

NAPE Annual Report – 2019

This year marks my second annual report having been elected Chair in January 2018 and covers the period from December 2018 – December 2019. Over the past 12 months it has again been a pleasure to work alongside fellow management committee members Craig, Dawn, Tom, Mark, John, Chris and Liam. Between us we bring a wealth of knowledge and experience from across the planning enforcement spectrum.

I am pleased to report that there continues to be an increase in the NAPE membership over the past 12 months with membership currently standing at 990 and we anticipate that this will pass the 1000 mark next year as one of our aims for the coming year is to continue to attract new members and continue to build a strong network which represents and promotes the planning enforcement profession.

Over the past 12 months we have continued to publish our monthly newsletter containing expert opinion on relevant enforcement court cases, links to enforcement related media reports and links to enforcement training events. The newsletter has also assisted a number of members with their dissertation projects as it has enabled them to seek information from members about enforcement matters.

In December 2018 I met with Victoria Hills to discuss the role of Enforcement within the RTP1 following which along with Richard Blyth I met with Steve Quartermain, MHCLG officers and a representative from PINS to discuss the wider role of enforcement within the planning system. One of the main discussion points was the ongoing delays for enforcement appeals. Unfortunately, the response I received from PINS at the time was not as positive as I had hoped.

In short, they set out that at the time they currently only had 35 trained enforcement inspectors to deal with their entire enforcement caseload and whilst there had been a recent recruitment drive they had no current plans to train new inspectors to deal with enforcement cases due to the government's targets which are focussed on Local Plan examinations, infrastructure projects and householder appeals. At the meeting we made the case that more needed to be done in relation to speeding up the enforcement appeal process as current delays, where appeals were routinely taking over a 1 year to be determined, were severely undermining local planning authorities ability to effectively deal with planning enforcement cases which in turn undermines the whole system. At the meeting the issue of lack of resources for planning authorities was also raised and how enforcement teams were generally bearing the brunt of local authorities costs cutting which again was contributing to undermining the planning system.

In January we welcomed our new network manager Max Tolley who became an invaluable addition to the NAPE team through the following 9 months. In the same month NAPE members contributed to a DEFRA consultation on possible mandatory biodiversity net gain requirement for plan-making and decision-taking in England.

In February MHCLG announced plans to commit an extra £1.5million to local authorities to assist in dealing with unauthorised development, however at the time no specific details were set out as to how the money would be allocated or spent.

In April, following our biannual committee meeting in March, we launched our monthly 'ask day' where NAPE members can contact a member of the management committee on a specified day to discuss and or seek advice on enforcement cases they are dealing with. This has continued throughout the year and we hope to continue this going forward as an additional way to help support our members.

With conferences season in full swing in June, committee member Tom Wicks attended the RTPI south-east conference held in Brighton to speak about the value to taking direct action in enforcement cases and I had the pleasure of attending the RTPI's Planning Convention to speak at the breakfast session on Enforcement. In June I was also invited, along with Richard Blyth to meet with MHCLG to discuss how the proposed £1.5 million fund announced in February could be best used. Following the meeting it was confirmed that MHCLG would provide funding to enable NAPE to update its Enforcement Handbook and provide 3 launch events across England which will be free to attend. A working group was subsequently set up by Max Tolley which has continued to meet with MHCLG to discuss the delivery of the updated handbook and I would like to take this opportunity to thank Max for his ongoing efforts in relation to this.

MHCLG subsequently announced in July that 40 local authorities would have the opportunity to apply for up to £50k of additional funding from the £1.5million that was previously earmarked to support enforcement services which is seen as a positive step, however NAPE still has the view that more can be done to support planning enforcement services and it will continue to lobby government in regard to this.

September was again a busy month for NAPE with deputy chair Craig Allison attending the Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission's round table event in Manchester and Tom Wicks speaking at the RTPI enforcement training day in London which I chaired. We also welcomed our new Network Manager Jenny Divine following the promotion of Max Tolley to RTPI England Policy Officer. In October we launched our lone worker survey as this issue has been raised by a number of our members, the results of which are currently being considered.

On 6th November NAPE held their annual conference in Peterborough which was a huge success and attended by 120 members. The conference as always was put on free of charge to our members and I would like to thank No.5 Chambers for generously sponsoring the event. The day was opened by RTPI President Ian Tant and throughout the day we heard from a number of expert speakers on enforcement related topics. Of particular note was the attendance of Jean Russell from PINS who amongst other things revealed the steps PINS are now putting in place to seek to address some of the delays in dealing with enforcement appeals by recruiting new

inspectors, and undergoing an operational delivery transformation project to clear the current enforcement backlog. News of these improvements has been warmly welcomed by NAPE and we will monitor the progress of this project over the next 18 months.

As we look forward to 2020, one of NAPE's main aims is to continue to make progress in raising the profile of planning enforcement both at local and national level. Within the last year the number of news articles within the planning press around enforcement has noticeably increased and we hope to continue this trend going forward. One of NAPE's main aims for 2019 was to update our enforcement handbook and 2020 will see the publication of this document together with three launch events around the country to raise awareness and ensure that the handbook fully reflects the latest developments in enforcement policy, practice and case law.

I would like to thank the members of the Management Committee for their continued input and support, in addition to their day jobs over the last 12 months. Also a special thank you to our former network manager Max Tolley and our new manager Jenny Divine, both have worked hard to bring together the various threads that make up NAPE. The continued support of the RTPI is also very much appreciated.

Finally, I would like to thank all our members, new and old for their continued interest and contributions, NAPE is here for our members and will continue to support our members as best we can and speak up for enforcement at all times.

Neill Whittaker—NAPE Chair