

LOCAL COUNCILS' LIAISON COMMITTEE
Special Meeting on Access to iPlan and Related Issues

Minutes

Date: Thursday 12th November 2009

Place: Council Chamber, Civic Offices, High Street, Epping

Present:

Name	Organisation
Chris Neilan (CN)	EFDC
David Newton (DN)	EFDC
Darius Vara'ee (DV)	EFDC
Victoria James (VJ)	EFDC
Vivienne Messenger (VM)	Loughton Town Council
Chris Pond (CP)	Loughton Town Council
Irene Sullivan (IS)	Buckhurst Hill Parish Council
Janice Curd (JC)	Buckhurst Hill Parish Council
Kay Canning (KC)	Chigwell Parish Council
Joan Bowerman (JB)	Matching Parish Council
Richard Morgan (RM)	Matching Parish Council
Ernie Fenwick (EF)	Matching and Willingale Parish Council
Pat Smith (PS)	Stapleford Abbots Parish Council
Ray Russell (RR)	Stapleford Abbots Parish Council
Bob Whittome (BW)	Epping Town Council
Ann Pegrum (AP)	Epping Upland Parish Council
Val Evans (VE)	Epping Upland Parish Council
Penny Smith (PS)	Epping Upland Parish Council and LCLC Chairman.
Jason Salter (JS)	Abbess Beauchamp & Berners Roding Parish Council
Sue Jones (SJ)	Theydon Bois Parish Council
Sally Crone (SC)	Theydon Bois Parish Council

Apologies:

John Preston (JP)	EFDC
Aimi Middlehurst (AM)	High Ongar Parish Council
Janet Whitehouse (JW)	Ward Councillor – Epping Hemnall

Aims of the meeting (CN)

To allow concerns and issues surrounding iPlan to be raised by Local Councils, and addressed.

To discuss and decide on a way forward.

Response to issues raised at LCLC

- **Timetable for implementation of government's e-planning agenda in Epping Forest district (CN/DN/DV)**

EFDC are continuing with the implementation of iPlan. At some point the government's e-planning portal will take over. iPlan should work along the same lines as the e-planning portal so hopefully the technical difficulties being experienced with iPlan should be sorted out and allow for a smoother transition when the e-planning portal is brought in. We are looking on a timescale of years before the full implementation of the e-planning portal.

Problems identified so far are due to technical difficulties in the linkage between Anite and iPlan, leading to a delay in the time taken for scanned documents to be transferred from Anite to iPlan.

- **Assistance for Local Councils with continued provision of paper copies of documents (CN/DN/DV)**

The major issue raised by the Local Councils was how long paper documents would still be available. With all the technical issues being experienced they feel paper copies are still necessary.

CN assured everyone that it would be wrong for any local council to be disenfranchised, therefore paper copies are essential until all complications, including broadband provision are sorted out. Although the future is in e-planning and paper copies will eventually become redundant, they won't be stopped in the immediate future.

CP discussed the difficulties of using iPlan in a more populous Parish (eg Loughton). With so many applications to discuss it is difficult and very time consuming to compile presentations for the planning committees, particularly for large applications. They have also experienced difficulties in comparing plans.

JS addressed the difficulties of using iPlan in a small parish (Matching) where they have no parish office, no computer equipment and no facilities to project plans. It is easier for them to use paper plans. RR (Stapleford Abbots) expressed similar thoughts. At present planning applications are discussed at Parish Council meetings but the plans are on view to the public at an 'open forum' beforehand. He is concerned that the use of iPlan would mean that transparency with the public might be lost as they would only get to see the plans in the middle of the meeting and not before.

BW put forward some of the beneficial points of iPlan. It allows people to look at applications before planning meetings and it works well for simple applications. The difficulty comes with larger, more complex applications.

The general view is that iPlan is "clunky", often giving too much information. It would help if the documents were more clearly labelled to make navigating around the system easier. There are issues with the scale on plans and the inability to print off any plans above A3 size. It is also proving difficult to be able to compare plans.

DV explained that with the appointment of the new Business Manager (Peter Milward) the streamlining of the iPlan system should happen more quickly and the problems noted above should be sorted out, including either a scaling tool or stickers for each plan indicating scale.

Issues were raised on the presentation of plans. It would be easier if there was a uniform way of submitting the plans. It seems as if EFDC are trying to make applications fit an electronic system – it would be better if the drawings were done in a way that would comply with what can be easily scanned and downloaded. CN will pass on the request to planning officers.

If anyone has any examples of other Council websites that are working well please make CN aware.

CN undertook to report all issues back to JP including the feeling that even a fully functioning iPlan system will not be able to completely replace paper copies. Local people like to come into the Parish Office to view plans, regardless of government requirements.

A suggestion was made that the cost of providing an extra copy of plans for Parish Councils could be passed on to the applicant.

There was a general consensus that a major problem with iPlan is being able to get a large volume of documents into a workable format for committee presentations and that more help should be available:

- contact DV or CN if any help/ training is needed, and the need can be addressed;
- is there any software that would make it easier to transfer plans from iPlan into a PowerPoint presentation/ could EFDC provide plans in PowerPoint format? DN will look into it.

- **Assistance for local councils with information on help available for access/ equipment (CN/DN/DV)**

Half the Parish Councils have computer facilities and internet access, half don't.

Can EFDC provide any help/ any equipment? CN: not possible to give financial or resource assistance but can continue to give advice on sources of grants and training on using the systems.

JS reminded everyone that £1000 was given by Lord Hanningfield to each Parish Council for IT use. If Parishes still have some left this could be used to improve computer facilities.

PS asked if there was Wi-Fi access in the Civic Offices. DN confirmed that it is available in the Council Chambers at the moment – speak to DN for access.

- **Technical issues/ difficulties in accessing iPlan**

DN explained how a lot of work has recently been done on improving the iPlan system. Timing out issues have been resolved, wording, links, the search screen and overall display have all been improved.

All feedback on the system is welcomed as it helps to improve it and is necessary to rectify any problems. We are not in overall control of the product but will do as much as possible to make it work for everyone.

General opinion from the Parish Councils is that now the 'time out' function has been resolved iPlan is working much better and now we are only dealing with minor problems. Darius Vara'ee will be the first point of contact for technical issues.

Darius Vara'ee: **01992 564 482** dvaraee@eppingforestdc.gov.uk

VE asked if the link from the Weekly List to individual planning applications was now working. DN will look into this.

Some Parish Councils receive an electronic form of the Weekly List, others don't. Could this be e-mailed to everyone?

At the request of the Council Chairman CP will give a brief summary of the current situation regarding iPlan at the next Local Councils' Liaison Committee meeting.

- **Incomplete nature of information on iPlan**

When looking up some old applications there are often 'no documents available'.

Many older applications (from the 1970s and also some in the 1990s) are on microfiche. These can be viewed at planning reception or if details are provided of what exactly is required they can be scanned and sent out.

80% of the back-scanning has been completed but there are still a few gaps. With the new Business Manager in place this should hopefully be brought up to date in the near future.

Need for further meetings

It was agreed that with the assurance of no immediate loss of paper copies and as long as EFDC continue to monitor iPlan and sort out any technical problems that crop up, there is no need to have a further meeting of this group.

It was suggested that input from Parish Councils might be useful in the development of iPlan, so it was proposed that a small working party be set up with the particular remit of liaison with EFDC officers as to the performance and accessibility of iPlan. DN agreed; he felt that it will be important to establish whether the system is working properly and is providing the necessary information. Improvements can only be made if the problems are known.

CN thanked everyone as the meeting was very helpful in clarifying the overall situation with iPlan, especially on the issue of paper copies. CN will report back to JP regarding the proposed working group.

AOB

The current situation regarding e-consultation:

- This will not be rolled out until all technical issues have been resolved.