

# PLANNING SERVICE

## AGENTS AND DEVELOPERS FORUM

### THE GRATTAN STADIUM 9<sup>th</sup> October 2009

Julian Jackson, Assistant Director Planning, welcomed everyone to the second Agents and Developers Forum and outlined the agenda for the day.

#### **Local Development Framework: Andrew Marshall**

Andrew gave a detailed presentation of the Local Development Framework process in which he provided the background as well as updating on the current situation.

- He referred to the CLG Development Manual document which can be found on-line.
- The Regional Spatial Strategy, adopted in 2008, was explained.
- Bradford has been designated a regional city.
- The Development Plan has to fit in with the Council's "Big Plan" document.
- He listed the documents that the Council need to prepare in order to paint the picture of what Bradford 2026 should look like.
- The number of consultations that have taken place were reported.
- A comprehensive evidence base has now been achieved.
- The draft Core Strategy should be ready for submission next year.
- AM listed websites where further information is located.

#### **Questions:**

**Q. A question was asked on how Elected Members would be involved in the process?**

**A.** AM explained that there are obviously policy issues to work through but the LDF goes through the normal Council processes. Officers put together the draft document for discussion with Members. When distributed there will be a number of options put to them, together with all the evidence. It will eventually be discussed at the Council's meeting of Executive Members. AM spoke of drawing in many colleagues both within the Council and outside, plus consultants, to support the work we do. An independent body is looking at the strategic housing assessment.

There will be more detailed policies on housing impacts which go beyond the general plan.

**Q. In relation to Housing Delivery it was asked whether Bradford would be publishing a Core Strategy in accordance with Regional Spatial Strategy figures.**

- A.** It was explained that the Core Strategy needs to set out how we are going to live. How it is to be done can be from a number of different directions. It allows for Bradford to come through from a lower delivery to a higher delivery. The Core Strategy will set out how we are to deliver on the requirements. In Bradford, within the Local Area Agreement, we have agreed a target of 1600, then 1900, then 2500 – stepping up to the national/regional requirements.

*An attendee said that people will live where they can find work and vice versa but Bradford has nowhere to work i.e. central area is still not developed. Therefore, instead of high ideas we need to get back to basics i.e. bringing work into the City.*

AM explained that this is what we are trying to do, through the infrastructure and Area Action Plans. It cannot be delivered easily as there are some big issues to deal with but we do have a framework.

The Plan will be tested by Inspectors to see if it is credible and not just aspirational.

We are also part of the Leeds City Region: people come into Bradford for jobs and vice versa.

Julian confirmed that the Agents and Developers Forum Group will be part of the LDF consultations.

### **Pre-Application Charges: Peter Bridgman**

Julian introduced the item by referring to discussions at the last Forum meeting and listing the systems that have been put in place such as the Majors Team meetings involving other Departments as an integrated approach in viewing major applications so that we can provide high quality advice to Agents and Developers. Up to now that service has been free but we are going to introduce a charge as we are spending a lot of time and resources on it.

PB presented the scale of charges which will come into force from the 12<sup>th</sup> October 2009. He explained that the charges had been set following comparisons with other Local Authorities in the West Yorkshire region in order that the level set is consistent or lower than other Councils whilst taking into account officer time.

### **Duty Planning Officer: Peter Bridgman**

Peter referred to the concerns that had been raised at the last meeting following which two things had been looked at to address the concerns. The first one is the re-introduction of the Duty Planning Officer, in Jacobs Well only at the moment but will be rolled out into the outer offices in the near future but probably not a five day service. Peter stressed it was an informal service and

produced a list of what they could expect from the Duty Officer, and also a list of what the Duty Officer would not be able to do.

**Contact by Telephone: Peter Bridgman**

At the last meeting, concerns had been expressed that agents and developers were unable to speak directly with case officers. Some of the problems were due to the Call Centre staff. Whilst it was accepted that the Call Centre staff were able to provide general updates from the information on the Systems, they were not able to provide the more detailed, specialist information which is often required.

The Call Centre has been instructed to try and put agents and developers through to the relevant case officers. If the case officer is not available then the Call Centre staff will send them an email and the case officer will be expected to make contact within 24 hours. Feedback from agents and developers on how this works would be appreciated.

Peter reported that a User Group is to be set up to map out user requirements and how we can provide it. We intend inviting 6 agents to take part, meeting perhaps on 2 x half day sessions to get a clear picture. Please send expressions of interest to Julian.

**Questions:**

- Q.** *Are we going to have to meet with seniors re principles as they won't have all the drawings/architectural information – developments need input early on as it affects the design.*
- A.** JJ confirmed that the fee is for the whole process. He outlined the format of the “Majors meetings” where the different internal consultees meet to discuss new applications. They have prior notice of items on the agenda. It is to ensure that agents have comprehensive advice given to them.
- Q.** *We still need access to “people” before paying out.*
- A.** JE said if people want a free initial meeting then he would still meet with agents and developers to talk through general principles i.e. to check whether this process is right for them.

People were reminded of the opportunity for follow up meetings. Most of the clear principles will have been set in the early stages such as the number of dwellings on the site etc.

- Q.** *Will the application still be registered even if they have not submitted a pre-application?*
- A.** Yes – providing the information is there to validate it.

It is important that we as a Council try to be as constructive as possible in the advice we give. Council officers need to come to meetings with a 'Council view' rather than sitting round a table arguing amongst themselves.

*There were concerns raised regarding information received from the Highways Section.*

It was acknowledged that there may be difficulties with advice from Highways and it is another point in the system where we need to have dialogue as early as possible in the procedure. However, Having the new system should improve the relationship.

**Q.** *If we pay a fee does it become binding?*

**A.** It will be signed off by JE or a senior officer which means the advice could carry weight in any future application.

It was stated that the Council was only trying to promote development in Bradford and be pro active in providing answers to very difficult problems.

Highways issues are common as they are quite complicated. These issues need identifying right at the beginning to save time and money.

During this process we can ensure all the documentation is available.

Members of the Majors Team also offered to sit in on the validation meetings.

**Q.** *There will be a difficulty in getting fees from developers.*

**A.** JJ spoke of the rationale behind the decision - looking at officers' time and also other fees within the Region. We have made our fees reasonable.

In response to whether the system included any discussions with the Planning Committee, Julian confirmed that work would be done in the future to make Members aware of proposals and the issues.

If the advice is that it is the wrong process then the money will be repaid.

**Q.** *The validation process works well but what does not work is arranging a meeting with all Council officers involved in the case – this does not happen. The feedback has been one page of A4 and a client will not pay for that!*

This was echoed by other agents.

**Q.** *You are offering what used to happen in the old days. Material considerations are now ten times more complicated than when they did the job. He queried whether we can deliver. Can we give a balanced weighted decision on all major developments?*

**A.** JJ spoke of his experience elsewhere – he knows the issues but is confident that we can deliver.

JJ explained that it is extremely important we can deliver and that people are committed to the system.

**Q.** *A question was asked on how many officers have we got to provide advice at these meetings.*

**A.** JE confirmed that there were 5 officers in the Majors Team at the moment.

**Q.** *A question was asked on what happens if a case officer gives the wrong advice?*

**A.** JJ confirmed that the Development Manager and the Major Applications Team Manager will have ownership and agents and developers will get a senior's response. JE chairs the fortnightly Majors meetings. At the Majors meetings the idea is to iron out strategic issues – minutes are taken at these meetings so that case officers understand the difficulties. The letter that is sent out following these meetings will be signed off by a senior officer.

To give an example of officer involvement in this process approximately 12 officers attended the last Majors meeting.

PB explained that we bring all the internal consultees together to iron out the Council's concerns so that when we meet with developers we have all this information to hand. It is important that agents and developers get value for money. We are trying to draw this together to improve the Service.

**Q.** *A question was asked on whether future committee reports would be based on advice given. Do Members endorse the idea?*

**A.** Pre-application advice in officers' reports will carry weight but there will be no guarantee that an application will automatically go through a Planning Panel. However this system offers continuity of advice throughout the process. there will be continuity.

**Q.** *A question was raised on whether the money from the fees would be ring fenced to the Planning Service?*

**A.** JJ stated that it would directly contribute to the Planning budget.

- Q.** *There was a question on whether the Duty Officer service will be available by telephone?*
- A.** The principle is for people to come into Jacobs Well.
- Q.** *So I would have to come down from Skipton?*
- A.** We will be setting up the service in the outer offices fairly soon once the logistics are sorted out.
- Q.** *Why can't we email questions?*
- A.** You are able to do that now but generally email enquiries will come into the automated planning in box and passed out to the most appropriate officer. The Duty Officer follows a request for face to face applications. This is in addition to improving telephone contact on "live" applications.

**Building Control and Planning Event: John Gray/Nicky McAlpine**

John and Nicky informed the audience of a joint event to be held in the near future to which everyone is invited. Flyers are available. It is primarily aimed at small to medium size builders. It will look at getting the best out of Building Control; the Party Wall Act; Warranties; PD Rights; HSE; Procurement (how to get on the Council's approved list); Links2.

**Communities and Local Development Update: Allen Camm/David Hand**

Following on from the last meeting Allen was in attendance to provide updates on the Portal promoting online applications. It was encouraging to learn that Bradford had received more online applications than Leeds! The following were highlighted during their presentation:

- There are two new documents within the suite of documents on the portal.
- The application for extension of permission (for non material amendments following submission). The fees would be the same as for the original permission, at least until the matter goes through Parliament in November. The indication is that the fees may be lower than the existing ones. There will be no fee for minor amendments to existing permission.

It should be possible to email Information but not through the Portal at the present time.

- Killian Pretty review: one recommendation is a change to publicity of planning applications. The other refers to changes of permitted developments. The consultation ends 23<sup>rd</sup> October. People were encouraged to submit comments.

- The Portal is restructuring some of its technical side and is moving away from the current infrastructure.
- Allen Camm offered to visit businesses to assist in using the Portal.

JJ thanked them for taking their time to come and speak today.

**Draft Householder SPD:                    Julian Jackson/Peter Bridgman**

The current document needs updating and refreshing. It will incorporate both House Extensions and Dormer Windows. It has not yet been discussed with Elected Members and is still in draft format. The document will set out what is likely to be acceptable and what is not, together with guidance on design.

The next step will be to take it to Members and then it will go out for consultation. Agents and Developers will then have the opportunity to submit their views.

**QUESTIONS AND CLOSE**

JJ noted that it was likely that the next meeting of the Forum would tie in with the consultation period for this document.

JJ asked the audience what they would like to see on the next agenda and if there were any further questions.

**Q.**     *Can we track applications through the computer system?*

**A.**     Yes, log on to [www.bradford.gov.uk/planning](http://www.bradford.gov.uk/planning). Click on to Public Access.

**Q.**     *This doesn't enable monitoring.*

**A.**     We are currently trying to refine this. The intention is, over time, to improve that. We realise it is not ideal but it is what is there at the moment. We are currently testing a new system and waiting for a "go live" date – this is expected to be later this year or early next year.

It was agreed to invite the Unit Manager to provide a demonstration of the new system at the next meeting of the Forum.

**Q.**     *We can log in but cannot look at consultee information.*

**A.**     PB/JE said that they ought to be able to do that. All consultee responses should be downloaded on to the site.

**Q.**     *Can an email be generated to the agent at the point a delegation is made?*

- A.** PB said it would need to be self generating by the system i.e. it would need a link to be built into it. Adrian Walker will be invited to the next Forum to do a session on Public Access.

Some work was being carried out on sending consultations to Parish Councils as the E-Government process is to reduce the sending out of paper.

### **Actions for Next Meeting**

*Accredited Agents: Can agents be accredited if they don't submit electronic copies?*

PB is currently discussing this with Allen Camm. There is a trail system but it may not be run out. Bradford Council has agreed to be involved in this pilot. The pilot does not exclude people submitting on line

JJ gave a round up of the day and said that the notes would be put on to the website.

The next meeting would take place in 3 months' time – we will look at dates in February.

It would be helpful to have feedback on the venue as well as agenda content.

JJ thanked everyone for attending.

19<sup>th</sup> October 2009