

# Positive Planning – Covid-19 actions 23 March-5 June 2020

The Planning & Sustainable Development Service acted quickly to ensure the planning system continued to operate in Cornwall through the first phase of the Covid-19 pandemic. It also provided effective communications on planning-related matters for businesses, the public, town and parish councils, planning agents and applicants and Council Members and officers.

## Challenges

The challenges faced by the Local Planning Authority in Cornwall included:

- switch all working practices to remote working
- all officers needed to work from home quickly
- limited or no access to hard copy resources
- how to help staff balance work with caring and homeschooling
- additional IT equipment needed
- how to assess planning sites without being able to visit
- no face-to-face meetings
- no planning committee meetings
- perceived threat to democratic decision-making
- need to set up communication routes quickly
- unauthorised development while officers can't inspect more enforcement cases due to increased neighbour disputes while people confined in close proximity
- Court case delays
- dependence on stakeholder ability of others to adapt to remote working
- need to balance social distancing requirements against planning requirements in re-opening business

## Our actions

- All working practices reviewed
- Procedures updated to work remotely or centrally
- All staff were able to work remotely quickly
- Teams worked flexibly
- Communication systems set up quickly for Members, local councils, agents, applicants, businesses and residents
- New planning protocol for emergency decision-making
- Took part in the Planning Inspectorate's first virtual planning appeal hearing in the country
- Virtual solutions found to replace face-to-face meetings
- Climate Change Emergency DPD consultation completed during lockdown
- Virtual planning committee meetings tested and held
- Enforcement approach adapted to support businesses
- Comms opportunities maximised by joined up working

## Our work up to 5 June

- — **353** - applications for dwellings determined
- — **17** - emergency planning decisions
- — **505** - enforcement complaints triaged
- — **1** - virtual planning committee
- — **2353** - planning decisions made
- — **1688** - building control inspections
- — **121** - full plans decided
- — **1174** - building control amendments
- — **330** - consultation responses received

## Our successes

- We switched to paperless systems quickly and smoothly

Planning process continuous as alternative processes implemented for site notices, site visits, neighbour notifications etc

- Flexibility and readiness for homeworking = planning staff worked remotely almost instantly
- **2353** planning decision
- **353** applications for dwellings determined
- **17** emergency decisions issued with written consultation from planning committees
- Successful first virtual planning committee held on **1 June** including public speaking in person
- Validation reduced cut by **5.5 days** by remote working processes
- **505** enforcement complaints triaged

99.2% of all paid for searches within 5 working days, only 2 searches took over 10 (compared to 66 search authorities taking over 10 days, 17 over 20 days, 3 over 30 days and 4 are closed)

- Personal search service switched to a temporary email service to ensure continuity
- **1688** building control inspections
- **121** full plans applications decided

- **1174** post-decision amendments processed
- **330** responses received to our Climate Change Emergency consultation
- Successfully supported the economy by:
  - relaxing planning requirements in outside spaces and allowing extended working hours on building sites
  - allowing more time to pay developer contributions so construction is not delayed
  - Planning Delivery assisted with social distancing plans to reopen high street and secure funding
- Successful participation in the Planning Inspectorate virtual pilot programme: [positive progress on virtual hearings announced recently by PINS](#)

Planning Covid-19 FAQ webpage created as a central resource for all planning service disruption and resumption information

- Success at PIN's first virtual appeal hearing in the country
- Switch to **virtual** opportunities = new online officer training intranet page and increased take-up of virtual modular Member training
- Maximised opportunities for working together = weekly "**Cornwall Council Official**" Covid-19 updates for Cornwall/Plymouth's development industry