

A new cinema for Loughborough



The Old Baxter Gate Hospital site is set to become a brand new multi-million pound cinema and leisure complex after approval was granted for the scheme in December.

The scheme, which aims to draw more people into the town centre, includes a new plaza and the renovation of the adjacent listed building, and should add to the appearance of Baxter Gate.

Following approval a number of conditions have been placed on the development, including the sustainability of the building and the addition of CCTV.

Do you need planning permission?

During the past year the Government has increased the number of types of development that can be carried out without the need for planning permission.

Until May 2016 larger house extensions can be carried out without planning permission, however the Council must be notified of any plans to ensure neighbours are properly consulted.

In its drive to boost the economy, the Government has also reduced the need for permission to convert offices, built before May 2013, to be converted into homes, while certain types of building can become schools and agricultural buildings can be changed into shops, offices, restaurants and even storage facilities.

We would advise anyone who is thinking of adding an extension or converting an existing building to contact the Development Management team, on 01509 634737 or visit www.charnwood.gov.uk for guidance.

The arrival of the inner relief road

The most radical change to Loughborough's high street is well under way as Leicestershire County Council continues with the building of the inner-relief road.

There are glimpses of how the new road, and the town as a whole, will look when the work is complete, and the County Council is also working to bring the two halves of the town together by pedestrianising the town centre.

Once completed the town offer will be enhanced, not only by the new Magistrates' Court and planned multiplex cinema, but also by new pedestrian areas.





Update on our proposed core strategy

Following an enormous amount of work, our proposed Core Strategy has been sent to the Government for examination in public.

Kevin Ward BA (HONS) MRTPI from the Planning Inspectorate has been appointed as the independent inspector who will scrutinise the Core Strategy and look at the various concerns and issues raised.

The proposal needs to be rigorously tested, found sound and then adopted by the Council before it can be used as planning policy. It is this testing which will give it authority in making decisions.

One of the most contentious issues we've faced is the need for more housing and where it should go and there are a number of groups who oppose certain aspects of our proposal. This is quite normal but means that, until the issue of housing need and its location has been settled by the Inspector or there is certainty that the housing sites will be developed, we are not able to rely on the five-year supply of housing land provided by the plan.

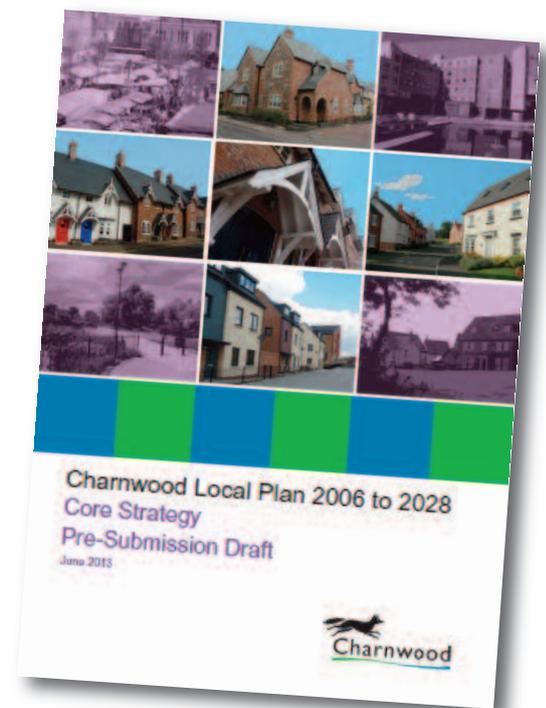
If the inspector finds the Core Strategy sound, we can begin to work again with a plan-led system rather than the adhoc arrangement that currently exists.

With this in mind it may seem odd that we say that there are parts of the strategy that can be given substantial weight now before the examination has concluded. However, the law is clear that those parts of the Strategy about which there is little or no disagreement can be given greater emphasis now. Of course none of the policies will have full weight until the Strategy is adopted.

Also thrown into the mix are those existing local plan policies which still constitute the development plan. Many of these policies have been tested through recent appeals and have proved to be consistent with the NPPF, so they can be relied upon until they, in turn, are replaced by the new policies in the future local development framework.

At the present time therefore we have to make careful judgements. Each planning application must be considered on its own merits in light of this complicated policy landscape and the planning issues. The Strategy regarding housing land supply is amongst the most contentious and therefore it will remain the case that it cannot be granted much weight at the moment, especially in light of the fact we do not have a five-year supply of housing land. We are now working very hard to ensure that the Strategy comes through the testing process so that it, and all the other detailed policies that will accompany it, will renew the Council's control over all aspects of the development of the Borough for the future.

To keep up to date with the examination visit <http://localplan.charnwood.gov.uk/>



More housing land news

One of the surprises of the year was the appeal decision at Rempstone Road Wymeswold.

The support that the appeal inspector gave to the protection of the landscape and the character of the conservation area was welcomed, but his conclusions regarding the suitability of the settlement for major development for housing was indicative of the importance that the government is placing on encouraging new house building.

He acknowledged the site performed poorly in respect of access to services but placed considerable weight on the closeness of employment opportunities.

The concern must be that some of our smaller settlements could become the target for proposals for housing development on a scale not seen previously.



Smile you're on camera!

Members of the Plans Committee received two minutes of fame when the BBC came to film the planning process for a controversial planning application.



In September 2013 the Committee was asked to consider an application from the National Trust to convert the 19th century Stoneywell Cottage, Ulverscroft, into a visitor attraction.

BBC Inside Out followed the Plans Committee meeting, and attended Councillors and Planners on a site visit, leaving Charnwood's planning process in the spotlight, giving residents and colleagues an insight into the system.

The Committee approved the National Trust's plans, including the creation of a small car park, to preserve the Ernest Gimson cottage in the heart of Charnwood Forest.

It can be difficult

An integral part of the planning process is to decide how to deal with development that has not got the planning permission it needs.

Action cannot be taken merely because there isn't planning permission, so the judgement needs to be made as to whether permission would be granted if it was applied for.

A team of four enforcement officers are kept busy dealing with this, working with planning officers on the judgments that need to be made. Over the last year there have been 639 new cases to investigate.

There is a wide variety of work involved, which has included works not in accordance with approved plans, businesses being run from home and numerous neighbour disputes.

In 48% of cases, some form of action has had to be taken, which has in some cases resulted in formal notices being served. This is serious work, and for some people even the most innocuous development can cause upset.

For more information on Planning Enforcement and the action that can be taken by the Council visit www.charnwood.gov.uk/pages/enforcementnotices1 or contact the Enforcement team development.control@charnwood.gov.uk or call 01509 634722.

The fourth emergency service

Imagine the scenes: a ferocious blaze has turned a building into an unstable, dangerous charred husk. Fierce winds have battered buildings, stripping tiles from rooftops and turning windows into showers of shattering glass.

Would you know who to call? As well as the emergency services, you would also need to alert the Council's Building Control team.

They work as part of the Planning and Regeneration service to provide an emergency response to reports of dangerous buildings and structures.

The team responds when they receive a report that a building or other structure is in such a condition that it places people in immediate danger. The Council has

legal powers, but not an obligation, under sections 77 and 78 of the Building Act 1984, to investigate and to take whatever action is necessary to remove the danger.

The team will act to all reports within two days, however if a structure is deemed to be an emergency by the emergency services they will arrive on the scene within an hour.

Paul Clothier, Building Control Team Leader, said: "If staff in any part of the Council receive a report about a dangerous structure which may pose a risk to the public, we need to hear from you as soon as possible. We are on hand 24 hours a day, 365 days a year to respond and to help make the Borough safe for everyone."

Contact Building Control on 01509 634756 or email building.control@charnwood.gov.uk.

For more information on the service visit www.charnwood.gov.uk/pages/dangerousstructures.



Pastures new for Planning manager

After 14 years at Charnwood Borough Council, Development Management Group Leader Steve Lewis Roberts is leaving for pastures new.

He has secured a new post as Senior Associate Director of a Midlands-based planning consultancy.



Steve has become much liked and widely respected as a colleague and a team leader and by elected members as a trusted source of help and sound advice in the difficult world that town planning has become in recent years.

He will not be taking up matters affecting Charnwood for some time, but he will be active in other areas around the Midlands, where the consultancy is based. We wish him well in his new role.

Stage set for hearing

Loughborough Town Hall's theatre will be the venue for an initial two-day public examination of the Core Strategy. The hearings will take place on Wednesday March 19, 2014, and Thursday, March 20, 2014, starting at 9am and will be open to members of the public.

What is sustainable development?



The concept of sustainability is very broad and it is about securing a better quality of life, now and for future generations, by meeting our present needs without preventing successive future generations from meeting theirs. Our Core Strategy sets out our vision for achieving this over the next fifteen years.

There is a presumption in favour of 'sustainable' development in the planning system which the NPPF says should run as a golden thread through plan making and decision taking. In summary it says sustainability means contributing to building a strong economy, ensuring sufficient land for development is available when it is needed, making sure infrastructure and local services are provided, developing and supporting strong healthy communities, providing housing to meet present and future needs, creating a high quality built environment, protecting our varied environmental and historic assets, improving biodiversity, minimising waste and adapting to the effects of climate change. Achieving all of this is a tall order, especially without a planned strategy, and sometimes achieving one objective will seemingly conflict with achieving another.

We have seen these conflicts with the many applications for housing development around villages across Charnwood over the last year or so, and we know some of you will have wondered how this can constitute 'sustainable' development. Some of these developments lie on the edge of villages in the countryside or in areas where the range of services and facilities is somewhat limited. The problem has been compounded by the fact that the NPPF is clear that, in advance of the council being able to demonstrate an adequate supply of housing land, and with the housing policies of our existing local plan being out of date, we should approve planning applications where these are sustainable.

The law says each planning application has to be considered on its own merits against the policies of the local plan and having regard to material considerations. This requires an assessment of the application in terms of its contribution to and impacts on the local community, environment and economy. Ultimately this is a judgement based on evidence submitted with the planning application and taking into account the views of statutory consultees, the views of the public and, importantly, the terms of appeal decisions where inspectors have set out their conclusions on what is meant by sustainability. If these impacts on the community are judged to be too severe then an application can be recommended for refusal. However, the pattern of decisions over the last year or so, as well as more recent Inspector's decisions, shows that many small communities are judged to be capable of accommodating development that is considered to be sustainable in the context of the NPPF.

More changes - more energy savings

The government has released new Approved Documents to support Part L of the Building Regulations which become effective from 6 April 2014 and which relate to energy efficiency standards in new buildings.

For new houses, the proposed changes concentrate on the performance of the fabric of the structure and require an equivalent of 6% improvement in energy efficiency. There will be new targets for this and for reducing carbon dioxide emissions, with a recipe type approach which, in itself, would provide a compliant solution. It may not be the most cost effective for everyone, but it might make the task of compliance easier for some buildings. DCLG see this as a robust starting point for compliance.

As part of the commitment to take a sensible cost effective step towards zero carbon homes in 2016, existing fuel factors will be retained in line with the current requirements and there are some relaxed requirements for fabric performance for detached dwellings. For non-domestic buildings a 9% CO2 target uplift is proposed, with more onerous targets set for building types such as schools, offices and hotels.

The new regulations come into effect on the 6 April 2014. Applications submitted after this date will need to comply with the new standards. For applications made before 6 April 2014, the current 2010 standards can be used, with the requirement to start works within 12 months.

There is some good news for existing homeowners, as there are no proposed changes to energy efficiency standards for works on existing dwellings.

Copies of the documents can be downloaded from the link

<http://www.planningportal.gov.uk/buildingregulations/approveddocuments/partl/changes>

How well are we performing?

In December the Council dealt with 10 out of 14 (71%) major applications within target times. These figures ensure that our performance is well above the 30% threshold for designation as a standards authority. 27 out of 34 minor applications (79%) were determined within the 8 week target. We remain on track with our performance target. 59 out of 73 (81%) of "other" planning applications were determined within 8 weeks. Accordingly, the majority of our customers receive decisions within the target date.

We have now received a Major application for the Sustainable Urban Extension (SUE) for NE Leicester, which has required 800 letters to be sent to individual households and other premises, 20 site notices to be displayed and a press notice in the Leicester Mercury. This is the largest application that has ever been submitted to Charnwood and over the coming months this will generate a huge amount of work for the Development Management team.

One of the signs of the growing buoyancy in the development economy is the level of fees receipts for new planning applications. These fees come to the Council to enable it to run services, including the planning service. Over this financial year the Council expected fee income to be £758,500, and by the end of December over £1million had been received. In addition to this, the Council now charges commercial applicants for obtaining pre-application advice on proposals. We expected this to be £15,400 over this financial year, but in the event £110,400 of pre-application fee income has been received. Overall the planning service has already received almost £0.5 million more for its services than was expected, which is good news for council tax payers. Some of this income is being used to employ temporary staff in order to ensure we continue to provide an excellent service