

Planning and Strategic Growth Portfolio
Councillor Mike Shirley

Against the backdrop of significant policy changes, this past year has seen us continue to evolve our approach in the current planning environment. Changes have taken place, with more expected in the future, meaning that my portfolio has seen plenty of challenges with unprecedented levels of planning applications but also positive results. We continue to deliver the Council's Blaby Plan priorities whilst ensuring we provide an open and transparent service that residents can be proud of.

Development Strategy

The Local Plan continues to progress despite ongoing amendments resulting in revisions to the timeframe of the Reg 19 publication. Furthermore, we anticipate the forthcoming Planning & Infrastructure Act which will comprehensively change the way Local Plans are formed and delivered in the future.

The Local Plan Member Development Group continue to meet regularly to ensure leadership input and effective communication with Members. A briefing with all member is planned to strengthen engagement, which remains critical as we move towards publication of the draft Local Plan in April.

Planning Delivery

We continue to drive forward the service offer available and have once again generated more income from planning applications this last year than ever before. We continue to provide training and support to the cross-party Planning Committee which has settled into its role, delivering democratic accountability in decision making, ensuring we continue to deliver planning decisions in line with national targets. This is achieved against the backdrop of changes to planning processes and procedures.

We are also continuing to invest in our customer journey, with the successful implementation of improvements to the planning front door through the Customer Services team. This has seen more customer enquires resolved at first point of contact. Plans to enhance this work will continue into 2026/27.

Planning Enforcement

The Planning enforcement team continue to deal with a wide range of matters. We continue to have an excellent record in obtaining successful outcomes from both the appeals and prosecutions processes but only take action where it is necessary.

Strategic Growth

Our Strategic Growth team continued its hard work this year in continuing to develop New Lubbesthorpe. Over the last year this has culminated in approval to extend the current Primary School to ensure local children can access their local school, as well as delivery of the new local centre, which includes a small supermarket, GP practice with more to come shortly. The team are also continuing work on other potential strategic sites ensuring they are right for Blaby District. These projects continue to ensure Blaby's place shaping vision, meaning it is a great place to live, work and visit.

Future

Our focus continues to be on delivering for the customer. While pressures are still being experienced from a number of areas, including the imposition of mandatory housing numbers, the Council and its officers are committed to delivering the emerging local plan and regaining control of our 5 Year Housing Land Supply.

We will be continuing to explore opportunities that technological advancements provide us and will look for efficiencies whilst ensuring we put the customer at the heart of everything we do.

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Mike Shirley

Senior Officers: Planning & Strategic Growth Group Manager

Portfolio Total

Planning and Strategic Growth – Total	2025/26 Approved Budget [A]	2025/26 Revised Estimate [B]	2026/27 Proposed Budget [C]	Variance [C] - [A]	Variance [C] - [B]
1. Establishment Costs	£1,744,780	£1,807,522	£1,809,350	£64,570 3.70%	£1,828 0.10%
2. Other Gross Direct Expenditure	£322,039	£822,638	£315,799	-£6,240 -1.94%	-£506,839 -61.61%
3. Direct Income	-£891,315	-£1,349,240	-£882,000	£9,315 -1.05%	£467,240 -34.63%
4. Net Direct Expenditure	£1,175,504	£1,280,920	£1,243,149	£67,645 5.75%	-£37,771 -2.95%
5. Overall No. of Posts (FTE)	29.99	31.99	32.15	2.16 7.20%	0.16 0.50%

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This portfolio includes the establishment and operational costs relating to Planning.

The establishment budget for 2025/26 allowed for a 3% pay award within services. The nationally agreed pay award for Chief Executives, Chief Officers (Directors and Group Managers) and officers on grades 1 to 9 was 3.2%. The establishment budget for 2026/27 allows for a 3% estimated pay award within each portfolio and a further 1% held centrally, contractual increments where appropriate, and employer's national insurance and pension contributions within service budgets. The Leicestershire Pension Fund confirmed a decrease in the Councils Employer contribution rate of 6% from 2026/27. The Council currently pays a rate of 28.3%, this will reduce to 22.3% from 2026/27 through to 2028/29.

Other gross direct expenditure includes one-off unspent budget brought forward from 2024/25, and additional funding released from the Local Plan Reserve for consultancy work is reflected in the revised 2025/26 budget. One off costs have been included within the revised 2025/26 budget relating to the Concept Framework and Stewardship.

Planning income has increased substantially during the year, the revised 2025/26 budget has been revised to reflect this. This income stream can be challenging to predict - the robustness of the general economy can have a big impact on the planning applications received, and income generated. As such, the 2026/27 has been reduced back to original 2025/26 budgeted levels.

DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

	2025/26 Approved Budget [A]	2025/26 Revised Estimate [B]	2026/27 Proposed Budget [C]	Variance [C] - [A]	Variance [C] - [B]
1. Establishment Costs	£417,610	£417,610	£413,380	-£4,230 -1.01%	-£4,230 -1.01%
2. Other Gross Direct Expenditure	£93,552	£455,237	£88,106	-£5,446 -5.82%	-£367,131 -80.65%
3. Direct Income	-£42,000	-£75,000	-£42,000	£0 0.00%	£33,000 -44.00%
4. Net Direct Expenditure	£469,162	£797,847	£459,486	-£9,676 -2.06%	-£338,361 -42.41%
5. Overall No. of Posts (FTE)	6.89	6.89	6.89	0.00 0.00%	0.00 0.00%

Reasons for Variances

1. The 2026/27 establishment budget takes account of the estimated pay award yet to be confirmed, contractual increments where applicable, any increase to employer's national insurance and the decrease of 6% to the Council's pension contributions.
2. The revised budget for 2025/26 includes expenditure relating to the Local Development Framework, for which funding is from the Local Plan Reserve and consultancy work associated with the local plan. 2026/27 proposed budget is in line with the original 2025/26 budget.
3. The revised budget for 2025/26 includes S106 contribution relating to Lubbesthorpe.
4. Net impact of variances listed above.
5. No change.

PLANNING DELIVERY

	2025/26 Approved Budget [A]	2025/26 Revised Estimate [B]	2026/27 Proposed Budget [C]	Variance [C] - [A]	Variance [C] - [B]
1. Establishment Costs	£777,750	£440,492	£824,530	£46,780 6.01%	-£15,962 -1.90%
2. Other Gross Direct Expenditure	£137,454	£189,405	£141,316	£3,862 2.81%	-£48,089 -25.39%
3. Direct Income	-£809,315	-£1,234,240	-£800,000	£9,315 -1.15%	£434,240 -35.18%
4. Net Direct Expenditure	£105,889	-£205,343	£165,846	£59,957 56.62%	£370,189 -181.16%
5. Overall No. of Posts (FTE)	14.15	16.15	16.26	2.11 14.91%	0.11 0.68%

Reasons for Variances

1. The 2026/27 establishment budget takes account of the estimated pay award yet to be confirmed, contractual increments where applicable, any increase to employer's national insurance and the decrease of 6% to the Council's pension contributions.
2. The revised budget includes additional consultant's fees relating to Oak Road. One off expenditure items from 2025/26 have been removed from the proposed budget for 2026/27.
3. The income budget has been increased in 2025/26 to reflect the forecast outturn position. Budget for 2026/27 based on 2025/26 approved budget.
4. Net impact of variances listed above.
5. Senior Planning Officer role replaced with two Planning Officers and a Planning Support Officer Apprentice. In addition, slight change in hours.

ENFORCEMENT

	2025/26 Approved Budget [A]	2025/26 Revised Estimate [B]	2026/27 Proposed Budget [C]	Variance [C] - [A]	Variance [C] - [B]
1. Establishment Costs	£176,390	£176,390	£201,310	£24,920 14.13%	£24,920 14.13%
2. Other Gross Direct Expenditure	£23,669	£21,687	£23,069	-£600 -2.53%	£1,382 6.37%
3. Direct Income	£0	£0	£0	£0 0.00%	£0 0.00%
4. Net Direct Expenditure	£200,059	£198,077	£224,379	£24,320 12.16%	£26,302 13.28%
5. Overall No. of Posts (FTE)	4.00	4.00	4.00	0.00 0.00%	0.00 0.00%

Reasons for Variances

1. The 2026/27 establishment budget takes account of the estimated pay award yet to be confirmed, contractual increments where applicable, any increase to employer's national insurance and the decrease of 6% to the Councils pension contributions.
2. No significant movement.
3. Not applicable.
4. Net impact of variances listed above.
5. No change.

STRATEGIC GROWTH

	2025/26 Approved Budget [A]	2025/26 Revised Estimate [B]	2026/27 Proposed Budget [C]	Variance [C] - [A]	Variance [C] - [B]
1. Establishment Costs	£212,510	£212,510	£205,310	-£7,200 -3.39%	-£7,200 -3.39%
2. Other Gross Direct Expenditure	£11,670	£91,815	£7,614	-£4,056 -34.75%	-£84,201 -91.71%
3. Direct Income	-£40,000	-£40,000	-£40,000	£0 0.00%	£0 0.00%
4. Net Direct Expenditure	£184,180	£264,325	£172,924	-£11,256 -6.11%	-£91,401 -34.58%
5. Overall No. of Posts (FTE)	2.95	2.95	3.00	0.05 1.69%	0.05 1.69%

Reasons for Variances

1. The 2026/27 establishment budget takes account of the estimated pay award yet to be confirmed, contractual increments where applicable, any increase to employer's national insurance and the decrease of 6% to the Council's pension contributions.
2. 2025/26 revised estimate includes non-recurring expenditure brought forward from 2024/25, for Whetstone Garden Village and Lubbesthorpe.
3. No movement.
4. Net impact of variances listed above.
5. Slight increase in hours in one post.

MANAGEMENT & ADMINISTRATION

	2025/26 Approved Budget [A]	2025/26 Revised Estimate [B]	2026/27 Proposed Budget [C]	Variance [C] - [A]	Variance [C] - [B]
1. Establishment Costs	£160,520	£160,520	£164,820	£4,300 2.68%	£4,300 2.68%
2. Other Gross Direct Expenditure	£55,694	£64,494	£55,694	£0 0.00%	-£8,800 -13.64%
3. Direct Income	£0	£0	£0	£0 0.00%	£0 0.00%
4. Net Direct Expenditure	£216,214	£225,014	£220,514	£4,300 1.99%	-£4,500 -2.00%
5. Overall No. of Posts (FTE)	2.00	2.00	2.00	0.00 0.00%	0.00 0.00%

Reasons for Variances

1. The 2026/27 establishment budget takes account of the estimated pay award yet to be confirmed, contractual increments where applicable, any increase to employer's national insurance and the decrease of 6% to the Councils pension contributions.
2. 2025/26 revised estimate includes costs of microfiche as the new MFD's cannot scan in house historic planning applications.
3. Not applicable.
4. Net impact of variances listed above.
5. No change.

Portfolio Priorities

Priorities for 2026/27 for the portfolio include:

- 1. Future Strategic sites** - The Strategic Growth team manages a range of large-scale projects which are likely to come forward in the future. These include:
 - a. Whetstone Pastures Garden Village
 - b. Land West of Stoney Stanton
 - c. Land West of Lubbesthorpe
- 2. Other Strategic sites** – The team will also progress the delivery and further development of other large scale sites already committed across the District. This includes:
 - a. Hastings Fields (Land north of Hinckley Road, Kirby Muxloe) – delivering the outline planning permission and progressing the reserved matters and delivery of the development.
 - b. Everards Meadows and Fosse Park – working with landowners on any future developments in this area.
- 3. Delivery of the Lubbesthorpe Sustainable Urban Extension (SUE)** - The development continues be held up as a beacon of best practice for how to deliver a SUE, as not only has it delivered a place but also a community. There are currently nearly 1300 occupied dwellings, including nearly 200 Affordable Homes (approximately 15%). As well as a recently completed Local Centre (including health centre and retail outlet) with the Primary School currently being extended. Over the next few years, further homes will be built alongside a new secondary school, further primary school, District Centre and second Local Centre, as well as community facilities and further open space provision.
- 4. Emerging Local Plan** - The next 12 months will see crucial milestones for the emerging Local Plan, these being publication of Regulation 19 in April 2026 and submission to the Planning Inspectorate by December 2026, with the aim of having an adopted Local Plan by the end of 2027.
- 5. Planning Reforms** - During the last 12 months there have been many consultations on proposed planning reforms which will inevitably impact the way we work across the planning service. We have recently received another National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) the second in 12 months as well as the progression of the Planning & Infrastructure Act which we expect to be implemented via secondary legislation in the Spring. This will bring with it a plethora of changes to fees, schemes of delegation and committees among other things; all in a bid to unlock development and drive economic growth.
- 6. Delivering an effective and efficient Development Management Service –** Planning application numbers are stable and manageable across the team. They range in complexity and we remain focussed on being able to determine these as efficiently as possible. We will build on existing knowledge and expand this through suitable training opportunities. We will continue to meet government timeframes for decisions and quality. The focus for 2026/27 is to deliver a number of projects including introduction of a paid pre-application service, and a validation checklist. A focus on continuing to improve our customer interface will remain a priority for 2026/27.

- 7. Enforcement action** - The team will continue to investigate breaches of planning regulations and take proportionate action where necessary. Any notices that are served will be done so accurately and effectively to ensure they stand up to external scrutiny. An expansion of more proactive enforcement through compliance monitoring will also be considered.
- 8. Joint Strategic Planning** – We maintain close collaboration with local authorities across Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland, actively engaging with external stakeholders (Homes England, National Highways etc) to facilitate the delivery of critical infrastructure, thereby enabling sustainable growth within the District and the wider region. This will continue and be critical as we progress through to Spatial Development Strategies which will come forward prior to devolution.

Services

The portfolio comprises the following services:

Planning & Strategic Growth:

Development Strategy

The key purpose of the Development Strategy Service is to ensure that the district has a robust and up-to-date strategic framework for planning decisions. The Local Plan, and other key planning policies, are the key mechanisms for place shaping and the delivery of many other corporate priorities.

This budget includes the costs of a Service Manager, Principal/Senior/Planning Policy Officers and a Planning Obligations Officer; all involved in developing robust policies and guidance, gathering and interpreting the data necessary to do this, advising on the interpretation of policies and designing and implementing initiatives to deliver strategic objectives.

Planning Delivery

The purpose of the Planning Delivery Service is to ensure that development is acceptable whilst determining planning applications in line with government timescales.

This budget includes the costs of a Service Manager, Team Leaders, Senior/Planning Officers and Technical/support staff involved in providing advice to potential applicants and determining applications.

Planning Enforcement

This budget includes the costs of a Team Leader, Enforcement Officers and Technical/support staff, who proactively monitor development across the district, carrying out investigations, enforce planning controls and take forward prosecutions where necessary.

Strategic Growth Team

The Strategic Growth team are responsible for progressing the planning, development, and delivery of large strategic sites across Blaby District. These are considered to be projects which fall outside of the usual development management process, due to their profile and the need for a more complex range of skills and will include applications which generate significant infrastructure requirements such as schools, local centres, strategic open space and road infrastructure.

This budget includes the cost of the Strategic Growth Manager and two Major Schemes Officers, along with some external funding from Planning Performance Agreements and external government funding.

Management & Administration

This budget includes the cost of the Planning & Strategic Growth Group Manager and the support staff who manage the portfolio budgets and systems.

Key Points

Doing things differently – plans for the coming year	<p>The portfolio continues to excel, despite a further challenging year due to unprecedented levels of planning reform which shows no sign of abating. However, staff remain motivated and continue to provide an efficient service.</p> <p>The focus of the portfolio continues to be on the submission of our emerging local plan and regaining our 5 Year Housing Land Supply position, which will allow greater control and focus on place shaping of the District.</p> <p>As set out in the priorities for the forthcoming year; we expect the next 12 months to be challenging –but also rewarding and exciting with the prospect of significant investment in the District coming forward.</p> <p>Development Strategy</p> <p>The team will continue to focus on strategic planning and the emerging Local Plan. Work will continue during 2026/27 on the key objective and corporate priority of delivering a new Local Plan which aims to progress to Regulation 19 and submission to the Secretary of State.</p> <p>Strategic Growth</p> <p>The team will continue to project manage and deliver some of the district's most high profile and complex strategic projects. This includes a wide range of sites; from commercial developments, two new strategic sites and the continued delivery of Lubbesthorpe.</p> <p>Planning Delivery</p> <p>The workload of the team has reached a stable level recently as application levels have become more manageable. This will enable focus to turn to the delivery of a number of specific projects, which will improve efficiency and transparency for all involved in the planning process. This includes the creation of a pre-application service, rollout of validation checklists and ongoing customer service improvements.</p>
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	<p><u>Enforcement</u></p> <p>The enforcement team will continue its work on the high profile and sensitive sites, as well as expanding its proactive monitoring approach utilising new ways of working in its capabilities.</p> <p><u>Management & Administration</u></p> <p>The focus for 2026/27 will be on the delivery of high-quality services, whilst supporting and enabling staff development, leading to improved business continuity and resilience.</p>
Income generation	<p>The fees and charges for the service are constantly being reviewed to ensure that we maximise our income without impacting on the service from both a customer and officer perspective.</p> <p>Income generation across the group is currently restricted to fees for documents, and nationally set planning application fees. However we anticipate this to change in 2026/27 with the Planning and Infrastructure Act which is likely to include an element of locally set planning fees. In addition, a project to look at chargeable pre-application advice will be delivered in 2026/27.</p> <p>The group will seek to maximise opportunities for cost saving through collaborative working.</p>
Capital plans for the portfolio	There are no current capital plans for the portfolio.

Key Performance Indicators

Planning & Strategic Growth	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26 Apr - Dec
Number of planning applications received	943	961	938	900	713
Planning application fee income	£572,724	£464,613	£546,461	£1,027,450	£817,174
Number of planning applications determined	1,280	842	536	852	594
% of major applications determined in 13 weeks	100	88.89	93.33	90	94.73
End to End (householders)	91.65	80.59	67.83	69.87	72.01
End to End (majors)	256.22	197.89	492.59	266.55	327.53
End to End (non-majors)	74.6	82.42	104.48	68.81	63.26
End to End (DOC)	90.59	84.3	94.01	106.44	81.81

Customers

- The Planning Delivery and Enforcement services in particular have heavy interaction with residents, and we continue to monitor customer feedback to ensure that all interactions with customers and stakeholders to these services are conducted appropriately and professionally, whilst continuing to deliver any efficiencies where possible.
- Customer Service improvements have been made throughout 2025/26 enabling more requests to be resolved at the first point of contact through joint working with

the Customer Services Team. This work will be reviewed and further improvements identified in 26/27.

- During 2026/27 we will be conducting a significant publication on the next stage of the emerging Local Plan which is our Regulation 19 (a full draft plan).
- A pre application service and validation checklists will support further improvements to customer communications in 2026/27 and beyond.

Risks

- Planning application levels have stabilised, but should they increase suddenly this will place significant demands on the service. Ongoing resource and service delivery reviews are essential to help to mitigate against this. This will ensure we continue to meet national performance targets whilst delivering the housing growth Blaby requires.
- Failure to progress the emerging Local Plan would leave the district vulnerable to unacceptable speculative developments.
- High numbers of appeals would increase pressures on the Development Services Team.
- Continued delivery of Lubbesthorpe is essential, as a failure to do so would continue to have a detrimental effect on the Council's 5-year housing land supply.
- Whilst clarity on plan making reforms has been provided, further planning reform is expected in 2026/27. Therefore, further amendments could lead to delays to plan making and decision making.
- Failure to deliver an effective enforcement service could result in reputational damage to the Council.
- Failure to ensure a robust and risk assessed approach to enforcement investigations, could leave staff at risk of harassment or violence.