

## St Albans City and District Council – planning ‘designation’ for non-major planning applications

### Statement

St Albans City and District Council has received a ‘designation notice’\* in relation to speed of decision making for non-major planning applications.

Cllr Chris White, Leader at St Albans City and District Council said: “Naturally we are disappointed, given that the Council is confident that we have a robust plan in place to deal with the current backlog in planning applications.

“Our hard-working staff are dedicated to delivering an effective planning service and the Council is already making steady and welcome progress in the right direction. The team has worked hard to reduce the backlog which has resulted in a reduction from 480 cases to 300 cases since October last year.

“Action has also been taken to implement recommendations made by the Planning Advisory Service which visited the Council in November to undertake a review of the service. They are aware of our improvement plan. Indeed, the government has recently provided additional funding through the Planning Skills Development Fund which means we have been able to plan for a great number of staff to tackle the planning backlog. This funding was conditional on our improvement plan. It is therefore baffling why the government has chosen this moment to initiate the designation process.

“St Albans City and District Council has one of the busiest planning teams of any District in the country yet planning fees in no way cover the cost of operating the service. The additional funding has been an extremely important factor in being able to deliver the improvements made so far.

“As with any improvement measure things may look statistically worse before they get better. The Council is committed to addressing the backlog and as a result we will be pushing to determine more applications, both to tackle those in our backlog and to keep on top of new applications.

“We will, of course, work with DLUHC and the Planning Advisory Service to ensure the service improves further and works as efficiently as possible given the funding position.”

### \*Designation

See: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/improving-planning-performance-criteria-for-designation/improving-planning-performance-criteria-for-designation-updated-2022>

A local planning authority can be designated only if “the Secretary of State considers that there are respects in which the authority is not adequately performing its function of determining applications”. There are two categories - the speed which applications are dealt with, and the quality of decisions made. The designation in St Albans District relates to speed of decision making for ‘non-major’ applications. Non-major applications include developments of between one and nine homes,

floorspace of less than 1,000 square metres, or developments where the site area is less than one hectare in size.

Where an authority is 'designated' as underperforming, applicants have the option of submitting their applications for determination directly by the Planning Inspectorate (who act on behalf of the Secretary of State). This excludes applications for retrospective development, householder applications, applications to vary or remove conditions on an existing planning permission, applications for permission in principle, applications for technical details consent, applications for discharge of conditions, and applications for advertisement consent and lawful development certificates.