<u>**Minutes of an iPlan Users Group held on 16 July 2013
at 10:30am in Committee Room 2, Civic Offices, Epping**</u>

Chair: Peter Millward (PM)

Attendees:

Brian Surtees (BS) – Ongar Town Council
Chris Pond (CP) – Loughton Town Council
Eileen Gough (EG) – Ongar Town Council
Joan Bowerman (JB) – Matching Parish Council
Stephen Bacon (SB) – Epping Forest District Council
Nigel Richardson (NR) – Epping Forest District Council
Theresa Parker (TP) – Epping Forest District Council
Mavis Bird (MB) – Epping Forest District Council
Andrew Rich (AR) – Epping Forest District Council
Michelle Harding (MH) – Epping Forest District Council
Andrew Gardener (AG) – Epping Forest District Council
Chris Redman (CR) Minutes – Epping Forest District Council

PM welcomed everyone to the meeting.

	Action

1.0 APOLOGIES –

Adriana Jones (AJ) – North Weald Parish Council, Richard Witham (RW) – Lambourne Parish Council

2.0 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

All approved the minutes of the previous meeting.

3.0 MATTERS ARISING

3.1 Navigation of Website

CP mentioned that the navigation of the website was still difficult, although agreed with NR that the signposting for accessing planning applications on the homepage had improved. SB explained that ICT had an action plan for improving the website navigation, but this had been frozen as there was opposing guidance from Members. The news site has recently successfully changed its menu system to make it more accessible for mobile phone users – work on improving the navigation of the main site should take place within the next 4 – 5 weeks.

CP noted that Licensing do not have an online archive – this would be useful as there was often a need to ascertain permitted opening hours. SB and PM agreed that this would be useful, but Licensing are not yet as advanced in electronic records and scanning as Planning. It was agreed that a letter from CP to the Chief Executive explaining how useful this would be could help to move matters along.

CP

3.2 Read-only access to Information@Work

(EG entered the meeting)

NR explained that read-only access to Information@Work for Councillors to view documents not currently published to the website was still being looked into - there are problems if you do not use Windows 7 and another browser would need to be downloaded for other versions. ICT are currently investigating this. PM added that we are keen for Councillors to be able to access this extra information, and would like to extend this to Parish Councillors. PM explained that we do not have the resources to place all documents on the website, as many documents (including neighbour letters) have telephone numbers and signatures that will need redacting, but we would like to give the Parish Councillors the opportunity to view them. BS was concerned that Councillors may not be aware that un-redacted information should not be used in a public meeting – PM responded that they would need to sign a data protection agreement first. SB mentioned that if more comments were submitted online, then they could automatically be placed on the website – it was hoped that Councillor access to Information@Work should be in place by next meeting.

(JB entered the meeting)

BS added that although neighbour consultation letters encouraged forwarding any comment to the appropriate local Town / Parish Council, there was not a similar message on the website. CR to update website to include this message.

CR

3.3 Use of WiFi in Committees

SB has now had permission from the Chief Executive to use site-wide dirty access which should improve WiFi access at Committees – this will trial within the next 2 weeks.

3.4 Mapping Systems

SB reported that due to priorities in updating the Gazetteer, the development of the open source mapping system to replace Pinpoint mapping had been delayed – ICT and Environmental Services to meet next week to get the project back on track. PM noted that this would replace Pinpoint that was removed from the old website due to inaccuracies as it was hosted externally. SB added that as we would control the information for the new system we can display not only Planning data with greater accuracy, but also other relevant information from other Directorates.

3.5 Search results

SB has managed to make some amendments to the search facility – he has been able to duplicate the search button as requested, and is waiting to remove the 'wild card' search and altered the wording on the front page to ease usage. CP agreed that it was much better after these alterations, and PM urged Parish Councils to send us their feedback if they have issues in the future with the search facility.

CP asked if there was any progress on the confusion of using apostrophes in the searches, and whether the program could be altered to ignore them. SB and PM noted that a lot of the problems stem from current work to update the Local Land and Property Gazetteer (LLPG) where we are trying to streamline and standardise existing entries to move toward greater accuracy – standard guidelines are to ignore all apostrophes when inputting new data. CP suggested that Parishes could be involved in updating the LLPG as they have a good understanding of the true names of streets / properties in their area – PM advised the LLPG Custodian Carolyn Bintley would be able to work with this. SB noted that when all the information is mapped this will solve many of the existing Parish boundary problems and improve the quality of Parish data.

3.6 Microfiche

PM indicated that while 650,000 images had been scanned in 2012/13, it was estimated that there remained a further four million images on 130 000 microfiche jackets to be scanned. The original pre 1974 planning and building control microfiche records were scanned due to their age and condition as they were considered more prone to deteriation. These can now be used by EFDC to respond to enquiries more efficiently, and we are able to email images on request. PM hopes to have another batch scanned before the end of the year and make further progress with this.

MB added that some of the records are pre 1948 – CP expressed interest in seeing some of these, including previous systems of building plans, and queried whether they should be held in the Essex Record Office. It was agreed that CP and JB would liaise with PM to visit the Civic Offices to view some of the earlier microfiche to look into possible preservation of historic records.

CP / JB
PM

3.7 Issues with browsers

Issues with browsers have been largely resolved, Webcasts are now Apple-friendly – SB advised that ICT were now improving their use with mobile phones.

3.8 Standardisation of plans

NR reported that Local Government has asked each Council to update their validation checklist regarding standardisation of plans and speeding up the validation stage – we are currently in the process of updating ours before this goes to Members for approval. It was agreed that it would be useful for the group to see these amendments for comments before they were submitted – NR to action.

NR

CP mentioned that the lack of scale bars on some historical plans was still a problem.

3.9 Notification of applications to Committee level

MB is continuing to send a list of all applications going to Committee to Town and Parish Councils.

3.10 Site notices

NR to investigate the possibility of officers taking photographs of site notices displayed and importing these as a new document type to be published to the website.

NR

3.11 Shared resources/legibility of plans

CP noted that at their last Parish meeting, 3 out of 13 plans were deemed illegible and so paper copies had to be referred to. It seems the problem in some instances is the paper that is used has a 'silvering' effect when scanned, in particular on plans submitted by Colin Southgate. MB suggested that perhaps AR and AG could try to alter settings on these scanned images to see if any improvement could be made – BS thought that this would prove time-consuming for the person scanning if they were constantly adjusting contrast controls. CP though that Loughton could probably do without paper copies except for these images by Colin Southgate, and NR suggested that perhaps we could contact him to see if other paper could be used.

PM asked whether there was any feasibility of some of the Parish Council's meetings to be fully electronic and to stop receiving paper copies by a certain date,

CP / BS /

possibly 31 December? CP, BS and EG thought that this would be possible for Loughton and Ongar, although CP stipulated that they would need an extension to the time limit for responses for illegible plans so that a paper copy could be obtained. TP noted that the Weekly List contains hyperlinks straight to each set of plans that should help to locate each item easily for meetings. BS added that we would need to be aware that some of the smaller Parish Councils do not have the resources to be fully electronic yet – JB agreed, and commented that Matching still work from paper copies as their Broadband is very slow. SB mentioned that we are trialling 4G on our servers, which will allow us to upload extremely quickly and would be of benefit to small Parish Councils. He added that Final Wireless Broadband will also be installed shortly in the tower at North Weald Airfield, which will improve WiFi throughout the district, and will keep us updated of any further developments with this.

EG

It was agreed that PM would create a list of Parish Councils who were willing to stop receiving paper copies and be fully electronic by 31 December. JB to compile a list of Parishes with least resources, to see whether we can visit them and supply advice / equipment. TP to put a note on the Weekly List summarising both of these points to see who else would be willing to stop receiving paper copies, and who may need more resources.

PM / JB
TP

4.0 **VISITS TO PLANNING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT BY PARISH / TOWN COUNCILLORS AND PARISH CLERKS**

PM noted that earlier in the meeting it was agreed that JB and CP would visit to look at pre 1948 historical information that we may hold on microfiche.

JB / CP

PM also mentioned that any Parish Councillors (especially new members) and Clerks are welcome to visit to familiarise themselves with our processes, and to contact him for further arrangements.

SB suggested that the creation of an online learning package for Parish Councillors may prove useful. JB noted that in the past they have attended sessions arranged by Ian Willett – NR added that 3 more sessions were planned for September.

5.0 **PROGRESS REPORT ON EFDC WEBSITE**

Much of this already covered earlier in the meeting. SB noted that since the flood at the Civic Offices, we will be moving the website externally, and are learning some useful lessons from the incident.

CP asked whether webcasts were archived and how he could gain access to them? SB to provide log-in for CP to gain access to these on trial, and also to use the read-only access to Information@Work as a pilot.

SB / CP

6.0 **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

PM asked the members of the group for confirmation of their continued representation, and all agreed.

NR enquired whether comments from Ongar were not always submitted – BS replied they always met to discuss applications and comments were always sent, and EG agreed that they were sent to both the Planning Officer and appcomment@eppingforestdc.gov.uk. NR suggested that the 'appcomment' email was the preferred method in case an officer was on holiday and a comment was missed from their email account. NR also noted Stapleford Abbotts had not supplied any comments for quite a while.

CP wondered whether our address could be shortened from 'eppingforestdc' to 'efdc' – SB noted that although we have procured the address 'efdc' we cannot use it at present, although we are looking into this further.

SB asked for volunteers from the Parish Clerks for a training session in the use of the system for preparation for electronic meetings – CP suggested that there may be a possibility of him attending the Parishes to see assess their equipment and provide suggestions. PM/SB to liaise.

PM /SB

SB also suggested that a home page for Parishes could be created on the website so that all pertinent information for them is all in one place, in a similar way that a Members home page was created. All agreed that this was a good idea, and that all the feedback provided was proving useful.

SB

BS noted that although the quality of plans had already been discussed, some of the hand drawn plans of the owner occupied applications were not very good – PM suggested that he supply us with feedback when these plans arise, and that we could then look at this perhaps as part of the validation process.

SB has had interest from Chigwell Parish Council in the use of our minutes system – if others Parish Councils are interested, then this could be made available to them. CP suggested that Enid Walsh would be a good contact for this, who could then pass on this information to the network of clerks.

CP

7.0   ADDITIONAL ITEM

Councillor Richard Witham (Lambourne Parish Council) was unable to attend the meeting but however forwarded some comments for the information of the iPlan User Group members which were received after the meeting;

PM/SB

In his e-mail RM said;

I like the way the single link from the EFDC home page to the Planning search page has been created, well done

It would also appear that issues regarding confused/muddled screen layouts on android tablets has been resolved, well done.

There are still some parish councils who do not have access to broadband and asked if EFDC is doing anything to support the Essex County Council's BBUK bid?

Do the EFDC head office's in High Street Epping have public access to broadband Wi-Fi, so that Town, Parish councillors and others can access on-line information, when required, such as for planning discussions? If not why not, as the new Chief Exec promised the EALC he would look into this some months ago.

8.0   DATE OF NEXT MEETING

January/February 2014, PM to confirm date.

PM thanked everyone for attending. Meeting closed 12:10pm