

## 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.

## 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.

- 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.

<p><b>Appendices</b></p> <p>None</p> <p><b>Background</b></p> <p>None</p>
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**Richard Morris**

**Deputy Chief Executive and Chief Officer - Planning & Regulatory Services**