

03 December 2020 at 5.00 pm

This meeting will be held virtually via Zoom,
and livestreamed here:

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCIT1f_F50fvTzxjZk6Zqn6g

Despatched: 25.11.20



Development & Conservation Advisory Committee

Membership:

Chairman, Cllr. Hunter; Vice-Chairman, Cllr. Thornton
Cllrs. Barnett, Cheeseman, Clayton, Penny Cole, P. Darrington, Fothergill,
McGregor, Pett, Reay and Roy

Agenda

	Pages	Contact
Apologies for Absence		
1. Minutes To agree the minutes of the meeting of the Advisory Committee held on 20 October 2020, as a correct record.	(Pages 1 - 6)	
2. Declarations of interest Any interests not already registered.		
3. Actions from previous meeting (if any)		
4. Update from Portfolio Holder		
5. Referral from Cabinet or the Audit Committee (if any)		
6. Innovation Update	(Pages 7 - 10)	Evelyn Gilder Tel: 01732 227306
7. Work plan	(Pages 11 - 12)	

EXEMPT INFORMATION

At the time of preparing this agenda there were no exempt items. During any such items which may arise the meeting is likely NOT to be open to the public.

If you wish to obtain further factual information on any of the agenda items listed above, please contact the named officer prior to the day of the meeting.

Should you need this agenda or any of the reports in a different format, or have any other queries concerning this agenda or the meeting please contact Democratic Services on 01732 227000 or democratic.services@sevenoaks.gov.uk.

DEVELOPMENT & CONSERVATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on 20 October 2020 commencing at 5.00 pm

Present: Cllr. Hunter (Chairman)

Cllr. Thornton (Vice Chairman)

Cllrs. Cheeseman, Clayton, Penny Cole, P. Darrington, Fothergill, McGregor, Pett, Reay and Roy

Cllr. Dickins was also present.

48. Minutes

Resolved: That the Minutes of the meeting of the Development and Conservation Advisory Committee held on 7 July 2020, be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

49. Declarations of interest

No additional declarations of interest were made.

50. Actions from previous meeting

There were none.

51. Update from Portfolio Holder

The Portfolio Holder thanked the planning policy team for their work on getting the report on the Planning White Paper to the agenda. She had received positive feedback on the videos and Q&A sessions and the availability of recordings for those that had not been able to attend the live sessions.

She advised the committee of a number of staff updates including that the Planning Enforcement Manager had commenced in post along with a Planning Support Team Supervisor role which added extra resilience and freed up the Planning Improvement and Standards Manager to lead on the transformation agenda. There were currently temporary enforcement officers in post and recruitment was underway for permanent roles.

Referring to the budget report later on the agenda the service dashboard referenced an amber performance indicator for minor planning applications which the Portfolio Holder was happy to advise was now green, and enforcement figures were up. She also advised that staff continued to maintain good spirits despite new working arrangements from home etc.

52. Referrals from Cabinet or the Audit Committee

There were none.

53. Budget 2021/22: Review of Service Dashboards and Service Change Impact Assessments (SCIAs)

The Deputy Chief Executive & Chief Officer - Finance & Trading, presented the report which set out updates to the 2021/22 budget within the existing framework of the 10-year budget and savings plan. The report presented savings items that had been identified which needed to be considered, and requested further suggestions from Members, before finalising the budget for 2021/22.

Informed by the latest information from Government and discussions with Cabinet, it was proposed that the Council continued to set a revenue budget that assumed no direct funding from Government through the Revenue Support Grant or New Homes Bonus. This would result in the Council continuing to be financially self-sufficient. To achieve this aim and to ensure a balanced budget position over the next 10-year period would be more challenging this year due to the financial impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The budget process would be shorter with the Council's budget set at the November Council meeting instead of the February Council meeting. This should enable any changes to be implemented before 1 April 2021 and minimise the period of uncertainty for staff.

The annual budget gap included in the report was £826,000 which was largely due to Covid-19. Savings proposals had been identified in the report for this Committee but Members were asked for their suggestions in order to contribute to reducing the budget gap, and their recommendations would be considered by Cabinet as part of the process to set a balanced 10-year budget. By addressing the issues this year, the Council would once again be in a strong financial position that other councils would aspire to.

As a result of the pandemic and forced new ways of working such as planning applicants putting up their own notices, it was believed that there would be savings but they had yet to be quantified. The Deputy Chief Executive and Chief Officer Planning & Regulatory Services advised that there had been a number of efficiencies which it was hoped could continue but for budgeting purposes they needed to be investigated to see what could be quantified for budget setting.

It was generally agreed that the necessity for remote meetings must have incurred savings and should be looked at for the future. It was acknowledged that this was not the Committee's remit and that this was dependant on legislation.

It was also noted that the dissolution of the Building Control Partnership from Tonbridge and Malling was not financially driven so there were no cost savings to report at this stage.

Public Sector Equality Duty

Members noted that consideration had been given to impacts under the Public Sector Equality Duty.

Resolved: That it be recommended to Cabinet that

- a) the savings proposals identified in Appendices F & G to the report (SCIAs 11 (21/22) and 12 (21/22)) applicable to this Advisory Committee, be considered;
- b) it be noted that no further income or growth proposals were identified; and
- c) consideration be given to asking Officers to maintain current best practice and efficiencies and to examine any cost savings for future budget setting, and to look at building control changes for future savings.

54. Infrastructure Funding Statement - Priorities

The Planning Policy Team Leader (Infrastructure) presented a report which sought agreement to proposed priorities for the Council's new Infrastructure Funding Statement (IFS) which the Council was required to report to the Government by the end of the year.

Members took the opportunity to ask questions of clarification. Some questions arose around particular possible Kent County Council (KCC) projects and the Planning Policy Team Leader (Infrastructure) undertook to ensure that local members were kept informed of any discussions and projects they were working together on across Sevenoaks.

In response to questions and arising discussion, it was clarified that the report was an evidence based factual document and advice was given against any pre-emption or judgement on any future potential bids for Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) or Section 106 funding.

Public Sector Equality Duty

Members noted that consideration had been given to impacts under the Public Sector Equality Duty.

Resolved: That it be recommended to Cabinet that

- a) the criteria for prioritising infrastructure projects for funding in the Infrastructure Funding Statement, as set out at paragraph 35 of the report, be agreed; and
- b) the specific projects and types of Infrastructure recommended in paragraphs 38, 41, 50, 52, 54, 58 and 60 of the report, be identified in the Infrastructure Funding Statement as having a priority for full or partial funding.

55. Planning White Paper

The Chairman on behalf of the Committee extended her thanks to all staff involved with the report and recent Member briefings.

The Strategic Planning Manager presented the report which sought Members' approval to the proposed consultation response to the Government's Planning White Paper. The proposed reforms to the system were presented as three pillars: Planning for Development; Planning for Beautiful Places; Planning for Infrastructure and Connected Places; and the proposed response addressed each of these in turn.

During discussion, Members noted that where the report may say 'no' to a question the actual draft response currently stated 'not sure,' for example as set out for Question 22 (a). Members agreed that they would prefer a 'no' followed by an explanation and generally commented that responses could be more substantive. The desire for officers to be more clear in their responses that the current planning system works well and the need to 'fix' what perhaps only needed 'tweaking' was also requested. It was discussed whether this should be in a covering letter but Members were keen to see this in their response for questions as this was more likely to be considered.

It was also acknowledged that there were a number of minor typographical and grammar amendments that were still required.

Public Sector Equality Duty

Members noted that consideration had been given to impacts under the Public Sector Equality Duty.

Resolved: That

- a) the content of the report be noted;
- b) prior to consideration of the report by Cabinet, Officers be requested to
 - i) make minor typographical and grammar corrections as required
 - ii) ensure all answers were as robust and comprehensive as possible, with 'not sure' being amended to 'no' with justification, where applicable, and to include reference in the response that the current planning system worked well and there was no need to 'fix' it
 - iii) check whether it was possible to submit a covering letter and produce a draft if allowed;
- c) it be recommended to Cabinet that the proposed response to the Planning White Paper be approved as amended above, and submitted to the Government, in advance of the submission deadline of 29 October 2020.

56. Work plan

The work plan be noted, with a 'Building Control Update' report being added to the Summer 2021 meeting .

THE MEETING WAS CONCLUDED AT 6.51 PM

CHAIRMAN

This page is intentionally left blank

INNOVATION UPDATE

Development and Conservation Advisory Committee - 3 December 2020

Report of: Deputy Chief Executive & Chief Officer - Planning & Regulatory Services

Status: For Consideration

Key Decision: No

Executive Summary: This is a report to provide an update regarding our already implemented and future thinking and plans around the use of technology in the delivery of the services of the Planning Department.

Portfolio Holder: Cllr. Julia Thornton

Contact Officer: Richard Morris, Ext. 7430

Recommendation to the Development & Conservation Advisory Committee:

That the contents of the report be noted.

Introduction and Background

- 1 This report has come to the Advisory Committee to provide an update of the work around existing and proposed innovation projects designed to improve efficiency, streamline processes, improve communication with customers and reduce unnecessary contact.
- 2 The facility to submit a planning application electronically to a Local Planning Authority via the Planning Portal was introduced in 2008.
- 3 We have come a long way since then and the reliance on paper applications and associated processes to determine and publicise applications and defend Appeals.
- 4 Since 1 April 2020 91% of applications have been submitted electronically compared with 29% for the same period in 2009.
- 5 The majority of our customers are now able to engage with us in a different way and while the initial consultation letter to residents about new applications is sent by post the majority of follow up engagement is carried out by email and self-service options available on our website.
- 6 We have adapted and progressed to meet this demand and exploit the use of various software and systems available to us. We have further adapted since March 2020 in order to provide services and business as usual while many staff have been working from home.

Agenda Item 6

A Summary of the main developments

- 7 Continued use of Enterprise software initially introduced in 2014 to support the administration of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) liable applications.
 - a) This is now an essential electronic tool in managing the workflow of all applications from receipt to decision enabling us to work without physical files.
 - b) It is also used to oversee the processing of Appeals and Enforcement enquiries. We introduced new software in September 2020 to enable us to more efficiently record and monitor Section 106 agreements associated with planning permissions.
- 8 The purchase of Ipads.
 - a) This has enabled case officers to access documents remotely without wi-fi e.g. on site visits and download notes and photos to then sync with the network.
 - b) Ipads also enable case officers to work more efficiently with regard to attending virtual meetings such as Development Control Committee (DCC), pre-application meetings and Appeal Hearings/Inquiries.
- 9 Use of software to hold virtual meetings.
 - a) This includes Development Control Committee, meetings, interviews, team meetings, training events and to keep in touch with and support staff.
 - b) We hold virtual meetings with applicants where physical meetings cannot take place.
 - c) We have delivered virtual training sessions to Members & Town & Parish Councils and will schedule more of these in over the coming months.
 - d) We will add to this the use of digital whiteboards - these will allow meetings and training sessions to be more interactive. We will be able to update notes and presentations in real time, sync to existing laptops and ipads as well as share them.
- 10 Agreed a new vision for the Development Management service since confirmation of the revised Management Structure in March 2020.
 - a) This is supported by all staff, and
 - b) Is linked to strategic objectives to ensure we deliver excellent customer service while refining our processes and build capacity.
- 11 Launch of text messaging service in April 2019.
 - a) We are 1 of 2 planning authorities we are aware of in England to do so.

- b) Applicants who provide a mobile number on their application form are contacted by text message to confirm progress from receipt, validity, end of consultation period, referral to Development Control Committee (if applicable) through to decision.
 - c) Since April 2019 we have sent over 16,500 text messages to 1600 customers with just 25 customers opting out of this service. This ensures customers are kept informed.
- 12 We have developed our own online application service for customers to submit pre-application enquiries, pay and send supporting documents.
- a) Since 1 April 2020 we have received over 300 pre-application enquiries with 90% submitted electronically.
- 13 We have launched an online interactive self-service facility for customers to access and answer the most popular enquiries at their own convenience.
- a) This includes planning constraints (e.g. conservation areas, listed buildings, conservation, AONB and Green Belt boundaries) and property histories.
 - b) Customers can view and download a list of applications and associated documents.
 - c) From 16 November 2020 a charge of £30 per address applies for us to provide information that can be found online.
- 14 With regard to the Arboricultural function we have:
- a) Purchased the digital National Tree Map - this is a layer on our mapping system that provides 3D information about trees in the District.
 - b) We have also used GPS technology to carry out a survey of a site to locate trees and support evidence to obtain an interim injunction to prevent more damage to a woodland.
 - c) We have agreed a process to work with Direct Services to respond to concerns about dangerous trees. DM now triage these enquiries and liaise with Direct Services to resolve them.
 - d) We are working to introduce an online form and application process for customers to submit notifications of urgent works to trees and works to trees in a conservation area.
- 15 A summary of projects we are working on and hoping to roll out over the next 3-6 months are as follows;
- a) Enable customers to download copies of Tree Preservation Orders via the interactive planning constraints map referred to above.

Agenda Item 6

- b) Mirror use of Enterprise software to oversee workflow of Enforcement enquiries, standardise templates and processes and expansion of texting service to Enforcement customers where appropriate.
- c) Development Management to assume responsibility for 'High Hedges' related enquiries from mid-December 2020.
- d) Further use and display of spatial record keeping. For example using GPS technology to locate and document the position of trees and use of 3D modelling to overlay planning application plans and photographs.
- e) Move to electronic consultation on applications with Town and Parish Councils from January 2021. There will be exceptions for Major applications.

16 At the meeting of the Advisory Committee the Planning Improvement and Standards Manager will give a presentation to Members to show examples of the progress mentioned above.

Key Implications

Financial

As this report is just informative, there are no financial implications regarding this report.

Legal Implications and Risk Assessment Statement

As this report is just informative, there are no legal implication regarding this report.

Equality Assessment

This decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the substance of the Equality Act. There is no perceived impact on end users.

Appendices
None
Background
None

Richard Morris

Deputy Chief Executive and Chief Officer - Planning & Regulatory Services

Development & Conservation Advisory Committee 2019/21 (as at 05/11/20)

3 December 2020	4 March 2021	Summer 2021	Autumn 2021
Innovation Update (to include Aboriculture Update)	Adoption of Edenbridge Character Area Assessment SPD	CIL Governance Annual Review Building Control Update	

This page is intentionally left blank