

At a meeting of the PLANNING AND HIGHWAYS COMMITTEE held in the CIVIC CENTRE on TUESDAY, 24TH JUNE, 2008 at 5.00 p.m.

Present:-

Councillor T. Martin in the Chair

Councillors I. Cuthbert, D. Forbes, M. Forbes, E. Gibson, G. Hall, Miller, O'Connor, J. Scott, Snowdon, Tate, J. Walton, Wares, S. Watson, A. Wilson and A. Wright.

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Blackburn, Chamberlin, Howe, Scaplehorn, Tye and Wood.

Minutes

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of this Committee held on 26th February, 2008 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

Reports of the Meetings of the Development Control (North Sunderland) Sub-Committee held on:-

- (i) 4th March, 2008
- (ii) 1st April, 2008
- (iii) 29th April, 2008
- (iv) 13th May, 2008
- (v) 3rd June, 2008

The reports of the above meetings of the Development Control (North Sunderland) Sub-Committee (copies circulated) were submitted.

(For copy reports – see original minutes).

2. RESOLVED that the reports be received and noted.

**Reports of the Meetings of the Development Control (South Sunderland)
Sub-Committee held on:-**

- (i) 19th February, 2008
- (ii) 4th March, 2008
- (iii) 18th March, 2008
- (iv) 1st April, 2008
- (v) 15th April, 2008
- (vi) 29th April, 2008
- (vii) 13th May, 2008
- (viii) 3rd June, 2008

The reports of the above meetings of the Development Control (South Sunderland) Sub-Committee (copies circulated) were submitted.

(For copy reports – see original minutes).

3. RESOLVED that the reports be received and noted subject to the inclusion of blanket apologies from Councillor T. Martin.

**Reports of the Meetings of the Development Control (Hetton, Houghton and
Washington) Sub-Committee held on:-**

- (i) 4th March, 2008
- (ii) 1st April, 2008
- (iii) 15th April, 2008
- (iv) 29th April, 2008
- (v) 13th May, 2008
- (vi) 3rd June, 2008

The reports of the above meetings of the Development Control (Hetton, Houghton and Washington) Sub-Committee (copies circulated) were submitted.

(For copy reports – see original minutes).

4. RESOLVED that the reports be received and noted.

**Reference from Cabinet 28th May, 2008 – Regional Spatial Strategy : Proposed
Modifications Response of Sunderland City Council**

The City Solicitor submitted a report (copy circulated) appending a report of the Director of Development and Regeneration on the Council's response to further proposed changes to the Draft Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) published for consultation by the Government Office North East (GO-NE).

The report had been approved by Cabinet at its meeting held on 28th May, 2008 and referred to this Committee for advice and consideration. Members' comments would be reported directly to Council at its meeting on 25th June, 2008.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Councillor M. Forbes welcomed that the response was couched in the strongest possible terms. She believed that the proposals disadvantaged Sunderland in its attempts to close the socio-economic gap between the North and South of England. It was her belief that decisions should be based on what was needed in Sunderland not what others perceived was needed.

The Chairman felt strongly that the sites of employment should be located as near as possible to the centres of population and having congratulated Mr. Lowes, Head of Planning and Environment on his drafting of the response, it was:-

5. RESOLVED that it be reported to Council that the Committee endorsed the response to the further proposed changes to the draft Regional Spatial Strategy as attached in the appendix to the report.

Sunniside Planning and Design Framework

The Director of Development and Regeneration submitted a report (copy circulated) which advised Members of the responses received following consultations on the proposed policies and proposals outlined in the Sunniside Planning and Design Framework (SPDF) Consultation Draft and which sought the Committee's comments on the revised SPDF.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Members were advised that comments from the Committee would be reported to Cabinet at its meeting on the 9th July, 2008 when approval would be sought for a recommendation to Council that the amended Sunniside Planning and Design Framework be adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor M. Forbes, Mr. Lowes confirmed that an Area Action Plan (AAP) would be more prescriptive than a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD).

The Chairman offered his congratulations to the Officers responsible for the excellent communication provided for the Hendon Ward Members during the consultation process. He believed the development on the west side of Sunniside was tremendous and welcomed the improved silhouette of Sans Street. He referred to the difficulties for pedestrians in accessing Sunniside from Hendon and hoped to see an easier and more pleasant route provided for people walking from the East End into the City Centre. In conclusion he referred to the terrible parking problems in the vicinity of the Hudson Road Health Centre and his desire to see the Murton Street Area raised to a par with West Sunniside.

6. RESOLVED that the Committee endorse the proposal that the amended Sunniside Planning and Design Framework be recommended for adoption by Council as a Supplementary Planning Document.

Building Control Performance 2007/2008

The Director of Development and Regeneration submitted a report (copy circulated) which informed the Committee of the performance of the Building Control Service during 2007/2008.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

To complement the report, Barry Coe, Building Control Technical Manager provided Members with a comprehensive power point presentation detailing:-

- the functions and services provided by the Section;
- how Building Control operates in England and Wales;
- the Section's response times in dealing with applications and inspections;
- human resources issues, including problems created by a national skills shortage and the investment provided in respect of training and staff development;
- the accountability of the Service via quality managed systems, performance indicators and the award of 3 Charter Marks for excellence in Service delivery;
- the operation of the Partner Authority Scheme including the new partnership with Balfour Beatty Construction; and
- Service Initiatives including remote working, the City Council Building Control Awards and a dedicated website.

Councillor O'Connor referred to the cost implications of training building control staff only to lose them to private practice and asked if anything could be done to prevent this. Councillor Mrs. Forbes expressed concern that taxpayers money was being used to train people for the benefit of the private sector. Mr. Coe explained that it was a free market and it was a risk that you ran if you wanted to have qualified staff. Turnover however was low in the Section. The fact that training was given was an attraction to employees as was the diversity of the work enjoyed. Private sector building control work often centred solely on housing. Mr. Lowes added that the provision of training does engender loyalty and that this shouldn't be underestimated.

Members asked that the relevant Directorate be contacted to ascertain whether there was any corporate policy which required staff, having acquired professional training/qualifications at the Council's expense, to remain in post for a certain period of time following qualification.

Members having complimented Mr. Coe and the Building Control Section on the excellence of the service provided, it was:-

7. RESOLVED that the report and presentation be received and noted.

Development Control Performance 2007/2008

The Director of Development and Regeneration submitted a report (copy circulated) which informed the Committee of the performance of the Development Control Service during 2007/2008.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

To complement the report, Mike Mattok, Deputy Development Control Manager provided Members with a power point presentation detailing:-

- functions and services provided by the Development Control Section;
- key legislation and the potential impact of the 2007 White Paper, Planning a Sustainable Future;
- the Council's performance in relation to Best Value Performance Indicator (BVPI) 109 which showed the following actual performance against targets:-

	Actual %	Target %
Minor Applications	92.6	80
Other Applications	97.72	80
Major Applications	95.12	65

With regard to Major Applications for the final quarter of 2007/2008, performance was measured at 100%.

There had been an increase in the number of appeals allowed from 22.9% to 42.86%. This was a concern which needed to be addressed and a training session had already been held in this regard.

- the improved performance of the planning service had been maintained and exceeded resulting from the implementation of an improvement strategy and action plan, the restructuring of the Development Control Team, improved communications both internally and externally, improved motivation, a more customer focused approach and planning performance agreements.

Mr. Mattok and Mr. Lowes having addressed questions and comments from Members, the Committee congratulated the Managers of the Development Control Team for maintaining the improvement of the Section and it was:-

8. RESOLVED that the report and presentation be received and noted.

(Signed) T. MARTIN,
Chairman.