

3 (d) **Electronic Records Document Management System**

Given the rural nature of Epping Forest District Council, the placement of electronic planning information online mainly via i-Plan has potentially saved a considerable amount of long journeys to Epping Civic Offices. These records were previously only available during office hours at Epping Forest Council Offices. A significant and large amount of Planning records are now electronically available online on a 24 hour basis, retrievable by members of the public from our website at any location that has access to a PC and the Internet.

Planning applications that have been placed on our website are available for the public to view on i-Plan, Epping Forest District Council's interactive planning website.

http://www.eppingforestdc.gov.uk/Council_Services/planning/iPlan.asp

For example some of the most frequently asked requests are about planning and building control applications are readily available by clicking a variety of links such as;

Search Planning Application Records;

<http://plan1.eppingforestdc.gov.uk/Northgate/PlanningExplorer/GeneralSearch.aspx>

The main page for Epping Forest District Council Website;

<http://www.eppingforestdc.gov.uk/>

contains the following links on its main page;

Planning Permission;

<http://www.eppingforestdc.gov.uk/index.php/residents/your-environment/planning-development-control/how-to-apply-for-planning-permission>

Building Regulations approval;

<http://www.eppingforestdc.gov.uk/index.php/residents/your-home/building-control>

The Directorate of Planning and Economic Development follows the template of action outlined in Appendix Two – Electronic Records Management Progress Plan as part of the process of moving away from paper based manual office systems to Electronic Record and Document Management Systems (ERDMS). The Implementing Electronic Government (IEG) policy is part of the core requirement of Governments drive to modernise local authorities and the services that they provide. Local Authorities are required as an essential part of e-government aims to implement this through the use of modern business practises and electronic record keeping.

The key area's that support the delivery of numerous benefits derived from making available information online are I-plan and electronic records delivered by our Corporate Website <http://www.eppingforestdc.gov.uk/>. While a number of technical and resource difficulties have been encountered, significant progress has been made in facilitating easier remote access to planning information across Epping Forest District. For example in mid 2011, due to a decline in visitor numbers, we were able to reduce the opening hours of our reception to mornings only. This enabled us to re- allocate resources to further enhance 'back office' i-Plan and support for electronic records. As a result we have been able to make significant savings gained from increased speed of work, reductions in the costs of printing, post and use of resources. However it is acknowledged that there is still much work to do in implementing further steps towards paperless planning. Our biggest challenge at this time is to provide the foundations where at a future date and time we will be able to seamlessly move into providing a full range of paperless Planning, Policy, Development and Building Control operations.

In 2012 – 2013 we carried out a 'health check' exercise to ensure that we are able to make better use of our primary planning and building control database – Northgate M3. Part of this has also involved developing and improving our Crystal Report performance reporting capacity. This has provided important key performance management information as well as supporting initiatives to implement improved faster business processes using fewer resources.

In addition in the year under review we have been able to carry out an audit of our Development Control historical planning microfiche records and are in the process of arranging with an external contractor to convert approximately 750 000 microfilmed historical planning images into PDF format. We have also commenced the scanning of all incoming Building Control information and are combining this with the implementation of a facility for Building Control applications to be accepted electronically via the 'submit-a-plan' system. Due to the large amount of paper Building Control files we commenced a project with Northgate Documents Online Bureau Services to 'back scan' 3000 paper Building Control files. It is our aim to progressively carry this out each year subject to the availability of resources both to aid the electronic availability of Building Control files and reduce the space required for the archiving and storage of Building Control paper files.