

Appendix B

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ROGER DUDMAN WAY REVIEW RECOMMENDATIONS: REPORT BY V. GOODSTADT : APRIL 2015

Introduction

1. The Roger Dudman Way Review (January 2014) set out recommendations to improve the planning service. Since then planning managers have identified other actions (see Annex) to improve the service. These recommendations and actions are grouped under the six headings:
 - a. Planning procedures;
 - b. Consultation processes;
 - c. The assessment of visual impacts and the quality of design;
 - d. Committee reporting;
 - e. The enforcement of planning conditions; and
 - f. The wider implications for the planning service.
2. This report identifies the progress that has been made based on discussions with senior staff and a confidential survey of all planning staff on the impact of the revised procedures in improving the planning service. It was recognised from the outset that the recommendations included matters which could be implemented immediately whilst others would be achieved over a longer period. Therefore the report also identifies work which is still ongoing, yet to be commissioned or should be kept under review.

Planning Procedures

3. Internal procedures have updated Standard Operating Procedures on the following matters identified in the RDW Review:
 - a. The pre-application process including the standing meetings with Oxford University
 - b. The registration process, including the management of planning files
 - c. The triaging of applications to determine the action required,
 - d. A review of procedures related to the EIA scoping, advice and training
 - e. The use of standard conditions
 - f. Auditing of enforcement.
4. As a result there has been a noticeable improvement in pre-application procedures, a key issue for the RDW Review. Other changes in procedures have also been generally recognised as having improved albeit to a lesser extent. As part of any ongoing improvement plan for the service the following would be desirable
 - a. a clear auditing process to ensure new procedures are being applied;
 - b. a common approach by staff to the management of information on applications;
 - c. triaging of applications at all stages in processing the applications; and
 - d. the role of the policy team in supporting the development management.

Consultation Processes

5. The following matters were identified in the RDW Review:
 - a. Time for consultation on applications;
 - b. Pre-application engagement of interested parties and members
 - c. Documentation required pre-application;
 - d. Format of post-application weekly lists;
 - e. Updated site notices guidelines;
 - f. Procedures for clarifying the scale of major schemes, post-application
 - g. Procedures for consultation on revised plans;

h. Procedures for integration with other regulatory bodies

6. Some consultation procedures have been reviewed resulting improvement in procedures in pre-application engagement, site notices: and consultation on revised schemes. Others matters are being reviewed as part of a more systematic update of the Statement of Community Involvement. The current draft SCI draws upon some of the findings of the RDW Review, which is welcomed. The finalised version should reflect the updated planning procedures referred to in this report including the process for keeping respondents informed on decisions and the integration with other regulatory bodies..

Visual impacts and the quality of design

7. A key issue highlighted by the RDW Review was the need to improve the approach to the assessment of visual impacts and the quality of design. Since then the Design Review Panel has become well established and has dealt with several major schemes, including the Westgate. It has not been possible to interview the Review Panel but from the staff survey and external (and often unsolicited) feedback, the work of the Panel has been well received. This has also been reflected in the design training of staff who also are benefitting from attendance at or feedback from the design review panel sessions.
8. There is however still a need to implement the RDW recommendations relating to the presentation of visual impacts of potential schemes. In this context the proposed publication of guidance to applicants on how to represent design and the training of staff in digital visualisations will be potentially very valuable. It is also considered that the City would benefit from greater in-house capacity in urban design (comparable with that in other major historic UK cities) in order to enhance the ability of the City to sustain and improve its historic character

Committee Reporting

9. The RDW Review recommended improvements in the clarity with which matters were reported to committee. Internal advice has been prepared, with some improvements in reporting being felt by staff. The area where it is considered that officer reporting has been improved has been particularly in the systematic evaluation of the policy context for decisions.
10. It has however not been possible to sound out members on this matter. Nor has it been practical to assess individual reports. This is therefore a matter that needs to be kept under review and best practice promoted in having very focussed reports in terms of the information provided and decisions sought.

Enforcement of planning conditions

11. The RDW Review sought a more systematic and auditable approach to planning conditions. In particular it recommended a review of :
 - a. The determination of appropriate enforcement action
 - b. The review and updating of standard planning conditions
 - c. The use of standard planning conditionsAs a result the department has carried out a review of standard conditions which appears to have been well received, with around two thirds of staff seeing an improvement in the service they provide
12. Since the RDW Review was undertaken, the issue of planning conditions has been the subject to national consultation by the Government. It is therefore a matter that needs continual attention.

Wider Issues

13. The RDW Review highlighted wider planning issues that needed to be addressed. In particular it recommended action in relation to:
 - a. The completion of the Heritage Strategy
 - b. The issues related the management of the growth of the city; and
 - c. A more strategic approach to the long term needs of the universities.
14. In respect of each of these there has been progress although by their very nature it would not have been expected that they would have been completed within the first year after the review. In particular, the initiative taken by the City to engage the University and Colleges of Oxford is welcomed and needs continued commitment. This work links to management the city's long term growth which might therefore be a means of setting a timetable for the collaborative leadership that is being sought.

Conclusions

15. It is concluded from the above assessment that:
 - a. A serious effort has been made by staff to respond to the recommendations of the RDW Review and embed them into the core processes and procedures of the department;:
 - b. The progress on enhancing the design capacity of the Council has been particularly significant and needs to be reinforced by continued commitment to training, and to enhancing the internal design capacity;
 - c. The outstanding tasks identified require a sustained commitment which would be best embedded into the departmental work programme and annual review and monitoring processes. Work on the wider planning issues in terms of the managed expansion of the city and the University remain as priorities which would benefit from a clear timetable.
16. Overall much has been achieved though the RDW Review which provides a good basis for making further progress towards providing an exemplar planning service for Oxford. It is recommended that the department put itself forward for a full external accreditation of its updated operational policies and procedures..
17. Finally I would like to thank the staff of the planning service for their support and patience with my questioning. The progress that they have made has been achieved during a period when the financial and time pressures on their resources have been severe. Several officers in particular have put a great deal of time into taking on board the spirit as well as the letter of the RDW Review..

ANNEX of Extra Action Points in the Action Plan

- A. Processes**
 - a. External validation or accreditation of improvements and procedures
 - b. Review of how we organise the electronic application file. Data management

- B. Consultation**
 - a. Review of Statement of Community
 - b. Review the methods it uses to consult the public on planning applications

- C. Post Application guidance**
 - a. Application of project management procedures to applications.
 - b. Produce a full list of all Standard Operating Procedures (SOPS)
 - c. Design Review roll-out
 - d. Audit & Improve internal design expertise

- D. Use of conditions**
 - a. Monitoring of pre-commencement conditions

- E. Wider issues**
 - a. 1990 Act: impact of development on a Conservation Area