

# **Report to Planning Scrutiny Panel**

**Date of meeting: 2 September 2014**

**Subject: Progress Report Electronic Information Systems  
Development Management**

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**Committee Secretary: Mark Jenkins (Ext 4607)**



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**To consider and note a report on Electronic Information Systems for  
Development Management – Governance Directorate 2014 - 2015**

## **Summary**

- (1 ) The following report outlines the Improvement Plan Electronic Information Systems - Development Management 2014 – 2015 as shown on Appendix One. This Improvement Plan details the different actions required to promote better access to electronic records and reduce Development Managements dependency on manual paper and microfiche records. Each paragraph in the report corresponds with the number sequence of Appendix A.
- (2 ) Significant progress has already been made with Parish Councils for them to access and present electronic planning applications at meetings. Development Management has been able to provide a limited amount of funding to allocate electronic projectors to Parish Councils to assist them with the electronic presentation of plans at their Parish/Town Council planning meetings. To date twelve Parish Councils have applied for grant funding for this from Epping Forest District Council.
- (3 ) Progress has been made in taking steps towards reducing Development Managements dependence on manual records with the last phase of microfiche scanning for Development Control due to commence and this will speed up business process access to these important historical microfiche records. Work is expected to continue in 'backscanning' paper Large Site, Contaminated Land and Building Control records as current storage space has almost reached the 'overflowing' stage.
- (4 ) Encouraging progress is also being made in rolling out of portable tablets and other equipment to promote flexible and mobile working. However it is accepted that this is the very first steps in this regard with significant work required to move this from the 'testing' stage to the actual implementation and rollout of mobile/flexible working.

## **Report:**

1. Development Management are heavily dependent on the smooth operation of its primary planning database for both Development Control (DC) and Building Control (BC). Linked to this is Information@work, the information management software where all plans, maps, photographs and documents are stored. There is an urgent need to engage a full time permanent Systems Administration Officer to co-ordinate and manage Northgate M3 and Information@work both for Planning/Building Control and iPlan on the EFDC Website. This post has previously been covered by a Trainee Technical Officer from 2010 to 2013. A temporary arrangement the trainee technical officer was put in place pending the outcome of the Corporate Restructuring process. A Business Case to create one post of Technical Officer Systems Administration has now been submitted as part of Development Management restructuring proposals in September 2014.

2. Work continues to take place to improve the electronic access to planning information by Parish and Town Councils. There are significant benefits in reducing the use of paper both in the short term and long term. Epping Forest District Council is no longer able to sustain the printing of plans and other documentation that have been received electronically to circulate to Parish/Town Councils. One of the key elements of reducing paper usage is to channel shift resources towards providing better quality online access to planning information which links in with items 5, 6, 8 and 9 of the Improvement Plan – Appendix A. Improved access to iPlan and other electronic Information will create cost savings and support 'back office' support for iPlan. However while no Parish Council has indicated that there is no internet access at all within their Parish's, it is accepted that Internet access in some areas is limited and many Parish Councils also have limited access to suitable computer equipment that is required to support this. Progress has been made with many Parish Councils now able to access and present electronic planning applications at meetings. Limited funding for electronic projectors has been made available to Parish Councils to support the electronic presentation of plans, with twelve Parish Councils as at late August 2014 making application for this grant funding.
3. The development of Crystal Reports has helped to aid faster business processes and availability of Performance Management information. Further development in improving Building Control Performance monitoring information and the production of a Weekly List for Enforcement to replace the current manually prepared list will further aid business process improvement. This will be a key role for new post of Systems Admin and Technical Officer as a User Expert to further develop this as an essential element of business process improvement.
4. One of the barriers to the provision of quality Planning and Building Control services is our inability to accept payments online by card for both DC and BC. We currently have this facility available as part of the electronic planning portal process where 46% of all planning applications are processed. However Building Control at this time do not have this facility and currently rely on the limited Submit a Plan process which does not include the acceptance of electronic payments.. An integrated payment solution for BC may be resolved once Northgate rollout online BC applications and/or if the Planning Portal provides a BC application service.
5. There is a need to support visible improvements to both i-Plan and other Planning/Building Control electronic records on EFDC Website. The iPlan User Group has met regularly and provide very good examples of feedback to assist in improving the quality of iPlan and planning information on the EFDC Website. The introduction of Web Mapping linked to planning and building control information is scheduled to be rolled out in late 2014 and it is hoped to be available on the EFDC Website in 2015.
6. Significant progress has been made in scanning large site files, however, in particular, four key sets of very large site files, the Gunpowder Mills and Royal Ordinance Site in Waltham Abbey, North Weald Airfield and Ninefields Estate remain to be indexed and scanned as well as the Contaminated Land Files. There is a high level of public interest in these files and once completed this information will be available to all officers across the council who in turn will be able to make this information more readily available to members of the public.
7. There is a significant number of planning history address anomalies that need correcting. An initial scoping exercise has been carried out identifying historical timescales with the largest percentage of errors. Initial indications are that to fully resolve this will take one admin resource between 12 – 18 months to fully investigate, identify and correct the majority of address errors.  
With the transfer of the Local Land and Property Gazetteer Address Management Officer to ICT the responsibility for planning history accuracies remains within Development Management. A large amount of historical address inaccuracies need to be corrected. This will lead to better informed planning decisions and accuracy in terms of information provided to solicitors and agents regarding properties by the Local Land

Charges section. In addition it will help to promote greater LLPG Address accuracy which is an important council priority.

8. A project to convert microfiche records to electronic format is due to begin in November/December 2014. The aim is convert the 71 000 historic Development Control microfiche jackets (4 million images) to electronic format during the course of the next twelve months. This is required because the existing microfiche records are over thirty years old and are deteriorating due to exposure to light and frequent handling.
9. There is a need to reduce Building Control's dependence on paper records as existing storage space has reached maximum capacity. The conversion of Building Control Paper Records to electronic format is part of the modernisation of Building Control who are not as well advanced in terms of electronic working as Development Control is. This will also support flexible mobile working and help BC business continuity with electronic back up files available 24/7 at any location. Some progress has already been made with a large batch of BC files that have been scanned and quality checked as part of the secure destruction of these files in February to March 2014. Further work is planned to build on this progress to scan another large segment of archived Building Control files from January to March 2015. However this will be subject to the availability of resources and funding to carry this out.
10. ICT are leading on this. Development Control including Enforcement is currently in progress using Surface 2 Network devices. The Building Control trial using Android devices commences August/September 2014. The rollout for Trees and Landscape is currently on hold pending Building Control trial feedback. The roll out of Tablets for flexible working for DC, BC, Trees and Landscape will assist in mobile and flexible working. It will also aid business continuity and remove barriers to future 'paperless' working.

**Reason for recommendation/decision:**

This progress report is a key element of the Work Programme to Planning Scrutiny Panel for 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2014. It is proposed that Appendix One will form the basis of the Electronic Information Systems Improvement for Development Management 2014/15.

**Consultation undertaken:**

ICT (SB)

**Resource implications:**

Resource requirements for some actions to achieve specific key objectives for 2014/15 are still to be agreed by Finance as part of the budget process.

**Background papers:**

Appendix A -Updated Improvement Plan Electronic Information Systems - Development Management 2014 – 2015

**Environmental/Human Rights Act/Crime and Disorder Act Implications:**

There are no specific implication implications arising from the recommendations of this report. However steps are being taken as part of the Improvement Plan Electronic Information Systems for Development Management to decrease paper usage and to encourage Epping Forest residents to make use of iPlan and associated website information are climate and environmentally friendly measures in line with the carbon reduction objectives of the council.