

RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL REPORT TO PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Agenda Item No.

meeting date: THURSDAY, 2 JULY 2015
 title: REVISIONS TO CONSULTATION PROCEDURE ON PLANNING APPLICATIONS
 submitted by: JOHN HEAP, DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY SERVICES
 principal author: JOHN MACHOLC, HEAD OF PLANNING SERVICES

1 PURPOSE

1.1 To report on a review of development management protocol in respect of Parish Council consultation procedures.

1.2 Relevance to the Council's ambitions and priorities:

- Community Objectives - }
 - Corporate Priorities - }
 - Other Considerations - }
- To be a well-managed Council, providing efficient services and to ensure the authority provides value for money within the current financial constraints.

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 The Town and Country Planning Act 1990 places a duty on the Local Planning Authority to notify the Parish Council about planning applications relating to land in the Parish. To comply with the duty, the Local Planning Authority must either (a) send the Parish Council a copy of the application; or (b) indicate to the Parish Council the nature of the development which is the subject of the application and identify the land to which it relates.

2.2 The Local Planning Authority currently undertakes both (a) and (b) by providing the Parish Council with a hard copy of all plans and documents associated with a planning application and a consultation letter, which includes a description of the development and a site address. The current Parish Council consultation procedures therefore go above and beyond what is required to comply with the duty.

2.3 An information report was taken to Planning and Development Committee in May 2012 which confirmed that the Parish Councils would no longer receive hard copies of plans and associated documents as part of the consultation procedure and that they would where possible receive e consultations or a letter with a link to the documents. This would be consistent with the way in which all other statutory consultees are informed. However, it was agreed to report the changes to a Parish Council Liaison Committee.

2.4 Changes to development management protocols were discussed at the Parish Councils' Liaison Committee meeting on 15 June 2012. Whilst a number of revised protocol measures discussed at this meeting were subsequently implemented, Parish Council Members expressed concern at the intention to no longer send hard copies of planning applications as many Parish Councils did not have the necessary technical equipment to handle the downloading of plans. Although the report was noted and accepted it was subsequently agreed to defer the revised consultation procedure. The Local Planning Authority has therefore continued to send a hard copy of planning applications to Parish Councils, at a cost to the development management service.

- 2.5 Since 2012 it is now evident that there has been a significant increase in planning applications that are submitted via the Planning Portal form around 20% to 65% with the majority of major proposals submitted electronically. When applications are submitted via the Portal there is no requirement for the applicant to submit hard copies of the documents.
- 2.6 Following a recent meeting with all Lancashire districts, it is now evident that no other District sends hard copies of plans to Parish Councils or other Statutory consultees.
- 2.7 Most authorities circulate an electronic copy of the weekly list to Parish Councils to notify them of planning applications. They submit a weekly list of planning applications identifies the relevant Parish, site address and description of development for each application. Some authorities also send consultation letters, both in hard copy and electronically.

3 ISSUES

- 3.1 I am mindful of the previous concerns expressed by some parishes but it is vital to consider efficiency savings and improvements to the overall planning service. Although it has been previously agreed to no longer send Parish Councils plans as it was deferred at the discretion of the Head of Service I now consider it appropriate to request Committee to endorse the changes.
- 3.2 Since the decision to defer implementation there has been a significant change in the way applications are submitted with an increase in the number of Planning Portal applications and the increase in number of comprehensive associated documents that are attached to major proposals all of which are submitted in an electronic format. There are significant costs associated with providing hard copies of planning applications to Parish Councils, including printing costs, postage costs and officer time. In relation to major proposals, these are often cases where there in excess of 20 plans as well as numerous ancillary documents, such as Design statements, Heritage Statements, Ecology reports and Transport Statements. The cost of printing documents has been assessed at around £10,000 and the amount of officer time involved in printing and then scanning the documents is considerable. I am of the opinion that in freeing up admin time spent on this process it would enable the whole consultation procedure to be more efficient and earlier consultation with all stakeholders, officers to receive applications quicker and with the ultimate aim of quicker decisions being issued and all the associated benefits.
- 3.3 The benefits to the Parish would be include earlier access to the documents, a direct link to the plans that could be forwarded to others as required by the Parish and also save on storage issues. It is the intention to make the officers hard copy available on request and in cases when additional copies are submitted by the applicant these will be available at reception and could be borrowed by the Parish Council.
- 3.5 Since the introduction of the web site and the uploading of planning application most documents can be viewed on line. It is also evident that there is a significant reduction in the numbers of members of public wishing to inspect hard copies of the plans. In relation to Parish Councils on a major application proposals stakeholders such as the Parish Council are normally approached prior to submissions with plans made available by the applicant. It is suggested that to assist Parish Councils, the LPA could suggests to applicants to submit a hard copy of documents to the Parish Council/Town Council at

the time they submit a final planning application. It is accepted that this may not be the final version of and that the Parish would still need to refer to the consultation document.

- 3.6 The Local Planning Authority now sends the majority of its consultation letters via email as this is the most effective way of sending consultations – it ensure consultees have the full 21 days to respond to the consultation as opposed to losing 2 days waiting for letters to arrive in the post and each electronic consultation also includes a direct link to the application on the Council's website, which assists the consultee in viewing the application online. It is my opinion that this should now be cascaded to all Parishes. It is evident that one Parish clerk has no email address and so a hard copy of the consultation will be sent in that instance.
- 3.7 In order to continue to provide a more efficient service to all users I would continue to review the consultation procedure and it may be possible to have minor alterations to the consultation procedure and I would suggest that as this an operational matter these should be continued to be delegated to the head of Service. One example is that on Major applications a site plan could be attached to the e consultation letter if it was considered to be beneficial to the Parish. that e consultation letters would be sent to Parish Councils in hard copy in relation to all major applications.
- 3.8 In relation to neighbour notification letters the LPA continues to send neighbour notification letters, place formal and informal site notices and advertise in newspapers as appropriate. In some cases on major schemes there have been cases when over 300 individual households have been notified. It is clear that this is now a significant financial cost in relation to postage and printing the letters and also has a considerable impact on staff time and other office issues. I consider that where appropriate there should be a reduction in the numbers of neighbour letters issued and in most cases it should normally only sent out to adjoining residents. To compensate for this I would advocate an increase in informal site notices. I recognise this may have a slight impact on the perceived service but I am satisfied that in most cases people are aware of development proposals and often are informed by directly looking at the planning website or by the applicant. I would suggest that the website should advise applicants of the benefits of contacting adjoining neighbours direct and that any pre application meeting should give similar advice.

4 RISK ASSESSMENT

4.1 The approval of this report may have the following implications:

- Resources – The changes to development management protocol would result in time and resource efficiencies.
- Technical, Environmental and Legal – The Local Planning Authority would still comply with its duty to consult a Parish Council by sending the consultation letter and site location plan.
- Political – None.
- Reputation – As the measures would result in an overall improvement to the Planning Service it would enhance its reputation.
- Equality & Diversity – No implications identified.

5 RECOMMENDED THAT COMMITTEE

- 5.1 Accept the proposed changes to the development management protocol in respect of Parish Council consultation procedures and neighbour notification letters in the interests of delivering a cost effective and efficient planning service.
- 5.2 Delegate future minor changes to the Development Management Protocol to the Head of Planning Services.

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For further information please ask for John Macholc, extension 4502.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

P & D report 24 May 2012
PCL report 15 June 2012
DM Protocol Revised July 2013

REF: JM/EL/2/7/15/P&D