

| No | Action Point  | Allocation | Timeframe | Update   |
|----|---|------------|-----------|--|
| 1  | <b><u>Introduction and Apologies</u></b>  |            |           | <p>Apologies received from: Sheila Black, Hilary Ellis, Anna Goodall, Matthew Hall, Emma Nasta, Rikki Parsons, David Rowen, and Anne Wardle.</p> <p>Present: Hannah Albans, Dino Biagioni, Stephen Buddle, Mark Dennis, Nick Harding, Simon Jackson, Councillor Dee Laws, Peter Harley, John Maxey, Nicholas Mills, Graham Moore, Nicola Oldfield, Collette Panther, Nick Seaton, George Stone, Bill Tilah, Jordan Trundle, Chris Walford and David Wyatt.</p> |
| 2  | <b><u>Review of Action Schedule from Last Meeting held on 12 April 2023</u></b> |            |           | <p>The notes of the previous meeting were approved and the actions were discussed.</p> <p>Nick Harding made reference to an action with respect to a possible meeting with the CPCA and Homes England concerning highway improvements in Fenland, and he explained that he is not aware of any meeting that has taken place. John Maxey stated that nothing has happened to date. <b>NH to take as an action.</b></p>  |

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| 3  | <u>Local Plan Update</u> |            |           | <p>NH explained that Peterborough City Council had been providing services to assist with the preparation of the Local Plan, however, that support was withdrawn at the end of March and since that time a decision has been made to continue the preparation of the emerging Local Plan under the existing and/or transitional arrangements.</p> <p>NH stated that approval has been given to introduce additional posts in the Local Plan team which is currently made up of one officer and the advertisements for the positions are likely to be in place imminently. NH explained that along with that process and, given the difficulties currently being experienced to recruit Planning Officers of any type, there will be an additional exercise to obtain quotations from consultancies to progress the Local Plan.</p> <p>JM asked whether there was a revised timetable in place for the next stages and he added that he appreciates that the recruitment process is difficult, and, in his opinion, he would caution using consultants entirely, due to difficulties he has witnessed with other neighbouring Local Authorities during a recent appeal hearing. NH stated that he appreciates the cautionary words concerning the use of consultants, however, due to the difficulties with recruitment, it does need to be an option.</p> <p>NH explained that the timetable has not been revised until the positions in the team have been filled and then a decision can be made with regards to what resources are in place in order to get to Regulation 19 stage.</p> <p>Councillor Mrs Laws stated that the shortage of planning staff is a national issue and it has been</p> |

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| 4  | <u>Accommodating bees , bats and birds</u> |            |           | <p>Councillor Mrs Laws explained that there are various policies coming forwards with regards to wildlife and nature on how to retain it. She stated that she has recently learnt that there are only two species of bees that actually require a colony and the rest operate independently. Councillor Mrs Laws made the point that there are several companies that are making bee bricks which can be just one brick costing under a pound which can be included in a new build or a renovation project. She explained that the bees nestle into the portholes and lay their eggs which then hatch and there is no danger to people. Councillor Mrs Laws stated that as part of the focus on helping and promoting nature, including improving the bee population, consideration is going to be given as to whether it should be included in the new Local Plan. She explained that KLWN DC have adopted the policy along with Brighton and Hove who have had a policy in place for some time and, therefore, it maybe something that agents and developers wish to consider going forward when submitting applications.</p> <p>Councillor Mrs Laws explained that the population of swifts has dropped considerably this year due to the fact that their habitat has been removed. She explained that 70% of the waste material from the china clay pits in Cornwall could be made into bricks and included in the eaves of properties which would attract the swift population with a cost of implication of 75 -80 pence per brick. Councillor Mrs Laws stated that swift population is in significant decline and they are likely to become not only a protected species but also classified as at risk.</p> <p>JM stated that there a number of environmental obligations which are going to fall on developers over the next few months and users and he asked</p> |

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| 5  | <u>Planning Fees</u> |            |           | <p>NH explained that he has just been advised that the legislative process has commenced with regards to fee increases and fees will increase by 25% across the board but majors are due to increase by 35%. He added that he recognises that will be a concern for agents and developers and he also advised that the provision of a 'free go' is going to be removed but there will be a transitional arrangement in place so that those applications which have already been decided can still take advantage of the 'free go' up to the available time limit. NH stated that the fees are due to be increasing in line with inflation and the increases are going to be capped at 10% every April from 2025 onwards and then hopefully that will remove the need for periodic jumps in planning fees. He added that under the proposals the planning guarantee is going to be tightened for non-major applications so that refunds can be sought after 16 weeks, provided that no extension of time has been agreed. NH stated that there is no update on the performance requirements that councils have to achieve other than the 16-week policy and he explained that he had previously advised members of the forum that it had been reported in the consultation that the Government was likely to make councils work harder for the fee increase, however, there has been no further update concerning that.</p> <p>JM asked for the date of implementation of the increase and NH explained that information is yet to be known, but, in his opinion, it could be May or June. HA stated that latest date she has been made aware of is 1 April, but that could be subject to change.</p> <p>DB asked whether the increase can be ringfenced and NH stated that he has not been made aware of that option. DB stated that, whilst the council</p> |

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| 6  | <u>Performance</u> |            |           | <p>NH stated that the validation backlog is now at 5 weeks, and explained that the validation backlog can be tracked.</p> <p>Since April 2023- performance figures are</p> <p>Majors – 90%<br/> Minors - 58%<br/> Others - 86%</p> <p>He explained that the Government’s 24 month rolling performance period and for majors the figures are as follows:.</p> <p>Majors - 81% of decisions on time against a threshold of 60%, but non majors are 72% and that figure is very close to the 70% designation threshold.</p> <p>NH stated that the concern over the non-major performance has been shared with members since the Spring and agreement has been sought to include additional resources in place to assist going forward.</p> <p>Councillor Mrs Laws stated that whilst it is disappointing news, Fenland is not the only council and there will be several authorities that will fall below that threshold. She made the point that the Inspectorate and Government are going to have tough times ahead through the lack of qualified staff available.</p> <p>PH stated that he would like to provide positive feedback as he has had a very good experience with officers in ensuring an application and approval was issued on the determination date.</p> <p>JM stated that the backlog for validation he finds worrying when the backlog for most other local</p> |



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| 7  | <b><u>Staffing and Resources including Capacity Funding</u></b> |            |           | <p>NH gave an update concerning starters and leavers in the Planning Team. He highlighted that Mark Russell has joined that team from Capita and he is a Principal Planning Officer helping to support Sheila Black and David Rowen.</p> <p>NH advised the forum that he would also be leaving the Council at some point in December and his post will be advertised shortly.</p> <p>Councillor Mrs Laws thanked NH for all of his support, advice, and guidance she has given him over the years.</p> <p>NH explained the various tasks which have been implemented as part of the transformation project work. He added that there is due to be an installation of a new mapping system which will be integrated with the back-office system in order that consultations will be automatically pulled off of the GIS system into the back-office system, rather than having to be actioned manually.</p> <p>Councillor Mrs Laws stated that some of the transformation work will save a great deal of officer time going forward. She explained that a great deal of investment of both time and money has been spent to bring the validation team up to date in order to assist applicants, agents and staff.</p> |

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| 8  | <u>Government News</u> |            |           | <p>NH explained that the Council has received two tranches of funding to assist with the work involved with biodiversity net gain. £5,500 to cover 22/23 and £27,000 to cover 23/24.</p> <p>NH added that a bid has been submitted for Planning Capacity and Skills funding which is both for Development Management and also for the emerging Local Plan. He stated that he is sure that the applications for funding will be oversubscribed but the outcome will not be known for 2 months.</p> <p>NH referred to the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill and the Infrastructure Levy and advised that there are some revisions to the bill being proposed and they all appear to be with regards to affordable housing and the ability for local authorities to apply viability to the intended levy process. He stated that the Secretary of State also has the power through the regulations to disapply the infrastructure levy in a particular area where the levy is not delivering on its policy aims and, in those instances, the local authority can use Section 106 obligations to secure the appropriate level of planning gain. NH said there is the promise to learn from the experience of the introduction of the levy so if it does not work there is hope that the levy will be reviewed, changed and improved going forward. He added that he was concerned that the National system was going to be foisted upon the Council and from the experience when undertaking research for the emerging Local Plan, the viability position in Fenland is very challenging and the Council would not want to be in a position where development is being stifled by a national system which is put upon us and does not reflect local circumstances, whilst at the same time facing the consequences due to non-delivery.</p> |

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| 9  | <u>Any other business</u> |            |           | <p>Councillor Mrs Laws stated that she will ensure she can provide further information with regards to bees, bats and birds at the next meeting.</p> <p>NH explained that a number of officers have been funded to progress with their planning education and Dannielle Brooke has undertaken her Masters qualification and as part of it, her dissertation was written on the quality of open spaces. She has been successful in obtaining two awards for her dissertation with the most recent one being awarded to her at the National Awards in Glasgow, and she is a real credit to the team.</p> <p>PH asked if biodiversity net gain can be added as a future agenda item once further guidance has been issued.</p> <p>JM asked whether Dannielle would be able to provide a short presentation to the forum as a learning opportunity for the members. NH agreed to approach DB.</p> <p>JM questioned whether the new Chair of the forum would be NH replacement. NH agreed to give it some thought.</p> |

Finish: 4.25 pm