

## **APPENDIX A**

### **Environment and Community Engagement Scrutiny Commission**

#### **Scrutiny Review Report: Streamlining planning applications for retrofit and renewable energy**

**November 2022**

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

The Commission initiated this mini review at the first meeting of the administrative year, on the 18 July, and completed the review at the second meeting on the 11 October 2022.

This timescale was chosen by the Commission as an opportune period to look at the Planning Service as the recently adopted Southwark Plan is being reviewed over the autumn in order to bring the plan in line with the council's declaration of a Climate Emergency 2019 and the more ambitious borough target to reach net zero by 2030.

Last year's Environment Scrutiny Commission Energy Review focussed primarily on interventions that the Council could pursue to reduce energy consumption and carbon on its own estate and in the public realm, as well as through the process of planning consent for development. This mini-review is intended to dovetail with last year's Energy Review, to streamline the process whereby organisations and individuals operating outside the public sector are able to and, potentially, encouraged to invest their own resources to achieve carbon saving.

Two sessions were held with officers providing verbal and written evidence on planning policy and implementation. Commission members' lines of inquiry particularly focused on constituent feedback arising from use of the Planning Service by owner occupiers pursuing installation of renewable energy technology on their homes.

## **2 MATTERS CONSIDERED**

The commission considered the following issues:

- The launch and usage of the free pre-application service for domestic renewables and external insulation, which commenced on 1 April 2022.
- The 'Find Out If You Need Planning Permission' free online tool to check whether the proposed works will need planning permission, launched on the planning website on 8 August 2022.
- The current number of planning applications for renewable energy and insulation.
- How the Planning Service is generating feedback from residents with a view to improving the service.

- Current advice provided and further ways to clarify and simplify the process, following feedback from residents who have made or would like to make applications for the installation of solar panels on their homes.
- Constituent concerns that there is a nudge from the portal to obtain a Certificate of Lawful Development, which comes with a cost, when this may not be needed in all cases.
- A need for collaboration between council officers and the Dulwich Estate, the other planning authority in the borough, to ensure that a similar approach to enabling renewables and retrofit through planning is adopted, as far as possible.
- Exploring what services the council can provide to residents in different types of tenure (owner occupiers, leaseholders, council and social housing tenants) to support the installation of carbon saving measures in their homes, through both the planning service and Green Building Fund.
- Monitoring the uptake of services to ensure equality of access.

### **3 RECOMENDATIONS**

1. Planning advice will be presented clearly and in plain English with any acronyms explained.
2. Explanatory guidance for completing the (government mandated) online Planning forms will be amended to ensure that it explicitly refers to common carbon saving measure(s) that are the subject of the given planning application.
3. Clear guidance will be provided to applicants as to why and whether a Certificate of Lawful Development may be required or not, helping residents to make informed choices.
4. The planning advice services available within the council to help residents proceed with carbon saving adaptations to their homes will be promoted.
5. The council will work with other planning authorities within the borough, to improve and expand uptake of carbon saving adaptations in domestic (and, where appropriate, other) contexts.
6. Relevant and appropriate demographic and geographic data will be requested from residents using the pre-application service in order for the council to assess, after a relevant period, the accessibility of this service to all Southwark residents.
7. Residents in different types of tenure (leaseholder, council and social housing, private rented) will be provided with advice and assistance by the council on ways to take forward the installation of carbon saving measures on their homes, and demographic data captured, as above.
8. Feedback from applicants will be collected and collated in order to facilitate further improvements in service delivery.