

New head of planning and housing takes the helm in the New Forest

New Forest District Council welcomed Flo Churchill to her new role as Executive Head of Planning and Housing on 22 May. Flo takes on responsibility for housing, including housing allocations, housing development and housing revenue; benefits and council tax; planning including building and development control; and economic development.

Flo was born and bred in Guildford and signs of her future career were evident from an early age: "Dad gave each of us a piece of the garden. Instead of planting things I built a town on mine, complete with a school, shops and a cemetery" smiles Flo. "I have always been interested in influencing the environment around me."



Flo actually made her first attempt to join New Forest District Council back in 1989 when she applied for a junior planning assistant role. Although she was unsuccessful on that occasion, she now brings a wealth of experience gained since then.

For the past ten years Flo has held senior roles in a range of local authorities as a professional interim, brought in by organisations to identify issues and develop solutions. She says of her new role:

"I am looking forward to bringing the breadth and depth of my experience to providing solutions to the challenges we face in the New Forest. I think the biggest challenge is in accommodating the pressure for development in a way that respects our environment and provides for the needs of our community - from those who need to be housed to our business community - all against a background of continuously changing legislation in planning and in housing."

Before joining NFDC, Flo was Chief Planning Officer and Interim Director of Development Services at Sheffield City Council. She drove a programme of improvement as well as managing the development management, forward planning, building control and urban and environmental design teams. She progressed the Sheffield Local Plan, setting out planning priorities for the city, as well as working closely with the Peak District National Park Authority and being involved in major infrastructure projects, attracting both Boeing and McLaren F1 to the city.

Prior to Sheffield, Flo worked for Windsor and Maidenhead Borough Council as Local Plan Manager in an area with large amounts of green belt under intense pressure for development. The range of local authorities she has worked for has also included Fareham Borough Council, East Hampshire District Council, Havant Borough Council and Gloucestershire County Council.

As well as extensive public sector experience Flo has provided planning advice to major corporations as a director of planning with BNP Paribas and a partner with GVA Grimley.

Flo's degree is in planning, with postgraduate qualifications in environmental psychology, and town and country planning. She lives with her husband in Petworth in the South Downs national park. Earlier in her career she worked as a planning manager in the Outer Hebrides, one of Europe's most environmentally sensitive areas:

"I understand the delicate balance between the demand for development, including new homes, and protecting a unique and beautiful area. I think I can contribute to that in the New Forest.

"Not only is it a wonderful place to come to work but the area is strategically important, with Southampton Water and the port and the Fawley refinery being key national infrastructure."

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