

Appendix A

Response by Mr Mills

As promised I write to set out the position as regards the advice given by officers to members of the two Area Planning Sub-Committees in December and repeated by Cllr Mrs Crossland at the recent Lowlands meeting. The background is that in November 2016 Government published guidance aimed at improving Planning performance. This indicates that Planning departments play a crucial role in enabling development to deliver home ownership, building homes people can afford to buy and supporting economic growth. An efficient and effective planning system facilitated by skilled and experienced planners is essential to support this. Government wants to support and work with local authorities to make sure that the planning system is valued, resilient and capable of providing the service that local people and planning applicants expect, and delivering on the increasing challenges being asked of it.

The performance of local authorities in deciding applications for planning permission is crucial to achieving this objective. The Government's approach to measuring the performance of authorities was introduced by the Growth and Infrastructure Act 2013 and is based on assessing local planning authorities' performance on the speed and quality of their decisions on applications for major development. Where an authority is designated as underperforming, applicants have the option of submitting their applications for major development (and connected applications) directly to the Planning Inspectorate (who act on behalf of the Secretary of State) for determination. Decisions that are unnecessarily slow, or which refuse development without good reason, can have a real impact by increasing costs for developers and hence delaying or discouraging investment. That is bad for the economy and bad for communities, so taking action where there is clear evidence that a service is not being delivered effectively is beneficial to all.

A local planning authority can be designated only if, by reference to the criteria in the document, "the Secretary of State considers that there are respects in which the authority are not adequately performing their function of determining applications"

An authority could be designated on the basis of its performance in determining applications for major development, applications for non-major development, or both. The assessment for each of these two categories of development will be against two separate measures of performance:

the speed with which applications are dealt with measured by the proportion of applications that are dealt with within the statutory time or an agreed extended period; and,

the quality of decisions made by local planning authorities measured by the proportion of decisions on applications that are subsequently overturned at appeal.

The thresholds and assessment periods for designation in 2018 for the indicator that was being referred to (the quality of decisions) had the assessment period triggered at the start of this year (2018) and assessed the period of applications determined April 2015 to March 2017 plus a further period to allow for any appeals on applications made in that period to be decided

In that we are a rural authority with a relatively small number of major applications (approx 50 per year) it only takes 10 majors to be overturned at appeal within a two year period before we are at

risk of designation. You will of course be aware that for the period that we have been without a local plan we have lost more major appeals than is the norm and were this number to rise beyond 10 or so then we run the risk of being designated. Until such time as we can clear away the backlog of "lost appeals" from the assessment period we need to be mindful that a refusal that is not supported at appeal could have much wider consequences than for just that application. That is not of course to say that all such applications must be approved but rather that Members and Officers need to ensure that they are confident that their suggested refusal reasons will stand the test of any appeal and are soundly based in good planning rather than to seek to assuage public opinion

I hope that this clarification sets your mind at rest that all that was being done was to remind Members that they continue to need good planning reasons to justify a refusal - as they have always done, but that particularly at present the consequences of not having those reasons needs to be given additional thought until such time as the backlog of lost appeals starts to drop away from the assessment period. If you need further clarification then please contact me.

Appendix B

Response by Mr Mills

It was with sadness that I learnt about Base 33's financial difficulties and the need for it to close its doors after declaring itself insolvent. It was always a pleasure to visit the charity to meet staff, volunteers and, most importantly, the young people supported by the charity. The visits helped me to learn and understand about the important work being done.

Whilst Mayor of Witney I supported the charity directly by making it one of the mayor's nominated charities and holding a number of fundraising activities including a fire walk in the Market Square. That was a really great night and, in turn, it was good to have the support of the young people from the charity when taking that first step.

More recently, along with Cllr Morris, and as part of Witney Round Table, we had supported the charity through a range of local fundraising activities in order to make charitable donations. I know that this is something the other local service clubs such as Rotary and Lions had also done.

This Council gave Base 33 a grant of £10,000 in 2017/18. In addition, the West Oxfordshire Community Safety Partnership (CSP) provided funding of £12,500. The CSP actually allocated £25,000 but was informed that Base 33 was closed before the further payment was made. In addition, 20% discretionary rate relief was in place in addition to the mandatory relief, meaning that no business rates were payable.

What will happen now that Base 33 has closed? How will support be given to the young people the charity helped?

Other organisations doing similar work could seek CSP funding and/or a grant from this Council and in fact a meeting has taken place with a potential recipient organisation, but at this time there is nothing further to report on this.

As part of the Housing and growth deal for West Oxfordshire with Government there is a proposal to include a 'housing with employment' hub. Whilst nothing is guaranteed with regard to how much Oxfordshire secures of the £60M, this demonstrates we are thinking strategically in regard to re-provisioning for these young people locally.