

MEMBER QUESTIONS TO PORTFOLIO HOLDER at Corporate Services Scrutiny Committee – 22 November 2018 - From Councillor Thompson

The responses were made by Councillor Edwards, (Leader and Portfolio Holder for City Development)

QUESTION 1

If monies are borrowed via the Public Loans at concessionary rates for the private development company to build property for sale on the open market, does this require within the regulations the support of the Section 151 Officer, bearing in mind, this appears to be a commercial operation with significant risk factors?

RESPONSE 1

All borrowing requires the approval of the Section 151 Officer regardless of the source or the purpose. The level of risk has been assessed and is built into the premium that the Development Company is paying on the loan.

QUESTION 2

When sites are transferred from Exeter City Council to the Private Development Company owned by the City Council :-

- a) **What is the basis of the valuation?**
- b) **Who undertakes the valuation?**
- c) **Does the City Council always obtain a Planning Consent for residential development prior to the date when the land is valued and the date when the land is transferred?**

RESPONSE 2

- a) Market Value was as defined by the RICS Red Book.
- b) In this case JLL, the commercial real estate company were engaged to provide the valuation advice.
- c) No.

QUESTION 3

Following conversations with external professionals concerned with Planning, Architecture, Design and Planning Applications, I understand it is perceived our City Council Planning Service is 'broken', so could the Portfolio Holder give information if the guidelines and regulations as in the attachments below are met in a timely manner and if this service can be improved bearing in mind extensions to Planning Applications have apparently increased significantly?

RESPONSE 3

Councillor Edwards categorically refuted the suggestion that the planning service was broken. Whilst there have been delays in planning application processing times in recent months due to staffing issues these were now largely behind us and applications were being registered within a few days of receipt. In the most recent published data on application processing times Exeter sits in joint 6th position out of 16 south west local authorities in terms of processing minor applications and in 10th position in terms of major decisions. This was not a bad place to be. In terms of undetermined householder planning applications the number of undetermined cases has dropped from in excess of 130 at the end of August to the mid-90s now.

QUESTION 4

Why has there been a large increase of Time Extension Agreements from March 2017 to April 2018?

RESPONSE 4

Planning officers have been reminded to use the extension of time facility to enable applications to be negotiated to an acceptable outcome.

QUESTION 5

How are planning Applications dealt with in terms of order as received?

RESPONSE 5

Applications which have not been subject to a pre-application discussions are allocated in date order. In cases where there has been pre-application discussions the applications are allocated to the officer who dealt with the discussions immediately on receipt.

QUESTION 6

Are Time Extension Agreements available for viewing by the public?

RESPONSE 6

Yes, the agreements are in writing – usually as an exchange of emails – and are available on the public file.

QUESTION 7

What reasons are given for Time Extension Agreements?

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/making-an-application#validation-of-an-application>

https://www.planningportal.co.uk/info/200126/applications/58/the_decision-making_process/3

RESPONSE 7

There were many and Councillor Edwards referred to a number of examples

- to allow applications to be considered by Planning Committee or Delegation Briefing meeting;
- to allow time for schemes to be amended to address concerns instead of refusing them;
- to agree the wording of conditions with applicants; to allow the comments of consultees and/or neighbours to be properly considered and addressed; and
- to allow the submission of further information by the applicant to support the proposal.

Councillor Mrs Thompson added that she had asked the questions because she was concerned about examples of an increase in the time extension agreement which could be putting some individuals in a difficult position.

Councillor Edwards reiterated that Exeter City Council had an excellent record in the south west and he invited individuals with any concern to write directly to him.