

PLANNING AND INFRASTRUCTURE WORKING GROUP (PIWG)

Summary: To review the progress of the Planning and Infrastructure Working Group and planning-related activity

Recommendation: That the Executive Committee notes the report

Report by: John Mills, Planning and Landscape Lead

MEMBERS OF THE GROUP

- Liz Hodges, Parish Council Board Member
- Nigel Adcock, Local Authority Board Member
- Martin Haywood, Local Authority Board Member
- Graham Hopkins, SoS Board Member
- Cate Le Grice Mack, SoS Board Member
- Caroline Mumford, Cotswolds Voluntary Warden
- Officers: John Mills, Planning and Landscape Lead, Simon Joyce, Planning Officer, Mandy Pressland, Office Manager (providing admin support)

N.B. PIWG would like to thank Steve Bucknell and Sue Crawford, who stepped down from PIWG at the AGM in June 2023, for their contributions to the group.

PIWG MEETINGS SINCE THE LAST EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

- A joint PIWG and Climate Action Working Group meeting was held on 26 May 2023 to review the final draft of the Renewable Energy Position Statement and to approve it to go to the Board for adoption in June 2023.

KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATOR (KPI) DATA

- In Q1 (April-June 2023) we provided a substantive response to 81% (17 out of 21) of proactive planning application consultations, above our primary consultation thresholds, by the original deadline. This is well within our target range, for 2023/24, of 70-94%. The average for 2022/23 was 91%.

OTHER PLANNING-RELATED QUARTERLY DATA

- In Q1 we commented on 16 'major' planning applications. The total for 2022/23 was 98 responses.
- In Q1 we commented on 31 'minor' planning applications. The total for 2023/23 was 91 responses.
- It is worth noting that we provide bespoke responses to the majority of the major planning applications, whereas we just provide a standard response to some minor planning applications. As such, the amount of time spent on minor applications is less than for major applications.
- In Q1, decisions were made on four development management proposals (three planning applications and one planning appeal) that we had objected to (and hadn't withdrawn our objection). 25% of the decisions (1 out of 4) were in line with the Board's recommendations (i.e., refused permission or withdrawn prior to a decision being made). This percentage is low compared to our average (e.g., 68% 2022/23).
- Simon Joyce is reviewing these decisions and will present a paper on this topic to PIWG in due course.

OTHER PLANNING-RELATED ACTIVITY

- Other planning-related activity since the last PIWG report for the Executive Committee meeting on 23 May 2023 includes:
 - **Renewable Energy Position Statement:** The finalised draft of the Renewable Energy Position Statement was discussed at a PIWG / Climate Action Working Group (CAWG) meeting on 26 May, with the two working groups approving the Position Statement to go forward for adoption by the Board. The Position Statement was adopted by the Board at the Board meeting on 26 June.
 - **Neighbourhood Planning Position Statement:** The finalised draft of the Position Statement was circulated to PIWG on 19 May for them to approve it going forward for adoption by the Board in June. The Position Statement was adopted by the Board at the Board meeting on 26 June.
 - **Meeting with National Trust:** On 12 July, Andy and John had an on-site meeting with the National Trust to discuss their aspirations for their new site at Woodchester, near Stroud (the former Thistledown Farm campsite). Following on from this meeting we are working together on submitting a proposal to National Grid to underground low-voltage electricity cables across the site. National Trust will also be seeking pre-application advice from the Board in the next month or so.
 - **Meeting with delegation from South Korea:** On 26 June, John met with an academic delegation from South Korea who are developing guidance for the South Korean government on managing valued rural landscapes. They were interested in using the Cotswolds National Landscape as a case study (and AONBs in general) for conserving and enhancing beautiful landscapes and natural environments in rural areas. John explained how legislation and planning policy helps to achieve this for AONBs.
 - **Briefing on Severn Thames Transfer Scheme:** On 12 July, Andy and John attended a briefing on the Severn Thames Transfer Scheme. This scheme is currently being classed as a ‘fallback’ option. In other words, it isn’t scheduled to be implemented before 2050 but it may proceed if other options, such as the proposed Abingdon Reservoir, do not progress as planned. Further planning will still be required for the scheme, though, to ensure that it is ready to be progressed if required.
 - **Significant planning-related decisions in Q1 of 2023/24:**
 - **APP/G1630/W/22/3310117 (55 dwellings, Alderton) (Tewkesbury Borough Council):** This proposed development is within the setting of the Cotswolds National Landscape (CNL). We objected to the development on the basis of adverse impacts on views both to and from the National Landscape. The applicant went to appeal because of the Borough Council’s failure to issue a decision within the prescribed period. The Borough Council’s putative reasons for refusal included impacts on the CNL, in line with the Board’s comments. The Inspector acknowledged some *‘limited and localised harmful residual landscape and visual effects to the area which includes the setting of the AONB’* but concluded that this harm was outweighed by the housing supply shortfall in the Borough Council area. The Inspector allowed the appeal.
 - **21/0084/COMPLI (Compliance with planning conditions, Naunton Quarry) (Gloucestershire County Council):** The Board objected to this planning application because of concerns relating to the proposed Restoration and Aftercare Management Scheme, including concerns relating to habitat

creation and tree species (e.g., silver birch). The application was granted planning permission in April 2023. There is no case officer report on the Gloucestershire County Council's planning portal. However, the planning portal does show that there was written correspondence between the applicant and the case officer, in which some of our concerns were addressed.

- **W/22/00685/FUL (Clay pigeon shooting, Farncombe Estate, Broadway) (Wychavon District Council):** The Board objected to this proposal on the basis of adverse impacts on the tranquillity of the Cotswolds National Landscape, relating to noise associated with the intensification of clay pigeon shooting. However, the case officer concluded that the proposal would not have an adverse impact on tranquillity, taking into account the noise / disturbance associated with existing activities on the site.
- **Significant planning applications that we have objected to (since the last Executive Committee meeting):¹**
 - **S.21/2579/OUT (Hybrid planning application for employment development – warehouses, etc., Javelin Park, Stroud) (Stroud District Council):** The proposed development is in the setting of the Cotswolds National Landscape, not far from the foot of the Cotswold escarpment. It includes a number of very large warehouses. We originally commented on this proposal in 2022. The applicant subsequently provided further information, including details relating to landscape and visual impacts. However, the scheme remains fundamentally unchanged so we have maintained our objection.
 - **22/02169/EOUT (300 dwellings, Coombe Hay, Bath) (Bath & North East Somerset Council):** The proposed development is located within the Cotswolds National Landscape on the southern edge of Bath. The 300 dwellings would be in addition to the 171 dwellings already permitted, which would provide a total of 471 dwellings on a site that has only been allocated for 300 dwellings. The Board considers the increase in the scale of development to constitute major development. As there is no shortfall in housing land supply, we do not consider that exceptional circumstances apply to justify the proposed development. We were originally consulted on the proposed development in 2022. Further information submitted by the applicant has not adequately addressed our concerns so we have maintained our objection.
- The only consultation relating to Local Plans since the last Executive Committee meeting has been Cotswold District Council consulting the Board on their draft Dark Skies Policy for their partial update of the Local Plan. The draft policy was already largely based on the Board's Management Plan policy relating to dark skies and on the Board's Position Statement on Dark Skies and Artificial Light. This is a good example of our 'value add'.

DECISIONS REQUIRED

- No decisions required.

¹ It is worth noting that we do not object to the vast majority of development management proposals that we comment on. This paper just highlights those that we have provided an outright objection to. There are a number of additional proposals that we have objected to, subject to the provision of further information.

NEXT STEPS

- A PIWG meeting is scheduled for 13 September 2023.
- Key work areas over the next few months will include:
 - Drafting a new Biodiversity and Planning Position Statement.
 - Drafting a new Minerals and Waste Position Statement.
 - Responding to national, planning-related consultations, including the current consultation on permitted development rights.
 - Responding to the current consultation on the West Oxfordshire Local Plan.

NO SUPPORTING PAPERS

SEPTEMBER 2023