



Planning, Regeneration and Environment Committee

Tuesday, 2 March 2021

Report on IWALC / IWC Planning Training, 17 February 2021

On 17 February 2021, Cllr Malcolm Ross (Planning Committee Vice Chair), Jonathan Baker (Committees and Ryde Place Plan Coordinator) and myself (Planning Committee Chair) attended an online training session provided by staff of the IWC's Planning Services Department at the request of IWALC. After an introduction by Ollie Boulter (Strategic Manager Planning & Infrastructure Delivery), there were brief presentations by James Brewer, Sarah Wilkinson and Russell Chick, followed by a question-and-answer session.

The session focused on the environmental aspects of planning. The speakers had been asked in particular to address the question: *When making decisions on planning applications, how does the IWC reconcile the need for new residential and other developments with the need to conserve the Island's environment and preserve its green spaces?*

The main points that emerged from the session are as follows:

1. *Island Planning Strategy*: The Department's intention is to publish the final draft of the Strategy in June/July this year. After consultation and further revision, it will hopefully be sent to the government early next year. They do not expect any major changes to the planning system along the lines proposed in the *White Paper* to be introduced in time to affect this process.
2. *Housing Targets*: The Island's Planning Authority is currently required to deliver an average of 688 homes a year. Since it has delivered less than 75% of this, it is subject to the 'presumption in favour of sustainable development' prescribed in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). This means that, irrespective of any local planning policies, it has to approve any applications for development unless they would be contrary to NPPF policies designed to protect 'areas or assets of particular importance' or the adverse effects of such developments 'would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits'.
3. *Affordable Housing*: The Department acknowledges that the main 'need' on the Island is for 'affordable' housing, and in particular for social rented housing. However, under present government policy, the only way of getting significant numbers of such homes is through large-scale developments, which have to include 35% of 'affordable' homes, 70% of which have to be for rent. In other words, one has to have the private commercial housing to get the social housing.

4. *The MP's Approach:* The Department is aware of Bob Seely's attempts to exempt the Island from the above targets (e.g. through designation of an 'island park') and they liaise with him. However, they do not have access to his political channels and have to abide by current legal procedures.
5. *Location of Development:* Since much of the Island is protected from development (e.g. designated as AONB) or unsuitable for development (e.g. flood zones), 'developable' sites tend to be concentrated in relatively few areas. The problem is exacerbated by the fact that many towns are on the coast, so the scope for expansion is 'semi-circular'.
6. *Prioritisation and Coordination of Developments Within an Area:* Given the 'presumption in favour of sustainable development' and the lack of an up-to-date local plan, it is difficult for the Department to prioritise one development over another. They have to consider applications in the order in which they are submitted. However, they can consider the possible impact of 'cumulative development' and new applicants are required to consider the impact (e.g. on highways) of other proposed developments as well as their own. The Department can also take account of the 'delivery record' of developers when considering applications.
7. *Brownfield Sites:* The Department has just launched a consultation on brownfield sites as part of the preparation of the new *Island Strategy*. Local councils and the general public are invited to notify them of possible brownfield sites that could be developed.
8. *Environmental Assessments:* All applicants are required to assess the impact of their plans on 'biodiversity' and applicants for developments in protected areas have to prepare a more detailed 'environment statement'. The 2020 Environment Bill, which is currently being debated by Parliament, would make it compulsory for developers to demonstrate a biodiversity 'net gain'.
9. *Enforcement:* All enforcement cases, including those related to trees, should be reported to the Department initially, rather than direct to the Tree Officer. They respond as quickly as possible to urgent cases – if possible, immediately in cases like illegal tree cutting. However, the Department does not have sufficient capacity to deal with the number of enforcement cases they receive, which increased by 32% in 2020. When reminded that they have refused financial help from RTC, it was explained that they would consider contributions from local councils but such contributions could not be earmarked for particular areas. It was suggested that IWALC might reconsider the possibility of a joint contribution. When this suggestion was considered a few years ago, there was insufficient support from members.
10. *Notification of Applications:* The Department is required, in addition to publication in the press and on its website, either to put up site notices or to write to neighbours. When the Covid-19 pandemic began, they decided to write letters instead of put up notices, primarily because it involved a lot of officer travel and there was a prohibition on all but essential travel. However, they will reconsider this policy when there is a long-term easing of lockdown restrictions. Since writing letters is more expensive, they may well return to site notices.

Cllr Diana Conyers

**Chair of Ryde Town Council's Planning, Regeneration and Environment Committee
22 February 2021**