# *Report to Local Council Liaison Committee*

Epping Forest District Council

## *Date of meeting: 10 July 2014*

**Subject: Parish Councils iPlan User Group report**

**Officer contact for further information:  Peter Millward (4338)**

**Committee Secretary: M Jenkins (4607)**

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**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

**That the following be noted:**

**(1). That a meeting was held with members of the iPlan User Group on 29th May 2014. A copy of the minutes of the meeting is included as Appendix A of this report.  At this meeting, discussions focused on the difficulties in accessing broadband combined with slow internet access speeds which in turn created difficulties in downloading planning information on iPlan, from the District Council Website.**

**(2). That Epping Forest District Council is working hard to provide a number of support measures to assist Parish and Town Councils to be able to move towards paperless planning. It is expected that further meetings will take place with Parish Clerks during 2014 to provide training and support to implement paperless planning.**

**(3). That Development Management (Planning) has been working closely with the iPlan User Group regarding the allocation of projectors/screens for the display of planning information at Parish Council planning meetings. The allocation of grants towards the purchase of projectors/screens was that firstly Epping Forest Council would purchase the projectors and secondly that the District Council will not be responsible for the maintenance of the projectors including equipment failure, once handed over to the respective Parish Councils.**

**(4). That it is important to note that no further paper copies of plans received electronically will be distributed to Parish/Town Councils in paper format from 1st October 2014 due to resource limitations.**

**Summary**

The ratio of electronic planning applications to manual paper planning applications continues to increase with Epping District Council currently receiving 46% of all applications in electronic format. Nationally the latest information from the Planning Portal is that 82% of all planning applications across the country are now being processed in electronic format. This adds some urgency on the need to support Parish Councils to move from receiving manual paper planning applications to receiving planning application information in electronic format.

This report summarises the steps being taken towards supporting Parish Councils move towards paperless planning. It also recognises the importance of improving the quality and operation of iPlan. It is agreed that there are some difficulties are being experienced by the Parish Councils in downloading plans and planning documentation and Development Management is working hard to try to resolve these difficulties. Currently Development Management is printing and copying full sets of documentation for distribution to individual parish councils which will be discontinued from 1st October 2014.

**Report**

1. That the submission of electronic planning applications from the National Planning Portal comprises nationally of over 82% of all planning applications with indications that this may increase to over 90%.The current ratio of electronic planning applications for Epping Forest District Council is expected to increase to over 60% in the next twelve months. For example the total electronic planning applications received nationally across the country reached the one million mark in February 2012 and increased to over one point five million in November 2013.

2. The ratio of electronic to manual planning applications is increasing every year and electronic applications now currently comprise of 46% of all planning applications submitted to Epping Forest District Council.

| CALENDAR YEAR | TOTAL PLANNING APPLICATIONS RECEIVED | ELECTRONIC PLANNING APPLICATIONS VIA PLANNING PORTAL | % OF PLANNING APPLICATIONS SUBMITTED ELECTRONICALLY VIA PLANNING PORTAL |
|---|---|---|---|
| **2009** | 2389 | 446 | 18.7% |
| **2010** | 2484 | 685 | 27.6% |
| **2011** | 2572 | 809 | 31.5% |
| **2012** | 2389 | 896 | 37.5% |
| **2013** | 2615 | 1070 | 40.9% |
| **Jan to May 2014** | 1209 | 555 | 45.9% |

3. Notification was given at the meeting of Local Council Liaison Committee on 6$^{th}$ March 2014 that from 1$^{st}$ October 2014 Epping Forest District Council will no longer be able to print and distribute electronically received planning documentation to Parish/Town Councils due to resource limitations. However copies of plans received in paper format will continue to be distributed to Parish/Town Councils.

4. Development Management in Planning intends to support Parish/Town Councils through this process with the following support measures;

   (a) A limited amount of small projectors will be provided to assist the smaller Parish Councils in presenting Planning Applications electronically. This will form a grant to the Parish Councils concerned and that specifically Epping Forest District Council will not be responsible for the maintenance or replacement of any equipment provided.

   (b) Parish and Town Council feedback is being actively encouraged both from the iPlan User Group and from individual Parish Councils. This will provide important quality checking information about iPlan.

   (c) In addition Parish and Town Councils have been encouraged to visit planning to both familiarise themselves with planning processes but to gain an understanding of the electronic processing of planning applications.

(d) Epping Forest District Council ICT section raised the issue of connectivity with BT Superfast Broadband, as there were still issues in getting Broadband to some areas. ICT are currently talking to Buzzcom about providing a new long-distance wireless broadband service to beam broadband to some of the Town and Parish Councils who are having problems. They are currently looking at services for North Weald and Chigwell Parish Councils and the status is that they have already contacted North Weald and their engineers are running path profile for Chigwell to see if a connection is achievable.

(e) A pilot project is in the process of being set up to investigate whether it is feasible to provide direct access to planning documentation held in Epping Forest District Council on their Information@work in house ICT system for Parish Council Clerks. The benefits of this if successful, the image quality of plans is better that that held on iPlan, documents may be able to be downloaded quicker and that there may be a measuring tool available.

**Reason for this report**
This report provides an update of the progress being in assisting Parish Councils to move towards paperless planning. This is due to the increasing national trend where electronic planning applications comprise of over 80% of all submitted submit planning applications. Epping Forest District Council is no longer able to sustain the costs of printing and distributing paper copies of planning applications received electronically to Parish/Town Councils.

**Consultation undertaken:** N/A

**Resource implications:** Development Management is no longer able to sustain the increasing costs of distributing paper copies of planning applications received electronically.

**Background papers:** None