

DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT SOFTWARE PATHFINDER PROJECT UPDATE

Development & Conservation Advisory Committee - 5 July 2022

Report of: Deputy Chief Executive and Chief Officer Planning & Regulatory

Status: For Consideration

Key Decision: No

Portfolio Holder: Cllr. Julia Thornton

Contact Officer: Evelyn Gilder, Ext. 7306

Recommendation to Development & Conservation Advisory Committee

That the contents of this report be noted.

Reason for recommendation: This report is to provide an update regarding the Development Management Software Pathfinder Project.

Introduction and Background

- 1 This report has come to the Advisory Committee to provide an update on progress and achievements of the Development Management Software Pathfinder Project.
- 2 During November 2021 the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) launched an Expression of Interest (EOI) to find councils who wanted to improve their existing development management software.
- 3 Through the DM Software Pathfinder EOI, councils who wished to work with their current development management software provider could apply for up to £150,000 of funding each. The funding available was for a single project or proposal specifically relating to their development management software or process.
- 4 Successful councils would then work with their existing development management software providers over a 12 week period from January 2022 to deliver their project.
- 5 The funding is intended to support short Pathfinder projects only, through which Local Planning Authorities, existing software providers and DLUHC will learn about and take forward opportunities to enhance discrete aspects of

existing development management software products. It is not meant for end-to-end service transformation.

- 6 Successful councils receiving funding should support the improvement of development management software while demonstrating the principles of the Local Digital Declaration.
- 7 An EOI was submitted on 26 November 2021 under the theme of 'Making better use of planning application data'. Namely to introduce improvements to the way applications for works to both protected trees and those in a conservation area can be submitted.
- 8 Our application was successful and we received the full funding requested. We are 1 of the 8 successful councils awarded funding.
- 9 Our intention was to create a 'one-stop shop' where applicants wishing to carry out work to privately owned trees can confirm if the relevant trees are covered by a preservation order (TPO) or within a conservation area. They can then view or download a copy of the TPO and if appropriate proceed to an online application form without leaving the council's website.
- 10 The existing process involved customers having to obtain copies of TPOs on request from officers before being able to submit an application. The proposed process removes this step and allows the customer to access information and submit an application at a time that suits them. The process we have designed would also be compatible with mobile devices to enable more agility and flexibility.

Project Delivery

- 11 Over a 12 week period we have worked with our software provider and consultants appointed by DLUHC. A requirement throughout the project was that all successful councils participated in public online 'show and tell' events hosted by DLUHC mapping our concepts, sharing experiences and learning whilst importantly demonstrating results and successes.
- 12 Our in house IT team have enabled the publication of TPO documents online via our interactive policies map. Customers can now view and download this information. We developed and tested an online application form ensuring it was accessible on various devices.
- 13 On 13 June 2022 we launched our bespoke and intuitive online application form allowing customers to submit an application for works to trees. Customers, such as home and business owners as well as landscaping companies will experience a more efficient and user friendly process available on demand.
- 14 Customers will also have a wider choice of how to submit applications but we are hopeful they will find this process more suitable for their needs.

- 15 Officer time will be saved in dealing with enquiries from customers who either should be able to or would prefer to self-serve on demand. We receive over 700 applications per year and around 1000 enquiries for information.
- 16 Our website has been updated and all relevant staff notified so they can share with customers. We have so far shared our project with Kent Development Managers as well as the London Tree Officer association. Councils we worked alongside on the project have also expressed an interest in adopting our approach.
- 17 DLUHC will shortly publicise the outcomes of the Pathfinder project in a final report and blog written by each council.

Key Implications

Financial

None. This report is for information only

Legal Implications and Risk Assessment Statement.

None. This report is for information only.

Equality Assessment

The 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.

Net Zero Implications

The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the council's ambition to be Net Zero by 2030. There is no perceived impact regarding either an increase or decrease in carbon emissions in the district, or supporting the resilience of the natural environment

Conclusions

We are pleased to have been successful in our application for funding and support from DLUHC. Working with our software provider, in house experts and other councils has enabled the successful delivery of our project. We intend to use the experience and knowledge gained to enhance other online forms such as the pre-application enquiry form and the Planning Enforcement breach reporting process.

Appendices

None

Background Papers

[DLUHC Digital](#)

[Local Digital Declaration](#)

Richard Morris

Deputy Chief Executive and Chief Officer - Planning and Regulatory