

Minutes of an iPlan Users Group held on 26 September 2012
at 10:30am in Committee Room 2, Civic Offices, Epping

Chair: Peter Millward (PM)

Attendees:

Richard Witham (RW) – Lambourne Parish Council
 Chris Pond (CP) – Loughton Town Council
 Joan Bowerman (JB) – Matching Parish Council
 Eileen Gough (EG) – Ongar Town Council
 Stephen Bacon (SB) – Epping Forest District Council
 Nigel Richardson (NR) – Epping Forest District Council
 Andrew Rich (AR) – Epping Forest District Council
 Theresa Parker (TP) – Epping Forest District Council
 Mavis Bird (MB) – Epping Forest District Council
 Chris Redman (CR) Minutes – Epping Forest District Council

PM welcomed everyone to the meeting.

		Action
1.0	APOLOGIES –	
	Brian Surtees (BS) – Ongar Town Council, Adriana Jones (AJ) – North Weald Parish Council	
2.0	MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING	
	All approved the minutes of the previous meeting.	
3.0	FEEDBACK REGARDING USE OF IPLAN / WEBSITE	
3.1	Navigation of Website	
	CP noted that the EFDC website had changed in its format, but was finding it more difficult to navigate the system. He had found it hard to bookmark when using several computers, and that although the new website looked better it was hard for the user to get to where they would want to be. SB commented that the home page now had a direct link to the Planning Explorer for ease of use. The layout of the home page had been amended by senior management just before the system went live, and this was now going to be changed back to how the Website Team had originally wanted it. There will be 3 task boxes below the banner, with the links to the top 5 or 6 tasks in each topic. The decision of where to place consultations by the Council would always open to debate, and there would be some thought in the future about where they could be placed. The Website Team were checking where visitors to the website were going and monitoring the situation, and at that point there had been over 10,000 hits with not too many problems. Extra pages created by the Directorates that were now deemed unnecessary would be removed to ease the navigation tabs.	
3.2	Read-only access to Information@Work	

	PM mentioned that plans were in motion with District Councillors to gain read-only access to the back-end of the system (Information@Work), to allow them to have access to certain other planning elements not currently published on the website within the next few weeks. The second phase would be to roll this out for Parish Councillors to gain access to objection letters etc, and this would need a group of volunteers to pilot the scheme. RW wondered why objection letters could not be sent out with the other notifications? NR noted that we would have to print all the letters at a considerable cost. CP asked if they could be published on the website with the other documents, but PM stated that they would have to be redacted to comply with the Data Protection Act and that EFDC did not currently have the resources for this. PM asked the iPlan Users Group representatives to nominate Parish Councillors to pilot the read-only access scheme for potential future use of this scheme.	All
3.3	Use of WiFi	
	RW wondered why there was not public WiFi at the Committees, as this would prove useful to view other applications that may be linked to those being discussed. SB replied that it was on its way, but was awaiting the go-ahead from the new Chief Executive. They were working on getting Modern.Gov, the Committee system used by the Council, onto Android, which should cut down on paper usage, but advice was currently being sought because of the legal obligations to provide paper at the moment.	
3.4	Mapping Systems	
	SB talked about the developments with the new mapping system for the website. Colleagues in Environmental Services had been developing an open-source mapping system that will be hosted internally, and a demo version should be released within the next 2 weeks for testing. PM noted that this could potentially replace Pinpoint mapping, that was removed from the old website due to inaccuracies.	
3.5	Search results	
	CP asked whether there had been any developments on the search facility on the Planning Explorer, and whether it was possible to search without the percentage sign? SB commented that the database supplied by Northgate for this system was awkward to manipulate to remove this function, but that there is a 'quick search' by application number that is more visible now on the new website. CP noted that when using this there is not another option for further searching, which leads to a potential dead end – SB to look at amending this. CP also wondered if the search results button could be moved from the bottom of the screen to the top to make this clearer – however, SB had tried this previously, but this had broken the system. RW noted that there were 2 lines of text on each search button that were unnecessary – SB to change to read 'quick search' and 'advanced search' only.	SB SB
	EG had noticed that when search results were produced that the EFDC watermark was more prominent and sometimes obscured the text – could it be removed? SB stated that it needed to be on plans and maps to stop others from re-using them, but the watermark could be made more transparent. CR to liaise with Shipra Bhajpai in IT to dial back the strength of the watermarks.	CR
	RW found it frustrating that in the search results on the Planning Explorer you still had to look through every document line by line, and that you couldn't download all the documents at once. SB to see if anything can be done to resolve the situation.	SB
	CP noted that there was a recent application where an important element for a	

	decision relied on a linked application from 30 years ago. However, the Clerk was unable to find it using the 'search parish' parameter as it had been incorrectly assigned to another parish. TP stated that this could be an ongoing problem from Plantech, the previous system used by the Council, that was updated to the current Northgate system. SB agreed, and said that the pre 1987 registers should be reliable, but from 1987 to the period Plantech finished could contain errors. CP suggested that some text could be added the 'search by parish' function stating that it should be not used between these dates – AR to implement.	AR
3.6	Microfiche	
	CP asked about the progress with the unscanned microfiche for the website. PM reported that quotations were being obtained to get them scanned and indexed – PM would look to prioritise the oldest, and would be looking initially at the pre 1974 fiches. A full audit had revealed there are over 21,000 fiches with 30 to 50 images per jacket – authority has been granted to bring forward some of the scanning budget to cover the process, and it was hoped that by the end of the financial year this first phase will have been scanned. By the end of 3 or 4 years, it is hoped that all the microfiches would have been scanned and indexed.	
3.7	Issues with browsers	
	CP noted that issues with browsers had largely been resolved and that the system worked better with Google Chrome. SB mentioned that this had been tested and was working well, and that they were now working to make webcasts become more Apple-friendly.	
3.8	Standardisation of plans	
	NR mentioned that the anomalies in information supplied by applicants on submitted plans had been raised at the recent Chair/Vice Chair meeting. These issues were due to be raised at the next Agents forum, but this had not yet taken place, and he still had to talk to the planning agents. He was currently awaiting information from the Government about standardisation of plans, who have said that there was too much delay at the validation stage, and will pass on that advice at the next meeting.	NR
3.9	Notification of applications to Committee level	
	MB asked whether the list of all applications going to Committee she had started sending was useful to the Town and Parish Councils? All agreed that it was helpful and should continue.	
3.10	Site notices	
	In the previous meeting CP had wondered whether pictures could be taken of the yellow site notices that were often missed, and whether the GIS system could be used to tell users exactly where the notice was? NR said that this had not progressed any further, and may prove difficult to roll out.	
3.11	Shared resources/legibility of plans	
	CP had raised the issue of sharing resources needed to display images for meetings between the Parish Councils at the last EALC meeting. However, objections were raised from some of the rural parishes who met mainly in hired halls and found that there was no facility for accessing the web. PM thought that if they targeted the bigger Town and Parish Councils to paperless meetings, then	

	they could help out on the resources for the smaller meetings. CP thought that the matter had got worse because of the legibility of scanned plans – if the Council could accept a delay in comments from Parish Councils on a legibility basis, then they may be able to try to push more paperless meetings. NR wondered if the delay was because of the legibility of scanned plans, and how this could be resolved? Sometimes the quality of the original plans was questionable and should be resolved at the validation stage. CP noted that some plans produced by particular people (e.g. Colin Southgate) were particularly bad. PM asked the iPlan representatives to identify those that were consistently problematic and that these could be targeted first to improve the service. SB noted that if a PDF is losing its quality, this could be resolved by the Parish Council's using TIFF images. PM to meet with SB to see how the images could be further improved.	All PM/SB
3.12	Adjacent area consultations	
	CP asked whether adjacent area consultations were scanned? AR noted that they were scanned on the back-office system, but not published to the web – PM said that this information would be available on the read-only access to the back-office system previously discussed. CR mentioned that a recent application for Fieldes Lock had been placed on the website as a news item, with the links to the adjacent authority's website, and all agreed that this had worked well.	
4.0	VISITS TO PLANNING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT BY PARISH / TOWN COUNCILLORS AND	
	PM thought that there had not been many visits by Parish/Town Councillors and Parish Clerks to planning recently, and was keen to have some new visits. CP noted that they had 4 new Town Councillors for Loughton, and would try to arrange a visit. SB also mentioned that if some extra training support was needed he could see if he could put together a training package in the Council's IT room if there was enough demand.	CP
5.0	PROGRESS REPORT ON EFDC WEBSITE AND	
	Much of this already covered earlier in the meeting. SB stated that since the new website went live we have had 99.95% uptime - CP and RW agreed that downtime was much improved. The benefits of designing and producing the website in-house had made a saving of £18,000 per year and saved £50,000 in Capital Procurement Costs. The next step would be to look at hosting the site externally for extra security. CP noted that information about the Parish Councils was not yet included on the website – SB said that this would be updated in the future as so much of the previous information was out of date.	
6.0	ANY OTHER BUSINESS	
	PM asked the members of the group for confirmation of their continued representation, and all agreed.	
7.0	DATE OF NEXT MEETING	
	January/February 2013, PM to confirm date.	
	PM thanked everyone for attending. Meeting closed 11.50am	