such as **Service Level Agreements (SLAs)**. These will be clear about what our internal customer need the consultancy team to deal with, where and when they need specialist advice and what performance measures need to be achieved to meet expectations and requirements.
22. We will be providing training to the new team this will be focused on developing skills which will help embed the new ways of working. All specialist officers will be **offered professional supervision** which will coach them in aligning their approach to casework and projects to the new ways or working. For example identifying where they can best spend their efforts to achieve outcomes and enable them to take a pragmatic approach.
23. We will **engage with agents at the Agents Forum and meet with key stakeholders** to update on progress and discuss how we should develop discussions in subsequent stages to align projects and identify opportunities to optimise resources.

#### **Phase 2: Launching the new Service and developing the detail (May 2014 – October)**

24. We will **launch the new Service** on 5 May 2014, this will involve half away day which will include a number of guest speakers which will challenge the team to think about working in new ways and the successes and achievement that can bring. We would like members, where possible to attend the event to further endorse the new Service.
25. An early task for the new team will be **test the vision and ways of working**, however as these have been created by a rigorous process involving members, customers and staff, it is envisaged that this will be more about securing buy in from the team. This phase will build on the impetus created prior to the team being set up; focus will therefore be on developing and delivering the detailed activities to deliver the vision.
26. The priority for the new team must be on utilising their specialist skills to shape our new communities, which will continue to gather pace this year as the LDF goes to Examination. Secondary, but of significant importance is the need to target expertise to conserve and enhance our landscape and built assets. The work done in phase 1 such as SLAs, training and guidance will support specialist officers in identifying where their skills are needed most.
27. The team leader will be tasked with aligning the team activities to the vision and creating a clear **team plan** which will define how this will be achieved including outcomes and service improvements which they will put in place. These will be developed from what the agents told us was important when we consulted them earlier in the review process. Such as an excellent pre-application service. We will use the agents forum to help us understand customer requirements and to prioritise service improvements.
28. We will work with the team and Members to develop the measures of success for the Service, this will facilitate effective review of the Service 6 months and a year after set up.

29. We recognise the need for a consistent and clear procedure for **customer standards**, we will where appropriate use Corporate standards and in addition work with the agents forum to develop standards unique to the needs of the service
30. We will build on the early **engagement with stakeholders** in phase 1, working to scope shared outcomes and priorities and identify where our activities can be aligned. We will seek where appropriate to develop and formalise partnership arrangements. **Priority partnership projects will include Green Deal and setting up a Design Review Panel.**
31. **Training and development of the team** will be central to success in embedding the new ways of working. **Professional supervision** will be put in place to coach the team in the relevant competencies as well as professional expertise. Team and individual training plans will be developed at an early stage in Phase 2. These will expose the team to different environments for example the private sector so they can understand how a private consultancy model operates and identify best practice to take forward in the new Service.

### **Phase 3: review and adapt (October 2014 – April 2015)**

32. Phase 3 will involve a formal review of the service in October 2014 and again in April 2015. The review will involve the team, members, internal and external customers, who will be asked about their views on the Service, it's success and what changes we need to make. It will also be assessed against the measures of success agreed when the Service was first set up.
33. We will identify what we need to adapt to make the Service more effective including it's team plan and/or processes and/or SLAs.
34. We will be working with our customers, partners and other stakeholders from the first phase in the implementation process to develop their confidence in the service. We recognise that it will take time to develop the reputation of the service and see a **marketing and promotion strategy** as key in supporting this.
35. The review process will provide the team with information to confirm what it is good at. We will collaborate with our customers and stakeholder to identify good examples which can be used promote our services. We will work to define our Unique Selling Point as a team and identify where we can add value for our customers.
36. Developing the reputation of the service goes hand in hand with our ability to justify **charging** which is central to resourcing against demand. We will seek to review charges in this phase for example by introducing pre-application charging and will benchmark with other authorities and consultancies to set appropriate levels. We will formalise the prep-application process for specialist advice as we develop new processes at Phase 1, this will inform this project.
37. The proposals above are intended to achieve positive outcomes for the delivery of the New Consultancy Service. These are intended to improve customer service and deliver a more efficient fit for purpose solution.

## **Implications**

### ***Financial***

38. The review will make a contribution to the corporate savings target was reported in the Medium Term Financial Strategy in November 2013. We will target resources where they are needed and have identified a consultancy budget of £50K to support the team's development and provide resource to assess more complex cases. Demand was not sufficient to justify an additional FTE within the structure.

### ***Legal***

39. There are no specific legal implications arising from this report.

### ***Staffing***

40. Staffing implications have been reported to Scrutiny in November 2013. We are currently progressing the selection process for the new team in line with Council policy.
41. The Trade Union have been involved throughout this process and will continue to be consulted regarding any potential changes to staff arrangements in accordance with the Council's normal practices.
42. We appreciate the impact on staff and are providing support through a range of means including regular discussions and meetings, and bespoke arrangements. This support will continue throughout the entire process of change.

### ***Risk Management***

43. Risks are recorded and monitored in the project risk register. This is a period of uncertainty for staff and customers. We will provide support and additional resources, if necessary, to maintain delivery of services.

### ***Equality and Diversity***

44. We will prepare a training and development plan as part of the recommendations and will follow council policies in staffing changes.

### ***Climate Change***

45. The training and development plan will include best practice on energy saving/conserving measures into design and conservation.

### **Consultation responses (including from the Youth Council)**

46. The team identified a list of agents who regularly use the conservation service. Telephone interviews were carried out, and feedback is reported above. The feedback is being used to direct the implementation.
47. Neighbouring authorities were asked for views in relation to shared services and for benchmarking. We will continue to engage with English Heritage as we implement the new Service
48. The trade unions have been consulted throughout the process.

49. No consultation was undertaken with the Youth Council

**Effect on Strategic Aims**

50. The recommendations seek to achieve the Council's three "A"s. We have listened to our customers to inform how we deliver this Service, their feedback is being used to inform implementation.

51. Conservation has an important role to play "*in offering an outstanding quality of life for our residents,*" however we are aware that measures are put in place to ensure that officers consider Conservation in relation to wider considerations such as the Council's growth agenda including to create "*opportunities for employment, enterprise, education and world leading innovation.* "

**Background Papers**

Planning Services Update presented to the Planning and Economic Development Portfolio Holder's meeting on 24 July 2013 and October 2013

Overview and Scrutiny Report, November 2013

**Report Author:** Jo Mills, Director of Planning and New Communities  
Telephone: (01954) 713350