

## **BUSINESS SUPPORT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**19 SEPTEMBER 2013**

### **IMPLEMENTATION OF CHARGES FOR THE PRODUCTION OF PAPER COPIES OF PLANNING APPLICATIONS TO PARISH COUNCILS**

Report from: Robin Cooper, Director of Regeneration, Community and Culture

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#### **Summary**

In the light of economic constraints and the increase of planning applications being submitted on line, Development Management has reviewed and carried out changes to the way Parish Councils are consulted on planning applications to make the process more efficient and cost effective.

#### **1. Budget and Policy Framework**

1.1 The decision to amend consultation practices is within the council's policy and budget framework including the Council Plan and is reflective of the promotion by Central Government of e-business and the use of electronic communication.

#### **2. Background**

2.1 At a meeting of the Rural Liaison Committee on 19 March 2013, at a request of Cliffe and Cliffe Woods Parish Council, it discussed the issue of the Council implementing charges on Parish Councils for the supply of planning documents relating to planning applications. This was following a decision by the Council to introduce these charges at its meeting on 21 February 2013 when it set the Council's capital and revenue budgets for 2013//14.

2.2 At the meeting, a Parish Council representative, supported by others, expressed the following concerns:

- it was not possible for a Parish Council to set a yearly precept if it was not aware of the likelihood of costs to be incurred in the oncoming year on receiving planning documents;
- there had been some issues regarding plans not appearing on the Council's website on the date that they should be;
- It was not easy to view A2 plans on a computer;

- Some rural areas did not have adequate broadband access and therefore to be reliant on viewing such documents on line was not satisfactory.
- 2.3 The Committee therefore recommended the Business Support Overview and Scrutiny Committee to scrutinise the impact of this as part of its 2013/14 work programme.
- 3. Advice and analysis**
- 3.1 As Local Planning Authority, Medway Council consults Parish Council' on planning applications within their parish. In the past this has included Medway Council copying and sending the application and accompanying plans to the relevant Parish Council.
- 3.2 Medway Council is under increasing pressure to reduce expenditure and Development Management is looking at all methods of assist this whilst still continuing to meet its obligations and provide a high level of service to our customers.
- 3.3 Previously hard copies of the submitted applications were posted to Parish Council's via the Royal Mail. In the light of current economic constraints and with an increase in the number of planning applications being submitted on line, Development Management has reviewed all its processes to see if they can be carried out in a more efficient and cost effective manner.
- 3.3 The production of plans and postage needs to be kept to a minimum and we have met with Parish Councils within Medway to explore new ways of working. It was appreciated that some Parish Councils will still wish to have a hard copy of plans for some applications, particularly those of a significant nature.
- 3.4 Development Management has met with the Parish Councils and it was agreed that the Parish Councils would be consulted on Planning applications in their area by an email letter giving a deadline for response and how to view the application on line. They will also receive a copy of the weekly list electronically. They will then identify what applications that they require to see hard copies of the plans for. If Development Management has a spare hard copy of the plans then these will be sent. If not then the Parish Councils have agreed to meet the costs of the printing and postage charges for the plans to be printed and sent to them. The Localism Act 2011 requires applicants for significant applications to carry out pre application consultation and to publicise planning applications which they submit. Although not fully in force, it is expected that Parish Council's will receive application documents and plans directly from the applicant. Where this does not happen then Development Management will contact the agents for the applications and ask for them to provide a set of the submission documents for the Parish Council.
- 3.5 The practice was introduced in March 2013 following the Council decision on 21 February 2013 (referenced at paragraph 2.1 above) and has been operating successfully since with no complaint.

#### 4. Risk management

<b>Risk</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Action to avoid or mitigate risk</b>	<b>Risk rating</b>
No comments received from Parish Council on an application	Parish Councils miss the electronic consultation, do not ask for plans and therefore do not comment	Parish Councils are consulted electronically by letter and by copy of weekly list. They can also be approached by residents consulted on an application or by observing a site notice displayed by the case officer.	Low

#### 5. Consultation

5.1 Development Management held a meeting with all Parish Councils on 18 April 2011 and 12 July 2011 and then followed that up with a letter on 26 February 2012. The option has been agreed with the Parish Councils.

#### 6. Financial and legal implications

6.1 The selected option meets the legal obligations of the Council in terms of consultations on planning applications. The selected option will provide saving on postage and plan copying as well as ensuring that future printing costs are borne by the relevant Parish Council, thereby removing a potential additional financial burden on Medway Council.

#### 7. Recommendations

7.1 The practice and procedures introduced be noted.

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#### Background papers

Town and Country Planning (General Development Procedure) Order 1995 (as amended).