

Strategic Planning and Sustainable Transportation Committee

7 February 2017

E-Planning – Parish Copies of Applications

Final Decision-Maker	Rob Jarman
Lead Head of Service	Rob Jarman – Head of Planning (MBC)
Lead Officer and Report Author	Ryan O’Connell
Classification	Public
Wards affected	All parishes

This report makes the following recommendations:

That the committee note the planned change in the way that planning applications are provided to parish councils.

This report relates to the following corporate priorities:

- Keeping Maidstone Borough an attractive place for all
- Securing a successful economy for Maidstone Borough

Timetable

Meeting	Date
Strategic Planning and Sustainable Transportation	7 February 2017

E-Planning - Parish Copies of Applications

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 To inform the Committee of the next steps in the introduction of E-Planning which specifically relate to how information is provided to parish councils. The report sets out the options considered and informs the committee that option 1 is the option that will be implemented.
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2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 2.1 MKPS is in the process of delivering its electronic planning project. This is part of the original vision for the shared service agreed by the council and it is driving changes to achieve an efficient and modern planning service.
- 2.2 The most efficient way for applicants to submit, and MKPS to receive, applications is via the planning portal (i.e. electronically) as they are entered into our systems automatically which in turn is good for the general public and other organisations as the information is made available via the website easily. We currently receive 70-75% of applications through the planning portal. The more we drive through this route the better for turnaround times, cost and transparency with the exception that all printing requirements fall on the Council for applications submitted this way. In order to maximise efficiency it is therefore crucial that we reduce the printing requirements in MKPS.
- 2.3 Printing costs an estimated £60-75k a year for MKPS which is made up of printing of documents during validation, printing of letters, printing of applications for planning officers and printing of applications for parish councils. Of that cost about 50-55% of the cost can be attributed to staff time, about £10k is for leases of largescale devices and the remainder (£20-25k) is for print consumables and machine click charges.
- 2.4 The production of hardcopies of planning applications for parish councils is a significant proportion of the printing requirements of MKPS and as part of a series of print reducing proposals the aim is to reduce print cost by £30k in 2017. For every application submitted via the planning portal in a parish area a copy of the application is produced to post to parishes, the postage carries with it a cost of around £6k a year. A reduction in the need to post documents would therefore also produce a direct saving into MKPS' budget.
- 2.5 It was also envisaged that MKPS would drive paperless process improvements across the planning service as a whole. A number of options were proposed when the pilot project for paperless applications was started with parish councils in 2014. This was put on hold due to performance issues at that time. Those options have been revisited below to test they are still viable.
- 2.6 The main barrier identified by parishes is poor quality broadband in some areas. There are a number of solutions available to this that will be

discussed with parishes depending on their individual need. Many parishes are in areas with good or acceptable broadband and this will not be an issue for them.

3. AVAILABLE OPTIONS

3.1

1. Implement E-Planning for planning application documents comprehensively with at least 2 months notice	
<p>The objective in this option is to remove all paper copies provided to parish councils and provide links to our website with the expectation that they will access the applications as all our consultees (such as the environment agency and KCC) do.</p> <p>In recognition of variations in broadband quality across the borough and current capability in different parish organisations allow several months so that MKPS officers can work with parish councils to assess the practicalities of making this change, making bespoke arrangements where needed.</p> <p>Where parishes have barriers to implementation, such as those identified in the 2014 consultation, the roll out of this change and solutions to it will be discussed with them individually.</p>	
Pros	Cons
Quick No capital costs No additional revenue costs Potential for reduced print savings depending on individual support needs of parishes Clear deadline	Change will not equally impact all parishes Some may consider precepting Potential for complaints from parish councils (short term)

2. Implement E-Planning for planning application documents comprehensively and provide Grant Support	
<p>The objective of this option is the same as Option 1; the additional element is the provision of a capital pot of funding for parish councils to purchase IT equipment to enable them to display planning applications at meetings.</p>	
Pros	Cons
No additional revenue costs Potential for reduced print savings depending on individual support needs of parishes Clear deadline	Potential delay to stopping paper copies of planning applications Capital funding required Administration for the funding required and consideration of

	assessment
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3. Full Funding	
The objective of this option is the same as for Option 1; the additional elements are the provision of a capital pot and revenue funding for parish councils to purchase IT equipment to enable them to display planning applications at meetings and to fund broadband. Remove all paper copies by a delayed deadline in order to allow parishes time to set themselves up for the change.	
Pros	Cons
Recognises the differing needs of parishes Clear deadline Parishes get new IT equipment and broadband that can be used for multiple purposes	Delay to stopping parish copies Capital funding required Revenue funding required Some parishes may require support in setting themselves up (IT) Parishes may require ongoing support (IT) Complicated to administer and could lead to disputes Expectation of capital replacement fund in the future

4. Retain hardcopies	
No change from current arrangement.	
Pros	Cons
No investment costs No need to make any changes No complaints from parish councils	No saving of revenue or staff time Costs will increase as planning portal usage increases Parish councils don't get funding for new IT equipment

4. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 The preferred option is option 1
- 4.2 This option delivers the required efficiencies to save money and is affordable whilst providing support and allowing parish councils enough time to adjust to the change. It also provides flexibility to deal with the individual needs of smaller and more remote parishes (particularly where high speed broadband is an issue).
- 4.3 Any changes to services to parish councils need to be considered in the context of the Parish Charter. The charter sets out an expectation that

parishes and the Council will work electronically where possible and maximise the efficiency of IT. Option 1 is consistent with this approach.

- 4.4 The minimum 2 month period identified at Option 1 satisfies the consultation period of 6 weeks for the change, as set out in the Parish Charter. This will be achieved through dialogue with Parish Councils individually in order to provide an opportunity for them to raise any issues that clearly demonstrate that for their parish this new arrangement is not deliverable. Each parish response will be considered and responded to in accordance with the parish charter.

5. CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK

- 5.1 A consultation was carried out with parishes in 2014 which demonstrated that parishes could adapt to operating electronically only for planning applications, but some individual parishes may need bespoke support.
- 5.2 An additional consultation on individual parish needs is proposed (as set out in 6.2 below).

6. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION

- 6.1 KALC will be informed of the changes that Maidstone Borough Council aims to implement and the process for this in advance of a letter that will be sent to parishes outlining the change.
- 6.2 A letter would then be drafted to the parish councils to inform them that copies of applications would cease, and set a date (recommended as 1 April 2017). This will also kick off a consultation period, in accordance with the parish charter, that will allow parishes the opportunity to raise any issues that clearly demonstrate that for their parish this new arrangement is not deliverable. Each parish response will be considered and responded to in accordance with the parish charter.

7. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
Impact on Corporate Priorities	An efficient planning service impacts on all corporate priorities	Head of Planning and MKPS Mgr
Risk Management	There are always risks arising from implementing changes the main risk mitigation approach being to allow time for parish councils to adjust to the change with advanced notice and to consult on issues in accordance with the	Head of Planning and MKPS Mgr

	parish charter.	
Financial	The aim of this change is to deliver savings towards each Council's MTFS	S151
Staffing	Staff time would be saved in reducing printing of parish copies. This would then be considered alongside other savings delivered in the MKPS Improvement plan for realisation as actual savings through reduction in FTE	MKPS Mgr
Legal	There is no legal requirement for parishes to be provided hardcopies of applications but the changes need to be practicable and made in accordance with the parish charter.	MKPS Mgr
Equality Impact Needs Assessment	The change is being applied to parishes and is not considered to disproportionately impact on any particular group. Specific requirements for hardcopies of documents will be dealt with under the usual means of access for those with disabilities or difficulties accessing the electronic planning register.	MKPS Mgr
Environmental/Sustainable Development	Printing less documents produces less paper and print waste.	MKPS Mgr
Community Safety	None directly	
Human Rights Act	None directly	
Procurement	None directly	
Asset Management	None directly	

8. REPORT APPENDICES

The following documents are to be published with this report and form part of the report:

None.

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None.