Issue number 5 Spring 2007

Newsletter

Building Control and Development Control Planning and Regeneration

Wigan Council

New Department Progress

Work is continuing on reshaping the three previous Departments of Planning and Regeneration, Community Protection and Engineering Services into the new Environmental Services Department. The new structure is intended to assist in responding to the challenge of delivering stronger, better integrated services. There will be five new divisions that will be headed by the following people:

Paul McKevitt
Performance and Resource Management

Neil Fearnley
Development

Ian Harrison
Neighbourhood Services

Ken Wardale
Regeneration and Protection

Operations - Post soon to be filled

Existing teams will fit within these divisions, but in addition 5 new teams will be created and spread across the divisions. They will be provided from existing resources. These are:

* Performance Management,
* Research and Information Unit,
* Sustainability,
* Project Management
* Environmental Education.

BC & DC will be part of the Development division.

The articles in this newsletter are designed to:

- Alert you to new regulations or procedures
- Guide you to sources of help on our website and elsewhere
- Help you understand our processes
- Report performance and request your views on how we can improve services

Built in Quality Awards

Our second annual Built in Quality awards ceremony took place in October. Sponsored by Modus Properties, the award scheme is for builders who achieve outstanding quality in their construction work, particularly related to the Building Control process. Winner in the small domestic category was John Greenhalgh of Standish. DJ & E Birchall (pevious small domestic winner) won an award for a commercial fit out in Golborne. Crystal Developments won the housing award for two detached houses at Pemberton and Eric Wright Construction won an award for their health centre at Frog Lane. These awards recognise and promote good buildings and good builders. The standards displayed by each of the winners were particularly high and we are very pleased to be able to demonstrate our recognition of their work. Details of the winning developments can be seen on our website.

Building Regulation Changes

Government have issued new guidance on fire safety. Approved Document B has been revised and is now produced in two volumes. Volume 1 deals with dwelling houses and volume two with buildings other than dwellinghouses. The new recommendations come into effect in April. Steve Gaskell gave a short presentation on the principle changes to an audience of local agents and designers in January. Significant changes on the domestic side include the withdrawal of the acceptability of ladder escape for third storey loft conversions. From April these loft conversions will require a fully protected stair. This will require FD20 fire resisting doors throughout although they need not be self closing.

Another change includes additional requirements for smoke alarms when constructing extensions. The new documents can be freely downloaded from the Planning Portal website. www.planningportal.gov.uk

Grand Arcade

The new Grand Arcade Shopping Centre within Wigan Town Centre is due to open on 22 March 2007. A fully covered shopping centre, providing nearly 40,000 square metres of new accommodation, anchored by a new 9,750 sq metre Debenhams, 4,600 square metres Marks and Spencer and a 3,800 square metres British Home Stores.

With direct ring road access and secure car parking, the Grand Arcade is set to alter Wigan's retail landscape - for good.

Planning permission has recently been granted for two state of the art wind turbines and an array of solar panels to be mounted on the roof of the complex. These will be used to power special exhibits in the new shopping centre.

Technical Seminars - Invitation

Building Control have now facilitated a number of technical seminars for our own staff and local agents. Two on Part L last year, and one in January on fire rated downlighters. If agents find these useful we will continue to arrange similar events on appropriate topics. Please let us know what topics you would like to see covered. The last three have been held mid morning at Wigan Cricket Club, if you attended please let us know if the venue and timing were convenient, if you didn't attend, was there a problem with the venue or the time?

Smoke free premises and workplaces in Wigan

From 1 July 2007 smoking will be prohibited in wholly or substantially enclosed premises.

- To which the public have access.
- Which are being used wholly or mainly as a place of work.
- Which are being used by or for a club.
- Which are being used for the provision of education, health or care services.

"Substantially enclosed" means premises which have a ceiling or roof and where less than half the total wall area of the perimeter is open. Door and window openings are counted as solid walls. This means that any structure designed to be used for smoking must have at least 50% of its sides completely and permanently open. Premises such as shops and shopping centres, pubs, hotels, restaurants, meeting halls, churches, betting offices, schools, day centres, snooker halls and factories will all be subject to this new law. It will include almost all workplaces and other premises to which the public have access.

The Council is preparing advice and guidance for those responsible for the management of these premises so that they can comply. A guidance leaflet is also being prepared by the Environmental Services Department to advise on the need for planning permission and the issues to be considered when designing suitable smoking shelters and similar facilities at these premises. The guidance note will be available on the Department's website when it is published. More information can be obtained from:

- www.smokefreeengland.co.uk
- Environmental Health on 01942 828142
- By e-mail to smokefree@wigan.gov.uk

Diversity Review

In our last issue we mentioned the Diversity work which the council is undertaking. Government have set targets and timescales in which all councils must demonstrate improved access to services across a wide range of social groups. We have now achieved level two of the required standard and are working towards level three. If there are any ways in which you think we discriminate against any sector of the population or have any ideas how we can be more accessible to sectors please let us know.

Comments, Compliments and Complaints.

We welcome any comments you may have regarding our work, they help us to improve the service. The BC Satisfaction survey includes space for comments all of which are welcome. For example, we have been criticised over delays in issuing completion certificates and will pay particular attention to avoid this in future. One respondent wrote ''the inspector was too much by the book.... the builder fitted circular soffit vents 18" apart but the inspector required additional vents closer together. This was done but the spacing is now not uniform across the soffit". The surveyor was of course correct and the builder was in error, inadequate ventilation can lead to condensation within the roof which may cause it to fail. He should have fitted sufficient vents in the first place and the owner's criticism should have been addressed to the contractor. Quality control regarding appearance is unfortunately beyond our powers and is the owner's responsibility; he should perhaps have insisted that the contractor replace the soffit. Not all comments are negative though, some recent comments include... excellent service....very helpful and informative.... Very approachable...can't thank this man enough.... helpful in the extreme!

If you have any comments, or complaints, please contact Paul Swift or Dave Melling direct, or use the corporate complaints process on the council website at www.wigan.gov.uk

Dangerous Structures

You will all be aware of the 80 mph winds which Wigan suffered on 18th January.

Our Building Control team was particularly busy that day. Last year we processed around 100 reports of dangerous structures. During the 24 hours from lunchtime on the Thursday, our admin team received 64 reports! All were passed on to our surveyors for inspection and appropriate temporary measures were taken to ensure the safety of people in the vicinity.

We had to suspend other activity that day to concentrate on the emergency situation.

Applicants Full Name Please

Agents are asked to ensure that the full name of the applicant is shown on all building regulations forms submitted. We have recently had several applications which simply say Mr and Mrs Smith. Legally there can be problems with this and we are advised that we should not process these without a fore name as well as the surname on all forms. It will help us to speed up our process if agents will remember to state the full name on all future applications.

ISO 9000

Wigan's Building Control team will shortly be seeking ISO accreditation for its management processes. We have been working on this together with the other authorities in Greater Manchester for some months now. ISO 9000 accreditation provides independent verification that we have robust procedures underpinning our essential functions. We are hopeful that our application will be approved. We are particularly pleased to advise service users that as a result of this being a joint initiative with other Greater Manchester Authorities, we have negotiated a considerable discount on the cost of the accreditation process.

Recent activity from the Dept for Communities & Local Government

In December 2006 the DCLG issued a consultation document on a draft Planning Policy Statement (PPS) entitled Planning & Climate Change. The final document is intended to form a supplement to PPS1. It sets out to establish the role spatial planning can play in reducing emissions and stabilising climate change as part of a wider package of action to help deliver the government's ambition of achieving zero carbon development.

Responses should be submitted to DCLG by 8 March 2007, with the intention of publishing a summary of responses in June 2007. Further details are available at www.communities.gov.uk

In a similar vein, Planning Policy Statement 25 (Development & Flood Risk) was published in December 2006. As a key objective, planning authorities are required to take into account flood risk at all stages of the development process by means of Flood Risk Assessments. A sequential approach is advised to focus development on sites with a lower probability of flooding based on flood risk zones identified by the Environment Agency. The PPS also encourages the use of sustainable drainage systems within new developments. Copies can be downloaded at www.communities.gov.uk.

A review of Householder Development Consents was announced in January 2005 as part of the government's reform agenda to 'speed up, simplify and change the culture of planning'. The Review reported back to Ministers and its recommendations were published in July 2006. The main recommendations included:

* a new and simplified Permitted Development Order for Householder Developments,
* Local Development Orders to allow LPAs to extend permitted development rights in their areas,
* a streamlined process for developments requiring consent, but where neighbours do not object,
* development of a model to demonstrate how mediation can lead to more efficient and effective regulation,
* revision of the Tree Preservation Order system
* improve the interface between planning and building control, such as a standard application form (and looking at the feasibility of longer term merging of these regimes),
* continue dialogue on alternative provision and new ways of working in processing planning applications.

No formal response has yet been received from the government. The review findings can be viewed at www.communities.gov.uk.

Development Plan Programmes

Local Development Framework
Supplementary Planning Documents

Adpoted

- Landscape Design
- Open Space in Housing Development
- Shop Front Design Guide
- Re-Use of Employment Land and Buildings
- Affordable Housing
- Access for All

To be adopted
*(*Currently out to consultation until 30th March 2007)*

- Travel Plans* (June 2007)
- Development and Protected Species* (June 2007)
- Air Quality (September 2007)
- House Extensions (June 2008)
- Trees and Development (June 2008)
- Buildings and Structures of Architectural or Historic Interest (December 2008)
- Advertisements (June 2009)

Development Plan Documents
To be adopted

- Core Strategy (July 2010)
- Allocations and Infrastructure DPD (November 2010)
- Greater Manchester Joint Waste DPD (December 2010)

Local Development Document

Statement of Community Involvement - Adopted

A copy of the current Local Development Scheme, which gives the detailed targets and milestones for the preparation of these documents can be seen on the council's web site at: www.wiganmbc.gov.uk/pub/planning/pages/localdevscheme.htm

Leigh Sports Village

Leigh Sports Village is the biggest investment in public sports, recreational and educational facilities in Wigan borough for many years and will transform Leigh into one of the finest hubs of activity in the North West.

The £83m project includes:

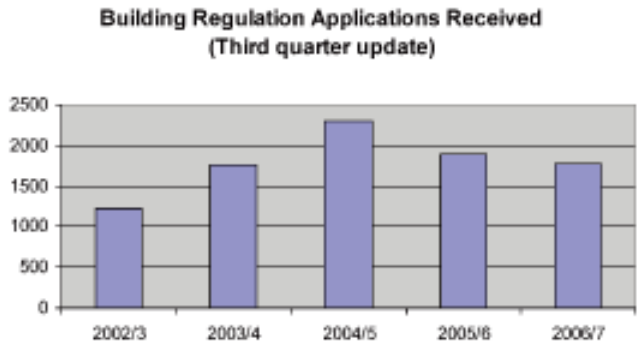
- 10,000 seat stadium on which work is just starting
- New Leigh Sixth Form College building (now nearing completion)
- Extensive sports facilities
- 130 bedroom 4 star hotel
- Leisure and specialist retail facilities including a health and fitness centre, restaurants and bars
- Leigh's first new public sports centre and swimming pool for decades (now nearing completion)
- 145 new houses and apartments
- New Leigh East sports pavilion (completed)
- New Leigh Harriers building (under construction)

Building Control Performance

Building control are currently checking deposited plans rapidly with deposited applications being examined within two weeks of validation.

Our site inspection team continue to provide a wealth of local knowledge and same day inspections which contractors and customers appreciate. A couple of local contractors have complained to us that they do not get a same day inspection service from private approved inspectors and they regret the fact that their client has chosen that route to approval. We would remind local agents that whilst our plan check process may have been protracted in the past this has now improved dramatically, and our overall service has always been very highly rated by contractor and final customer alike for its thoroughness and value for money.

Applications received have fallen slightly from this time last year. The chart below shows comparable receipts at



end of third quarter for the past five years.
Customer satisfaction levels remain encouragingly high with 87% of householder respondents registering a positive overall satisfaction with our service (only 3% registered a negative opinion of the service). 90% were happy with the speed of the process and 95% were satisfied with the number of inspections carried out. Overall 92% felt that we gave good value for money. Recent efforts to improve our speed of plan checking will hopefully improve these results next quarter.

Planning applicant satisfaction survey

A survey has been carried out of all applicants who received a decision on a planning application between April and September 2006. Over 600 questionnaires were sent out and 47% were returned. The results show that 80% of applicants were very satisfied or quite satisfied compared to 75% when the previous survey was carried out in 2003. 13% were quite dissatisfied or very dissatisfied compared to 14% in 2003. Therefore, there has been a significant improvement in satisfaction over this 3 year period. Over 80% of respondents said that they understood the reason for the decision made on their application, whilst over 70% felt that they were treated fairly and their point of view was listened to. But just under 60% of applicants felt that the Council kept them informed about progress of their application. In general, more applicants think the service has got better rather than worse. The survey also asked about the ethnicity of applicants and showed that over 96% of applicants described themselves as white British. The survey was carried out at the same time by every Local Planning Authority in England and is repeated every 3 years.

Exciting times for Trencherfield Mill

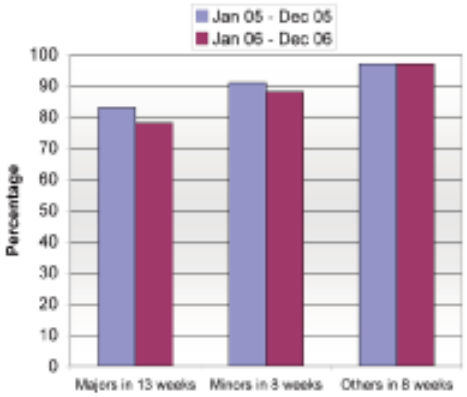
The major redevelopment and refurbishment of the historic Trencherfield Mill site is now well underway. The development will help to create a new cultural quarter within the Pier Quarter area.

The Trencherfield Mill scheme will include:

- The refurbishment of the historic mill for a mix of apartments, offices and leisure uses. As part of the scheme, the restored Mill Engine and Machinery Hall are to be retained.
- Space for cultural activities.
- A new hotel.
- Restaurant, café and kiosk units.
- 200 new apartments.

Work on the regeneration is well underway, the work being carried out by the Stewart Milne Group.

Introduction of new national planning application form

A standard planning application form applying throughout England is to be introduced with effect from 1 October 2007. Some Authorities, not including Wigan, will be piloting the new form from late March 2007. The form is designed to be completed online via the planning portal. However, paper copies will be available on request. Planning applications submitted after the end of September 2007 must be on the new forms, otherwise they cannot be accepted. To coincide with the introduction of the new forms, new requirements for submission of appropriate information to accompany planning applications will be introduced. These will include both national and local requirements for each type of application. The Government is expected to publish more details of these new arrangements during Spring 2007. Local Planning Authorities will not be able to accept applications which are not supported by the relevant information.

Percentage of Applications Determined within Statutory Time Periods