

Report to the Council

Committee: Cabinet

Date: 1 November 2011

Subject: Planning and Technology Portfolio

Portfolio Holder: Councillor John Philip

Recommending:

That the report from the Planning and Technology Portfolio Holder be noted.

Technology

(a) *Corporate Website replacement.*

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) presented a demonstration of the new website replacement to the Finance and Performance Scrutiny Panel on 15 November. The current website is not flexible and is expensive to develop, requiring external consultancy to enhance functionality. The new version has been developed in-house based on open-source software and will allow us to realise revenue savings of approximately £15,000 per annum. For those who were unable to attend, a video demonstrating the new website can still be viewed at;

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QFrKZUPgoak>

(b) *Mobile Working Solutions*

ICT are currently working towards a solution which will allow the Facilities Management TREND system to be available on the Corporate Local Area Network (LAN). This system controls many of the Civic Offices environmental systems such as the monitoring and adjustment of the heating system. By integrating this system onto the LAN, many of these types of issues can be addressed remotely without the need for staff to attend on-site and therefore reduce the associated costs.

(c) *SMS (Mobile Phone - Text Messaging) using Outlook.*

ICT have implemented a pilot SMS system which will enable staff working off-site, to use their mobile phone to contact their colleagues using the internal email system. The message sent on the phone appears in the same way as a standard email and can be replied to using the Microsoft Outlook system.

This system is also capable of sending automated text messages to registered external users, to remind them of specific events, for example revised bin collection dates, Council

Tax reminders etc. This system has the potential to benefit the public and is substantially cheaper than other forms of communication. It is anticipated that this system will be available early in the financial year 2012/2013.

(d) Wireless Broadband

The wireless broadband Invitation to Quote (ITQ) is due to close on 30 November. This project will link the computer systems between the Civic Offices and the disaster recovery site in Loughton and will also make wireless broadband connectivity available to residents within Epping Forest District.

Planning

(a) Local Plan

The Planning Advisory Service have come forward to provide Forward Planning with assistance on the delivery of our Local Plan. Two key areas they will focus on are project management and timetable for delivery.

The Localism Act was enacted in November 2011 and covers the abolition of Regional Strategies, and the introduction of Neighbourhood Planning and Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL). The Act allows for a “meaningful proportion” of the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) receipts for a particular area to be channelled to the local community to spend as they wish it. A letter was sent to all town and parish clerks, by EFDCs Forward Planning team regarding neighbourhood planning. This included information of how they should proceed should they be interested in pursuing a community plan.

As reported at the last Council meeting, a series of Local Plan related Member information/briefing sessions are being arranged by the Forward Planning team. These will be scheduled in the coming months. Members will be notified via the Bulletin of these events and information will be available and displayed in the Members room.

(b) Development Control

An appeal against the Council's serving of an enforcement notice alleging land raising on land between the M11 motorway and Langston Road has been dismissed by the Planning Inspectorate. The Planning Inspector agreed that the land had been raised by as much as 5 metres in some places through the importation of clay, soils and demolition waste and supported the Council on the planning merits. The owner has 1 year to remove the material. There is however, a planning application for the site, waiting to be made valid, for a warehouse and distribution building and use that includes the land at the current built-up level.

An appeal against the refusal of planning permission for a commuter car-park at The Old Foresters Site, Theydon Bois is now to be decided at a Public Inquiry, date to be agreed in the new year. We are employing highway consultants to defend the highway reason for refusal, including carrying out traffic and parking surveys, given there was no objection raised by Essex County Council and the appellant has also employed their own highway consultants.