



**PORTFOLIO AREA: INFRASTRUCTURE, ENVIRONMENT AND  
TRANSPORT**

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Date of Meeting: 29 July 2002

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Public

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Key Decision: Yes

Recorded in Forward Plan: No

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Inside Policy Framework

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**Title: PLANNING SERVICE DIVISION USE OF ADDITIONAL  
RESOURCES**

**Report of: Director of Environment and Development**

**Report reference: EN.083/02**

**Summary:**

The report outlines the significant increase in the number of planning applications, a resulting decline in performance against Best Value Indicators, the availability of increased resources through the 14% national increase in fees from the 1 April 2002 and the need to recruit additional staff to meet the workload.

**Recommendations:**

11.1 It is recommended that:

- i) The additional resources identified in paragraph 1.7. be used to fund the posts detailed in paragraph 1.12 at a full year cost of £56,000.
- ii) the post of Assistant Planning Enforcement Officer, which was a fixed three year appointment, should be continued as from the 1 April 2003 on a permanent basis at a full year cost of £23,000.

Mike Battersby

Director of Environment and Development

Note: in compliance with section 100d of the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 the report has been prepared in part from the following papers: Development Committee Report EN 082/02

## 1.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION AND OPTIONS

- 1.1 The latest national statistics on planning applications were reported to the Development Control Committee on 12 July 2002. This showed that the number of planning applications in the first quarter of the calendar year increased by 10% nationally. In the north west this increase was 14%, the highest in the country as a whole and local statistics show an increase of 30% within Carlisle District.
- 1.2 This is a large increase in the number of planning applications and coupled with the 19% increase last year has significantly increased the workload of the Development Control Section. Consequently, although the national average for decisions on planning applications within eight weeks has risen by 2% to 65% Carlisle's performance has declined from 69% to 65%, and Carlisle has fallen to bottom place compared with other Cumbrian authorities. As members will be aware each planning authority is required by the Best Value Indicators to determine 80% of all applications within eight weeks.
- 1.3 As the Executive is aware the Planning Division is to undergo a Best Value Comprehensive Service Review this year and it is important that sufficient resources are available to meet the demands placed upon the Division.

### Increased Number of Applications

- 1.4 The following table illustrates the increase in the number of applications considered by the Planning Division since 1998.

Calendar Year	Number of Applications
1998	992
1999	993
2000	1002
2001	1189
2002 <sup>*1</sup>	1450

NB: <sup>\*1</sup> assumes that the 30% increase in the number of applications will continue throughout the year.



**1.0 Increase in Income**

- 1.5 The 15% increase in the number of planning applications received during 2001 resulted in an income of £39,500 in excess of budget in the 2001/02 financial year.
- 1.6 The Planning Green Paper published in December 2001 introduced a 14% national increase in planning fees as from the 1 April 2002. The Planning Green Paper required this increase in income to be used for the benefit of the Planning Service. Based on the number of applications last year this 14% increase would have resulted in an additional income of £47,620. Income for 2002/03 has been budgeted at £347,610 and after three months is already £15,428 over budget (pro rata).
- 1.7 If such levels are maintained throughout the year this would result in total income of £409,320 (an additional £61,710). Approximately £48,660 of this would be generated by the 14% national fee increase.
- 1.8 In addition it has proved impossible to recruit for the Year Out Student position in Development Control. This has been caused by a number of factors including;
- (i) reduced intake to universities as planning is no longer seen as a popular or rewarding career;
  - (ii) a reluctance of some students to take a year out;
  - (iii) a reluctance of the remainder to gain work experience in Development Control; and
  - (iv) the increasing popularity of the private sector.
- 1.9 Therefore, from the end of September 2002 when the current planning student leaves to return to university the Development Control Section will have one less Planning Officer to deal with the increased workload.

**Need for Additional Staff Resources**

- 1.10 From the evidence so far it is likely that the number of planning applications received this year by the City Council will be between 300-350 more than two years ago. This increase coupled with the increasing complexity of the applications, greater public awareness and the right to speak has resulted in a situation where our performance against Best Value Indicators has fallen and if no steps are taken will continue to fall.
- 1.11 In order to improve performance it will be necessary to employ additional Planning Officers in Development Control using the additional income generated from the increase in both activity and fee levels (approximately £61,000).
- 1.12 I therefore consider that there is justification in recruiting a permanent replacement for the Planning Student in Development Control, together with another Officer on a three year fixed term contract. This post can then be reviewed when a clearer picture of workload can be established in future years. The cost of these two posts is:

No.	Post	Cost
2 x	Development Control Officers	£54,184 (maximum cost)

- 1.13 I would further suggest that the Student Planner post can be transferred to the Local Plan Section in 2003/04. Local Plans lost their Student Planner post as part of savings in 2000/01. It is likely from evidence obtained from the universities that a position in Local Plans is likely to be more attractive than a post in Development Control.
- 1.14 In addition it is considered that the post of Assistant Planning Enforcement Officer, which was a fixed three year appointment, should be continued as from the 1 April 2003 on a permanent basis, at an annual case of £23,000.

**2.0 CONSULTATION**

- 2.1 Internal consultation has taken place and comments are included below.
- 2.2 No further consultation is proposed.



**3.0 STAFFING/RESOURCES COMMENTS**

- 3.1 The Report requests additional staff resources to meet the additional workload generated from the increased number of planning applications.

**4.0 CITY TREASURER'S COMMENTS**

- 4.1 The City Treasurer has been consulted in the preparation of this report and he comments further as follows:

The Director proposes to recruit two additional Development Control Officers. The maximum full year cost would be  $2 \times \text{SO.2} = 2 \times \text{£28,000} = \text{£56,000}$  (inc. on costs and 3% provision for 2002 pay award).

Clearly the part year effect in 2002/03 would be less than this sum.

The Director also wishes to make permanent the post of Enforcement Officer. Currently this is budgeted for on a 3 Year Period to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2003 at a full year cost = £23,000.

*Full Year Cost of Proposals = £79,000*

- 4.2 The Director also proposes to transfer the post of student planning officer to the Local Plans Section. This post is clearly included in the estimates and would have a neutral effect on the departmental budget.
- 4.3 Fees for development control increased by 14% on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2002. Clearly this was a substantial increase though in the context of no rise in these charges since 1997, the annual equated rise is fairly similar to the movement in inflation over this period. Given the spasmodic nature of this rise in fees, there is no guarantee that an annual increase will be generated in the future.
- 4.4 However, the 14% rise in fees can be anticipated to yield an additional £48,660 if the trend in the quarter of 2002/03 is continued throughout the year. Coupled with an upturn in planning activity, total projected income is anticipated at £61,710 over the 2002/03 estimate.

- 4.5 Such an amendment would be sufficient to fund the two development control posts on a full year basis although care must always be taken to project forward long term income expectations on the basis of just one quarters data.

This income is essentially uncontrollable and could easily fall if planning activity in the area were to decline.

- 4.6 The issue of making permanent the post of Enforcement Officer is rather different because of its potential impact on the 2003/04 budget. Insufficient income has been identified to finance this post as well as the two development control ones and it would be more appropriate to defer consideration of this until the budget cycle,
- 4.7 Council approval is required for any virement over £30,000, and essentially it is proposed that £56,000 (full year effect) of income be issued to fund these two planning posts. Members should also note that if this additional income is not sustained i.e. through a downturn in planning/economic activity, then compensating savings would be required in the future.

## **5.0 LEGAL COMMENTS**

- 5.1 The City Solicitor has been consulted.

## **6.0 CORPORATE COMMENTS**

- 6.1 None

## **7.0 RISK MANAGEMENT ASSESSMENT**

- 7.1 None required

## **8.0 EQUALITY ISSUES**

- 8.1 None

## **9.0 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 Additional staff are required to deal with the increased number of planning applications. Without additional staffing resources greater strain will be placed on existing staff and the quality of the planning decisions are likely to decrease and the time taken to make those decisions will increase.

## **10.0 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS**

- 10.1 None

## **11.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 11.1 It is recommended that:

- i) The additional resources identified in paragraph 1.7. be used to fund the posts detailed in paragraph 1.12 at a full year cost of £56,000.
- ii) the post of Assistant Planning Enforcement Officer, which was a fixed three year appointment, should be continued as from the 1 April 2003 on a permanent basis at a full year cost of £23,000.

## **12.0 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 12.1 The use of the additional income from the increase in planning fees brought forward through the Planning Green Paper should be used for the benefit of the Service. The 15% increase in the number of planning applications last year and 30% so far this year have placed an increasing burden on the Development Control Section and without additional staff resources the Council's performance against Best Value targets will continue to decrease below that of the national average.

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Director of Environment and Development

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