

PLAN-A NEWS

Firstly, we would like to take the opportunity to congratulate our Senior Planner, Fiona Martin who has recently welcomed into the world her baby boy! She is currently on Maternity Leave and we really look forward to meeting her new addition soon.

Speaking of baby news (there seems to be a theme this year) Lydia, our Marketing and Design Manager is also expecting a baby and will be heading off on Maternity Leave at the end of January 2023.

Shortly before Fiona went off on Maternity Leave we all got together for a lovely lunch at the Greyhound Pub. With Covid-19 hitting a few of us last Christmas, we never managed to get together for a festive meal, so this year we're really looking forward to getting together before we close the office for the year.



PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS FROM THIS QUARTER

Amongst a number of approvals this quarter, here are a few that particularly stood out.

Planning Permission Granted for New Home in West Oxfordshire Village



We recently helped a developer client achieve approval for an additional 4-bed dwelling in a village close to Witney.

The application site comprised a parcel of vacant land on a wider site, where our client had previously built 4 high quality bespoke homes. The site had a fairly complex and negative planning history, with earlier 5-unit schemes having been refused, including a dismissed appeal. By examining the previous reasons for refusal along with a review of more recent planning decisions in the locality, we were able to present a carefully argued case justifying why planning permission should now be granted.

We highlighted 'material changes' in circumstance that had occurred since previous schemes had been rejected, which officers accepted. The proposals were recommended for approval, however, as the Parish Council objected, the application was referred to the Planning Committee for determination. We were pleased that the proposals were unanimously supported by Members.

The scheme represents a well-designed 'windfall' on an infill plot within the settlement. The new home will complement the established form and character of the wider site and make a useful, if modest, contribution to the housing supply in the area, helping to address the Council's current shortfall.

Listed Building Consent for Alterations to North Cotswolds Cottage



We recently supported a client in gaining Listed Building Consent for repair works to their Grade 2 listed cottage; a holiday let located within a picturesque Cotswold village.

The proposals included the replacement of a crumbling chimney, alterations to the roof (including retiling, provision of additional insulation and ventilation, along with new rooflights). The front elevation of the property also needed repointing. As the proposals involved removal of some historic fabric from the Listed Building, formal consent was required before any works could be carried out.

In justifying the works, we needed to provide a Conditions Survey and Method Statement from a suitably qualified stone mason. As roofing material is to be replaced, a bat survey was also required to assess the potential impact of the works on legally protected species. The survey (conducted during the summer months - during the defined season when targeted bat surveys are deemed viable), established the likelihood of bats using gaps between the existing handmade clay tiles for roosting.

Following positive dialogue and engagement with officers, Listed Building Consent was granted subject to conditions; including the need for an ecological watching brief during the works and approval of sample panels of the proposed new materials to be used at the site.

Grade II Listed Water Tower Conversion



Whilst our work brings us into contact with a whole variety of buildings and properties, it's not every day that we get the opportunity to work on something as unusual as a Grade II listed 4 storey Water Tower.

Having reached the end of its working life in supplying water to the private estate in which it is set, we were instructed as part of the consultant team charged with establishing a new long-term viable use for the heritage asset. Supported by specialist heritage input provided by Natalie Fenner (Independent Heritage Consultant), we set out a compelling case in support of its conversion to residential use and, based on Rixon Architects' design, planning permission and listed building consent were granted in August. Therefore, the building can now look forward to a new lease of life as a unique 2 bedroom home!

PLANNING NEWS

River Pollution, Phosphate Pollution Targets and Housing Delivery

High levels of phosphate and other nutrients in rivers can lead to algal blooms and, ultimately, the loss of many species that make rivers their home, including fish, birds, invertebrates and plants that are vital to the river ecosystem.

As a result of this, tougher rules on phosphate river pollution targets have recently been brought in, which are in turn having significant impacts upon the delivery of a huge number of new-build homes. Delays to the delivery of new homes could result in a considerable loss of economy activity. To avoid further delays, it is critical that local authorities, housebuilders and Natural England work together to find a solution.

One such solution is the creation of manmade wetlands funded by developers, with the aim of stopping more nutrients, such as phosphate, leaching into rivers. One such wetland is in the village of Luston, near Leominster in Herefordshire close to the Wye. This, however, is only one way of dealing with the problem.

Key to securing the long term aim of reducing levels of phosphate and other nutrients is to enforce water quality regulations to police the new pollution rules.



Cotswold Beechwoods SAC - update

After some significant delays, Cotswold District have finally begun to pilot their 'Strategic Mitigation Approach' in respect of those application proposals for holiday accommodation which fall within the zone of influence associated with the Cotswold Beechwoods 'Special Area of Conservation' (SAC). This involves a 'per unit' financial contribution towards the cost of on and off-site measures to mitigate the damage that increased recreational pressures are causing to the biodiversity value of the SAC.

The cost per unit has been calculated at £673 and is payable in addition to an administration fee of either £125 or £510 depending on whether the contribution is secured via a s.111 agreement or (more complex) s.106 agreement.

For the purposes of the pilot scheme, applicants using the s.111 agreement complete and submit a signed template to the Council, who will then generate an invoice for payment. Payment must be received prior to determination of the application although the contribution will be refunded if the application is refused and the period for lodging an appeal has elapsed (or the appeal is dismissed).

Don't Forget Your Sustainability Statement!

As local planning policy stipulations gradually strengthen requirements towards achieving Net Zero in development terms, local planning authorities are increasingly demanding that applicants submit a 'Sustainability Statement' in support of their development proposals. Whilst all good architects and designers will be well versed in the various ways in which to achieve the highest possible standards of energy efficiency, low carbon and Net Zero building design, it is important to set out the measures that have been adopted and incorporated as part of the scheme within the 'Sustainability Statement'.

In order to assist this process, Cotswold District Council, together with West Oxfordshire and Forest of Dean District Councils have published a 'Net Zero Carbon Toolkit' which identifies the various options and opportunities that can be utilised in respect of both new homes and by retrofitting the existing building stock (<https://www.cotswold.gov.uk/environment/climate-action/how-to-achieve-net-zero-carbon-homes/>).

AND FINALLY...

Recruitment - We are now looking for an enthusiastic and hardworking Senior Planner to join the Plan-A team! For more information please visit our website www.plan-a-planning.co.uk or email ap@plan-a-planning.co.uk.

Christmas Office Hours

The office will be closed from Monday 26th December and will re-open on Tuesday 3rd January 2023.

Spotted whilst out and about...

We all struggled to find some (printable!) words to describe this beautiful extension to the roof of these properties. Needless to say, we should all be aware of what results from any relaxing of planning controls...

