

A meeting of the **CABINET** will be held in **CIVIC SUITE A, GROUND FLOOR, PATHFINDER HOUSE, ST MARY'S STREET, HUNTINGDON, PE29 3TN** on **THURSDAY, 18 MARCH 2010** at **7:00 PM** and you are requested to attend for the transaction of the following business:-

APOLOGIES


**Contact
(01480)**

1. MINUTES

To approve as a correct record the Minutes of the special meeting of the Cabinet held on 16th March 2010 (to follow).

**Mrs H Taylor
388008**

2. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

To receive from Members declarations as to personal and/or prejudicial interests and the nature of those interests in relation to any Agenda item. Please see notes 1 and 2 below.

3. REQUEST FOR A LOAN TO THE WILDLIFE TRUST FOR BEDFORDSHIRE, CAMBRIDGESHIRE, NORTHAMPTONSHIRE AND PETERBOROUGH. (Pages 1 - 6)

To consider a report by the Head of Financial Services outlining a request for a loan from the Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Northamptonshire and Peterborough.

**S Couper
388103**

4. RURAL STRATEGY FOR CAMBRIDGESHIRE 2010-2015 (Pages 7 - 38)

To receive a report by the Head of Environmental and Community Services on Cambridgeshire Acre's Rural Strategy.

**D Smith
388377**

5. DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT PROCESS WORKING GROUP (Pages 39 - 76)

To consider a report by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being).

**Mrs J Walker
387049**

6. EXCLUSION OF PRESS

To resolve:-

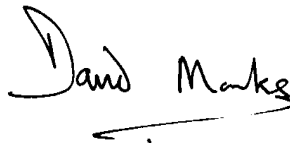
that the public be excluded from the meeting because the business to be transacted contains exempt information relating to the financial or business affairs of particular persons.

7. SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATE FOR NATIONAL NON DOMESTIC RATES RELIEF (Pages 77 - 78)

To consider a report by the Head of Customer Services regarding an application for hardship relief from National Non Domestic Rates.

**Mrs J Barber
388105**

Dated this 12 day of March 2010

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David Marks". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath the name.

Chief Executive

Notes

1. *A personal interest exists where a decision on a matter would affect to a greater extent than other people in the District –*
 - (a) *the well-being, financial position, employment or business of the Councillor, their family or any person with whom they had a close association;*
 - (b) *a body employing those persons, any firm in which they are a partner and any company of which they are directors;*
 - (c) *any corporate body in which those persons have a beneficial interest in a class of securities exceeding the nominal value of £25,000; or*
 - (d) *the Councillor's registerable financial and other interests.*
2. *A personal interest becomes a prejudicial interest where a member of the public (who has knowledge of the circumstances) would reasonably regard the Member's personal interest as being so significant that it is likely to prejudice the Councillor's judgement of the public interest.*

Please contact Mrs H Taylor, Senior Democratic Services Officer, Tel No. 01480 388008/e-mail Helen.Taylor@huntsdc.gov.uk /e-mail: if you have a general query on any Agenda Item, wish to tender your apologies for absence from the meeting, or would like information on any decision taken by the Cabinet.

Specific enquiries with regard to items on the Agenda should be directed towards the Contact Officer.

Members of the public are welcome to attend this meeting as observers except during consideration of confidential or exempt items of business.

Agenda and enclosures can be viewed on the District Council's website – www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk (*under Councils and Democracy*).

If you would like a translation of
Agenda/Minutes/Reports or would like a
large text version or an audio version
please contact the Democratic Services Manager
and we will try to accommodate your needs.

Emergency Procedure

In the event of the fire alarm being sounded and on the instruction of the Meeting Administrator, all attendees are requested to vacate the building via the closest emergency exit.

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CABINET

18 MARCH 2010

**REQUEST FOR A LOAN TO THE WILDLIFE TRUST FOR
BEDFORDSHIRE, CAMBRIDGESHIRE, NORTHAMPTONSHIRE AND
PETERBOROUGH
(Report by the Head of Financial Services)**

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Northamptonshire and Peterborough (the Trust) is working with the Council and other partners on the Great Fen Project. They have asked whether the Council would be willing to grant them a loan for up to £1.2M.
- 1.2 The illustrative Great Fen Masterplan, approved by Cabinet on the 17 September 2009 for public consultation, outlines the social and environmental benefits of this major project. Annex A provides further information.

2 THE PROPOSED LOAN

- 2.1 The proposed loan would enable the Trust to acquire, as soon as possible, the leasehold of some key land which will substantially assist in delivering the Great Fen Masterplan. The Trust already owns the freehold of the land.
- 2.2 The Trust is confident that over the next few years it will obtain sufficient donations and grants to repay the loan given the status and significance of the Great Fen project. It is therefore seeking a flexible arrangement which allows repayments when they are available, thus avoiding the significant additional cost that banks impose for early repayment, with a fall-back period of ten years.
- 2.3 Clearly the Council needs to protect its position in the, probably unlikely, event that this funding is not achieved. The Trust is therefore proposing to provide security through a piece of high quality agricultural land that they own and which is let on a short term tenancy. The Council would be able to sell the land for a sum at least equivalent to the value of any outstanding loan and interest.
- 2.4 The Local Government Act 2000 permits a local authority, subject to certain limitations, to do anything they consider likely to achieve the promotion or improvement of economic, social or environmental well being of their area, which includes a power to give financial assistance.
- 2.5 It is considered that the project meets this requirement and whilst none of the limitations appear to prevent us making such a loan

this will be confirmed before any loan is finalised.

- 2.6 The Council's Treasury Management Strategy sets the balance between reward and risk for any investment the Council makes and provides delegated authority to the Head of Financial Services to agree variations which will reduce or only marginally increase that level of risk. The key issues are that:
- an adequate rate of interest is set to ensure there is no net cost to the Council.
 - the security provided ensures the Council could easily and speedily receive the return of its funds and any outstanding interest.
- 2.7 The Trust expect to complete the purchase by October and, by then, they may be clearer on the results of further fund raising or grant submissions which could reduce the loan amount and the fall-back number of years for the agreement. They would therefore like the loan to have an initial period of up to five years that is interest only which, as long as the security is agreed at an adequate value, would not be an issue for the Council.
- 2.8 They are comfortable with a variable rate loan but would like a cap on the maximum interest rate. The Council will ensure that it is left with no net cost by adding a margin to base rate to ensure that a surplus is achieved with the cap level being subject to negotiation.
- 2.9 The Trust need to reach agreement with the Council so they have the ability to finalise their negotiations with the tenant knowing the funding will be available. The completion of the loan agreement will be subject to the terms meeting the requirements of the Treasury Management Strategy, the Director of Commerce and Technology and the Head of Legal and Estates. The Trust will pay the legal costs of the agreement.


3. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Cabinet approve a loan of up to £1.2M being provided to the Trust subject to the Director of Commerce and Technology and the Head of Legal and Estates being satisfied with the terms and security.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Correspondence with the Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Northamptonshire and Peterborough

**Contact
Officer:**

Steve Couper, Head of Financial Services
 01480 388103

THE GREAT FEN PROJECT

The Great Fen Project is one of the most significant habitat restoration projects ever undertaken in Britain. The project however, is by no means exclusively about wildlife as it will create a massive green space for people, opening up new opportunities for recreation, education and business. The aims of the project as set out in the emerging Masterplan are:

- To create a new resilient fenland landscape which delivers major wild life benefits and achieves high standards of sustainability in all respects.
- To create an accessible, inspiring and tranquil environment for recreation, education, health and well being.
- To contribute to diversification and development of the local economy, consistent with environmental and social objectives.
- To plan, design and manage the Great Fen to benefit climate change adaptation and mitigation.

The project aims fit closely with those of the Council, particularly:

- The provision of strategic open space both in terms of access to the countryside and in association with the significant growth of the District;
- Diversification of the economy especially in NW Huntingdonshire;
- Promotion of healthy lifestyles;
- Conservation and enhanced local heritage;
- Protection and improvement of wildlife habitats;
- Adaptation and mitigation in the face of climate change.

and also align with and contribute to the achievement of the Council's key strategies, including the :

- Sustainable Community Strategy,
- Core Strategy (Spatial Planning),
- Local Economic Strategy,
- Environment Strategy.

The Great Fen is a key component of the Green Infrastructure Strategy for the Cambridge Sub Region linking with other areas of strategic open space including Paxton Pits and around Needingworth and Grafham Water. The project is given statutory force by inclusion in the Regional Spatial Strategy (now with the Council's adopted Core Strategy part of the 'Development Plan' for Huntingdonshire).

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**REQUEST FOR A LOAN TO THE WILDLIFE TRUST FOR BEDFORDSHIRE,
CAMBRIDGESHIRE, NORTHAMPTONSHIRE AND PETERBOROUGH
(Report by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being))**

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 At its meeting on 11th March 2010, the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) considered the report by the Head of Financial Services on a request for a loan, which has been received from the Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Northamptonshire and Peterborough. This report contains a summary of the Panel's discussions.

2. THE PROPOSED LOAN

- 2.1 The Panel has discussed detailed aspects of the proposed loan and the wider implications of it. With regard to the terms of the loan, Members have expressed concerns about the security being offered. While an independent valuation will be obtained from the County Council (at the cost of the Wildlife Trust), it has been pointed out that there have been significant fluctuations in the value of agricultural land in recent years, which could mean that the future value of the land might not match the value of the loan. In addition, the Council should consider whether there is a reasonable chance that, should it be necessary, the sale of the land can be achieved. These points should be taken into account during negotiations on the security provided as part of the loan agreement. Any agreement should comply strictly with the terms of the Council's Treasury Management Strategy.
- 2.2 The Panel has suggested that the Wildlife Trust's funding raising plans should be examined to establish whether they are realistic and achievable. It has also been suggested that the Wildlife Trust's request for a cap on the maximum level interest that is payable should not be granted and that alternatives to the flexible repayment arrangements should be explored.
- 2.3 It has been reported that the level of return the Council will receive in return for the loan will be greater than that which could be achieved through investment through financial institutions. Members recommend that negotiations with the Wildlife Trust should aim to maximise the Council's return on the sum loaned.
- 2.4 On the wider implications of the report, the Panel is divided on whether the Council should approve the principle of the loan. A Member has commented on the rise in the importance attached to food security, particularly as the Great Fen occupies high quality agricultural land, and that the loan should not be used to encourage local farmers to relinquish their farm tenancies. The view has also been expressed that the Council should take into account whether there is a risk that it might suffer damage to its reputation either by being a cause of loss of agricultural land or through the failure of the loan arrangement. In order to reduce this risk, it has been suggested that a condition of the loan should be that the outstanding governance arrangements should be resolved.

- 2.5 Other Members of the Panel have expressed support for the Great Fen Project, pointed out that the loan would further this aim and should be regarded as a financial transaction, which will bring benefit to the Council.
- 2.6 The Panel has discussed whether the Wildlife Trust should sell the land it is offering as security and use the proceeds to purchase the new land. However, if a loan is taken and repaid in the way suggested, the Wildlife Trust will eventually own both areas of land.

3. CONCLUSION

- 3.1 On being put to the vote, the Panel has decided to recommend the Cabinet to approve a loan of up to £1.2M being provided to the Wildlife Trust subject to:
- i) the Director of Commerce and Technology and the Head of Legal and Estates being satisfied that the terms and security are completely robust;
 - ii) the maximum interest rate payable not being capped; and
 - iii) the governance arrangements for the Great Fen Project being approved.
- 3.2 The Cabinet is invited to consider the comments of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) as part of its deliberations on the report by the Head of Financial Services.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Report on Request for a Loan to the Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Northamptonshire and Peterborough.

Contact Officer: A Roberts **(01480) 388015**

**Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being)
Cabinet**

2 March 2010

15 March 2010

**Rural Strategy for Cambridgeshire 2010-2015
(Report by the Head of Environmental and Community Services)**

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to enable members to make known their views on the above strategy document, so that the authority's comments can be fed back to Cambridgeshire ACRE by the 23 April when the consultation period ends.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Cambridgeshire Together Board commissioned Cambridgeshire ACRE to produce on their behalf a rural strategy for Cambridgeshire that sets out the "future viability of the county's rural areas". The strategy document assesses the challenges of living and working in the Cambridgeshire countryside. The strategy document also reviews Cambridgeshire's rural economic well-being and sets out a long term vision for rural Cambridgeshire.
- 2.2 During 2009 Cambridgeshire ACRE held a number of consultation events across Cambridgeshire to gather the views of statutory agencies, community organisations, rural business and individual residents on both the challenges and opportunities that living and working in rural Cambridgeshire presents.
- 2.3 At its meeting in December 2009 the Cambridgeshire Together Board agreed that the document headed Rural Cambridgeshire, Ensuring a Vibrant Future, A Rural Strategy for Cambridgeshire 2010-2015 should go out for consultation from 1 February – 23 April 2010 following which Cambridgeshire ACRE will produce a final document for consideration by Cambridgeshire Together.
- 2.4 The Rural Strategy document has been circulated to officers within the authority and specific officer comments are set out in response to what actions are proposed to be taken in the report in Appendix 'A' of this report. In addition to the report been discussed and considered at the meetings outlined above the rural strategy document is due to be discussed at the Huntingdonshire Strategic Partnership board meeting on the 3 March 2010.

3. CONCLUSION

- 3.1 Whilst the ambitions of the rural strategy are commendable and some are complementary to the District Council's objectives. The strategy fails to take into consideration the present economic challenges facing statutory agencies and could possibly commit the authority to programmes/initiatives that are not Huntingdonshire priorities. The rural strategy consultation document states "how we can get there and who can make it happen" at no point within the document is there any reference as to which agency or agencies will be responsible for delivering and funding the actions outlined in the document or regards to actions already been undertaken or provided.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 5.1 Members note officer comments on strategy document
- 5.2 Members comments requested on strategy document

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Rural Cambridgeshire Strategy Document

Contact Officer: Dan Smith – Community Manager
☎ 01480 388377

Appendix 'A' What actions will be taken – Officer comments	
	OFFICER COMMENTS
LIVING IN THE COUNTRYSIDE	
Priority 1: Preventing rural deprivation	
Use OCSI (Oxford Consultants for Social Inclusion) data to develop and interpret the Cambridgeshire rural evidence base to influence how local services are provided in rural parishes.	No comment other than clarification regarding who will fund the work
Liaise with parish councils and attend rural community events (such as meetings and fairs) in order to raise awareness of fuel poverty, energy efficiency, grants for repairs and assistance available for vulnerable rural households.	District Council offices already attend a number of community events promoting energy efficiency measures.
Ensure each parish has at least one local service / meeting place that provides a 'social hub'.	Over the last 11 years the District Council has extensively invested via its grant aid budget to both the provision of and improvement to village meeting places (Village Hall's)
To achieve one new intervention in an agreed area of deprivation in each district.	The District Council via its 3 neighbourhood management programs is actively working in partnership with a variety of other agencies both statutory and voluntary on a number of interventions in areas of highest need within Huntingdonshire
Develop Neighbourhood Forums as a way of clustering parishes in rural areas in order to develop wider approaches to local issues and needs.	Neighbourhood forums have been established and are operational in Huntingdonshire.
Priority 2: Building local homes for local people	
Build relationships and gather best practice information from Rural 80 and Rural 50 local authorities on how they deliver affordable housing through all available methods, including Section 106 agreements.	No comment

Develop a Countywide set of principles to ensure effective development in rural communities on rural exception sites, in agreement with the Regional Spatial Strategy		Officers have with this proposal to meet a set of criteria prior to planning consent been issued.
. Rural proof District Local Development Frameworks to ensure rural housing provision is catered for and that it will aid rural community sustainability.		This is un-necessary as the LDF would have gone through a raft of sustainability tests before adoption
Continue to conduct an independent Housing Needs Survey where applicable to ascertain local needs and make people aware of the results.		The undertaking of surveys should be targeted at areas where evidence suggests that there may be a need, requires further investigation. Any undertaking of housing needs survey would require additional financial resources.
Set affordable rural housing development targets for rural exception sites.		Targets for rural housing may be acceptable and will probably be a subset of NI 155 – Number of new affordable homes built each year.
Continue to develop Cambridgeshire's Affordable Rural Housing service bringing together Local Authority Housing Providers (RSLs), Local Authorities and parish councils in order to address proven need in rural areas.		No comment
Explore the concept of Community Land Trusts for delivering affordable rural housing in Cambridgeshire.		Statutory agencies can release their land to housing associations for housing if in appropriate locations; this does not need to be done through a community land trust.
All statutory agencies to assess their own estates for land which could be released for the provision of affordable housing.		This is undertaken as a matter of course.

Priority 3: Protecting and enhancing rural services		
Monitor the change in provision of rural services by repeating the Rural Services Survey (last undertaken in 2007).		No comment other than clarification regarding who will fund the work
Build relationships and gather best practice information from Rural 80 and Rural 50 local authorities on how they are supporting reducing the decline in rural services.		No comment
Support multifunctional mobile service facilities, such as libraries, police, citizens advice bureau and health services, to work together to bring services to rural areas.		CCC already operate mobile library services in Huntingdonshire and the District Council via its service agreements with Hunts CAB and DISH financially support the provision of both outreach and home visiting advice services in Huntingdonshire.
Support communities with saving essential rural services that are under threat.		No Comment
Provide support to community groups / parish councils for widening the use of existing buildings (e.g. village halls, churches, libraries, etc.).		As previously stated over the last 11 years the District Council has extensively invested via its Capital Grant Aid budget to both the provision of and improvement to village meeting places (Village Halls)
Priority 4: Providing access to local healthcare		
NHS Cambridgeshire to promote local service provision in order to allay fears.		No comment
Work with parish councils and other community groups to identify gaps in local service provision and consider what services could be provided.		The District Council along with other Cambridgeshire District Authority's have already commissioned Cambs ACRE to work with Parish Councils to undertake parish plans (statements) that should identify any service provision gaps.

Priority 5: Widening transport options		
Undertake a consultation to understand attitudes towards public transport.		For the vast majority of rural residents, the car is the only option and despite the objectives of the rural strategy will remain so.
Rural proof new Local Transport Plan to ensure that it reflects local rural needs.		The wording used to a certain extent implies that other options will be available to all, for the vast majority of rural residents, the car is the only option and despite the objectives of the rural strategy will remain so.
Support the development and implementation of accessibility action plans in the LTP priority action areas, informed by a robust evidence base and genuine stakeholder participation.		Developing accessibility action plans is an LTP objective but it is very unlikely that funding will be available to implement fully as elements will not be affordable.
Roll out of a Demand Responsive Transport scheme across Cambridgeshire and evaluate its success.		This statement implies that funding is in place to make it happen this is not the case. Developing a demand responsive scheme is an LTP objective but it is very unlikely as elements will not be affordable.
Map community transport provision in each District in order to identify gaps and opportunities for integration of services.		Mapping of community transport provision is ongoing and been undertaken by CCC.
Encourage cycling and walking between rural communities by making footpaths and bridleways suitable for everyday, year round use—perhaps by introducing a network of ‘inter village routes’ that are off road but surfaced (and possibly lit) in such a way that make cycling and walking possible at all times.		HDC and CCC have a current priority list of 30 rural cycling projects across Huntingdonshire but in reality a budget to only take the top 5 forward. In reality this is an initiative that has little hope of delivery.

Priority 6: Supporting and strengthening local communities		
Co-ordinate a training programme for all parish councils that supports the increased use of the Well-being Power.		No comment this would be an issue for Parish Councils to finance themselves.
Support parish councils to own and run community assets through the Well-being Power.		No Comment
Support and encourage parishes to achieve Quality Parish status.		No Comment
Support and encourage the development and delivery of Community Led Plans by ensuring appropriate mechanisms at all levels for responding to actions identified.		As stated previously the District council along with other Cambridgeshire District authority's have already commissioned Cambs ACRE to work with Parish Councils to undertake parish plans (statements) that should identify service provision gaps. The reporting procedure for community led planning is via the Huntingdonshire Strategic Partnership.
Provide training and support for local people to develop the community leaders of the future.		This work is undertaken already e.g. How your Council works course operated in Huntingdon, Ramsey and St Neots.
ECONOMIC WELLBEING		
Priority 1: Improving employment opportunities		
Encourage specialist business advice for self-employed people at all stages of work to gain skills and develop their business.		The District Council is already working with a range of agencies and organisations providing support & advice to individuals who are or are considering establishing a self-employed business.
Ensure full allocation of the funding available through the Fens Adventurers Rural Development Programme in order to increase land-based businesses.		There needs to be better publicity of the funding programme. Additionally the reporting and monitoring requirement for the Fens Adventures Programme are disproportionate to the level of funding provided and as funding is paid in arrears creates major obstacles to small business wishing to take advantage of the funding programme.

Attract a wider range and larger number of businesses to set up and expand in rural Cambridgeshire.	No comment
Encourage the development of rural workspaces in appropriate locations by ensuring that appropriate references are made in Local Development Frameworks.	No Comment
Encourage the growth of home based businesses.	No Comment
Investigate the potential for reduced business rates as a means of encouraging rural business growth.	Part of the DRR scheme applies to rural properties. The District Council already provides mandatory relief (50% where applicable) The District Council have the power to 'top up' the relief and the council bears 75% of the cost of the top ups. The authority already grants 100% relief to all rural Post Offices. Any additional increase in granting discretionary relief would require an MTP bid.
Influence decision makers to draw attention to the consequences of digital exclusion.	No Comment
Priority 2: Maintaining and enhancing market towns as essential service hubs	
To increase support for tourism in market towns through local farm diversification and business development.	Officers whilst supporting these aims consider it necessary that a diversity of business and local supply chains are required to ensure the sustainability of market towns in addition to tourism and farm diversification.
Produce a master plan for each market town.	Clarification would be required as to what such a master plan would cover that is not already been done? Who would undertake and finance the master plan?

Priority 3: Improving skills through education and training		
Support initiatives which increase qualification attainment levels (both higher and basic skills) in sectors where there are emerging employment opportunities.		No comment
Work with rural employers to improve the skills of their workforce, in order to equip them for the business challenges of the future.		This can be increased by the promotion of work based learning.
Encourage collaboration between businesses and further education facilities to develop apprenticeships with the intention of encouraging young people to stay in rural Cambridgeshire.		This work is already ongoing via the Cambridgeshire Learning Partnership's established in each District Council in Cambridgeshire
LAND AND ENVIRONMENT		
Priority 1: Making the most of Cambridgeshire's unique landscape		
Develop a project where parishes are supported to create green infrastructure plans.		No comment other than clarification regarding who will fund the work
Support communities to develop projects that increase biodiversity and access.		No comment other than clarification regarding who will fund the work
Priority 2: Mitigating the impact of climate change		
Work with parish councils to increase the awareness of the impacts of climate change to allow them to lead communities in making a difference.		The District Council already provides extensive information direct to residents, and parish councils.
Undertake Cambridgeshire specific scenario planning on the effects of peak oil and peak water on rural communities, using existing projection models.		Support but have major concerns regarding 'Peak Water' this must deal with both abstraction and usage for both agricultural and residential requirements.
Encourage businesses to take up renewable energy schemes, green technologies and energy efficiency measures.		No Comment

Priority 3: Ensuring sympathetic development	
Investigate the use of Village Design Statements as a mechanism for influencing decisions on design and development so as to respect the local identity.	This would only be appropriate in village locations where substantial development is proposed.
Priority 4: Promoting Cambridgeshire's food	
Develop a 'Cambridgeshire Food Policy' to enhance local food supply chains and encourage stronger loyalty to local food production.	No comment
Encourage retailers and local businesses to promote and source local produce	No Comment
Continue support for projects that localise local food and farming such as community orchards, farmers markets and community food projects.	The promotion of farmers markets and community food project is undertaken already.

Rural Cambridgeshire: Ensuring a Vibrant Future

A Rural Strategy for Cambridgeshire 2010 – 2015

17 *Under consultation from 1 February – 23 April 2010*

**Cambridgeshire
Together**

working together to
improve our quality of life

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What is the Cambridgeshire Together Rural Strategy and how does it affect me?

The Cambridgeshire Together Rural Strategy is a plan for the future viability of the County's rural areas. It assesses the upsides and challenges of living and working in the countryside, reviews the area's economic wellbeing and looks at the land and environment that surrounds us. It goes on to set out a long-term vision for rural Cambridgeshire, how we can get there and who can make it happen.

Why do we need a Rural Strategy?

The need for a Rural Strategy is clear. Significant parts of the County of Cambridgeshire experience a quality of life which is considerably below that of the national population at large. Alongside this, traditional rural life is gradually being eroded and yet local people tell us they want to keep the special 'rural nature' of the communities where they live and work.

Many of the problems in our local communities are distinctive and are rooted in their rural nature and legacy from the past. The Rural Strategy will play an important part in helping to describe and understand these conditions and will help shape and monitor how well the County's major plans and organisations are addressing them.

How can a document change things?

The Rural Strategy will influence the work of Cambridgeshire Together, the partnership that delivers the Cambridgeshire Local Area Agreement. The Local Area Agreement sets out the relationship between central and local government and what each expects from the other. This is documented in an action plan that has a balance of national and local priorities.

The Rural Strategy will ensure that the County's rural areas are not forgotten when public money is being spent on these priorities, creating a vibrant rural economy that ensures people can live and work locally in a safe and pleasant environment.

The Strategy will have its own action plan that will set out exactly what will be done, by whom and by when. It will influence and coordinate existing activities to ensure the best approach is taken.

Where are we now?



Living in the Countryside

Living in the Countryside is a different experience across the County. Some areas, typically in the north and in pockets across the rural areas, show evidence of considerable disadvantage as measured by things such as income levels, access to services and transport.

Deprivation measures tend to focus on local concentrations and in rural areas more thinly-spread disadvantage can often go unnoticed, particularly that linked to issues of material deprivation such as fuel poverty, isolation / loneliness, lack of transport and fear of crime.

Lack of affordable housing is an issue across the area, as well as declining rural services such as shops, post offices and pubs. The ways in which expected growth in the County is channelled and controlled could have a major impact on these issues. New approaches to joint investment, community self-reliance and self-governance are needed to maximise future opportunities.



Economic Wellbeing

In recent years, traditional industries such as agriculture and manufacturing (especially food) have been added to by new technology and knowledge-based businesses and greater levels of self-employment and home-working.

Economic well-being across the County as whole is generally strong and expected to remain so, but the broad picture of economic prosperity and growth masks areas and communities which are relatively poor and less productive. Rural Cambridgeshire tends to have lower wages, smaller scale firms and employment opportunities with much economic activity operating below the radar of attention and support. Key potential areas for economic growth are tourism, food and farming (especially looking to build on local, distinctive products and markets) and other rurally-based business.

Whilst Rural Cambridgeshire has levels of young people not in education, employment or training lower than the national average, these levels are fast increasing and follow the more general patterns of deprivation in the County. This is resulting in the out-migration of many young people to more urban areas.



Land and Environment

Land and the environment in rural Cambridgeshire has undergone and continues to experience significant change, mainly as a result of the continuing development of new housing, business premises and associated infrastructure. Other influences are changes in agriculture (an overall decline in land used for farming but also shorter term shifts in the intensity and types of production), plus increased attention to recreation needs (mainly through increased access to the countryside).

The effects of climate change are expected to have different impacts on the different landscape areas and parts of the County, but a key challenge for the future is to ensure new development is more environmentally sustainable – including the better matching of where people live, work and access services, so as to reduce the amount of travel and its impact on the environment and local communities.

Where do we want to be?

Our vision is of a rural Cambridgeshire that will flourish with sustainable rural communities that are prepared for the challenges ahead.

People living in rural Cambridgeshire will have access to the jobs and services they require; the rural economy will be successful and diverse; and the environment will be protected and enhanced.

How do those who live and work locally see the future?

In putting together this Strategy, we consulted with over 230 local people who gave us both individual perspectives and views from the organisations they represented. Here are just some of them:

Philip Bradshaw

Farmer, Flegcroft Farm, Whittlesey

“There is recognition that food production has to increase dramatically at a local and international level in the very near future, and Cambridgeshire is able to play an important part in this process. It is essential that land based industry in the County is encouraged to accept the challenge of increasing output in a way that is sustainable, responsible and profitable.”



Helen Copping, Completely Chilli

Local Entrepreneur, Haddenham

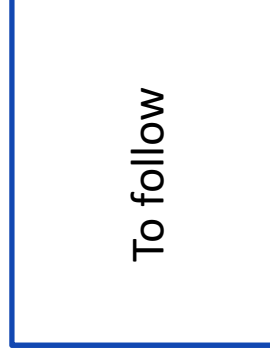
“Setting up a new business is tough. Having the right idea and stacks of enthusiasm is just the start. Support from specialist advisors and local funding is crucial to getting your business running and keeping it going.”



Philip Broadbent Yale

Outdoor Programme Manager, National Trust

“The National Trust has a crucial role to play protecting Cambridgeshire’s unique landscape. We are lucky to have an amazing variety of places and habitats in this County and we will work in partnership to look after them for ever, for everyone.”



Hugh McCurdy

Archdeacon of Huntingdon and Wisbech

“My area of the Diocese encompasses many different villages. There’s a huge variation in economic prosperity across the County and I’d like to see more support to help communities help themselves.”



Living in the Countryside - What do we need to change?

The people we consulted have collectively identified six 'priorities' for action that will improve 'living in the countryside'. For each priority we have considered what our ambitions should be and how we would know if we had been successful in achieving them...

1. Preventing rural deprivation



Our Ambitions

- To ensure the allocation of resources takes account of all types of deprivation, including isolation and fuel poverty.
- To support local neighbourhood management / partnership working as a method of counteracting rural deprivation.

What will success look like?

- Increased number of community neighbourhood initiatives in targeted communities making them better places to live.
- Rural isolation is reduced through the provision of 'social hubs' in each community.

2. Building local homes for local people



Our Ambitions

- To work with planners to support the sustainability of smaller rural communities.
- To build more homes on rural exception sites.
- To understand the scale of hidden homelessness in rural Cambridgeshire.

What will success look like?

- Vibrant, rural communities with a good mix of housing and associated infrastructure.
- Increased housing built in rural areas.
- Communities have better ways to manage homes that stay in local ownership.

3. Protecting and enhancing rural services



Our Ambitions

- To halt the decline of essential rural services.
- To support communities so they are able to play a greater role in finding their own solutions for viable service provision.

What will success look like?

- Increased number of community enterprises.
- Communities with better access to vital services with a reduced need to travel.
- More multi-use centres delivering a number of different services under one roof.

Living in the Countryside - What do we need to change?

4. Providing access to local healthcare



Our Ambitions

- To address peoples' concerns relating to the perceived centralisation of healthcare services.
- To look for opportunities where healthcare services can be provided locally in existing community facilities.

What will success look like?

- People believe that their primary care needs are being met within their local community.
- Increased use of community buildings offering some kind of healthcare service.

5. Widening transport options



Our Ambitions

- To encourage people to think differently about how they travel.
- To consult people in order to fully understand when, where and how they want to travel.
- To increase rural transport options.

What will success look like?

- Increased number of journeys made by community and public transport.
- Greater use and integration of public and community transport schemes.
- A Local Transport Plan that reflects rural need.

6. Supporting and strengthening local communities



Our Ambitions

- To increase the role of parish councils in providing governance to their own communities.
- To facilitate all rural communities in developing a clear vision for their own future.
- To ensure communities have the capacity to bring their plans to life.

What will success look like?

- Parish councils will be managing services through the Well-being Power.
- Strong, cohesive, rural communities that work together for the benefit of all residents.
- Community members will have the capacity to lead.

Economic Wellbeing - What do we need to change?

The people we consulted have collectively identified three ‘priorities’ for action that will improve the County’s ‘economic wellbeing’. For each priority we have considered what our ambitions should be and how we would know if we had been successful in achieving them...

1. Improving employment opportunities



Our Ambitions

- To improve business and social enterprise support in order to facilitate rural entrepreneurship.
- To encourage more high skilled jobs in rural areas to alleviate the need for commuting.
- To create the correct mix of business premises to allow business development and growth.
- To improve broadband and mobile phone connectivity.

What will success look like?

- Better mix of employment opportunities.
- Increased number and mix of businesses operating.
- Reduced commuting.
- No broadband or mobile phone network ‘hotspots’.

2. Maintaining and enhancing market towns as essential service hubs



Our Ambitions

- To support the tourism opportunities within and around market towns.
- To ensure all market towns have appropriate master plans for their future development.

What will success look like?

- Increased visitor numbers to market towns.
- All market towns have a long-term vision for development of the local economy.

3. Improving skills through education and training



Our Ambitions

- To enhance training and educational provision across all rural areas and at all skill levels.
- To reduce the barriers to young people in accessing education, vocational training and apprenticeships.

What will success look like?

- Young people have more choice in learning and training provision enabling them to remain in the rural areas.
- Cambridgeshire has an adequate workforce with varying skill levels across the whole County.

Land and Environment - What do we need to change?

The people we consulted have collectively identified four ‘priorities’ for action that will improve the County’s ‘land and environment’. For each priority we have considered what our ambitions should be and how we would know if we had been successful in achieving them...

1. Making the most of Cambridgeshire’s unique landscape



Our Ambitions

- To ensure that the planning of green spaces in and around rural parishes takes into account social, economic and environmental considerations.

What will success look like?

- Better use of green space is linked to the needs of the rural population and the wider Cambridgeshire environment.
- More opportunities for enhanced landscapes, better access and greater biodiversity value.
- Green spaces play a direct role in improving the lives, livelihoods and health of local people and communities.

2. Mitigating the impact of climate change



Our Ambitions

- To support communities with programmes of climate change adaptation and mitigation.
- To fully understand the effects and concept of ‘peak oil’ and ‘peak water’.
- To support businesses with schemes which promote green technologies and energy efficiency.

What will success look like?

- Increased number of parishes with local climate change interventions being delivered.
- People have an understanding about the impact of climate change on rural sustainability.
- Businesses make better use of local assets and technologies.

3. Ensuring sympathetic development



Our Ambitions

- To recognise the character and distinctiveness of rural parishes across Cambridgeshire.

What will success look like?

- Rural Cambridgeshire will remain an attractive place to live, work and visit.
- Communities will feel their voices are being heard when new development is planned.

Land and Environment - What do we need to change?

4. Promoting Cambridgeshire's food



Our Ambitions

- To address the issue of global food security by Cambridgeshire-specific interventions.
- To develop better local food supply chains and clearer labelling.
- To develop a better understanding of food production.

What will success look like?

- Changes in local farming practices to mitigate against the effects of climate change and to protect the local environment.
- Increased demand for people purchasing food grown locally .
- Increased number of local community food projects.

How will we know what's been achieved?

Success in delivering the Rural Strategy will be overseen by the Cambridgeshire Together Board monitored through its Safer and Stronger Partnership. An Action Plan has been developed which details who is responsible for overseeing the delivery of each ambition. The actions are shown on pages 14 – 17.

The phrase 'rural proofing' is used within the Action Plan and this is the process of checking the effect that policies, programmes, initiatives and individual projects could have on rural communities. It ensures that the particular needs of people in rural areas are not overlooked and that policies or projects do not have any unintended negative outcomes for rural communities. One of the key elements of the Cambridgeshire Rural Strategy will be to rural proof key local initiatives.

Nine key performance indicators (KPIs) have been set to enable us to measure the vibrancy of Rural Cambridgeshire going forward. These are:

1. Number of homes built on rural exception sites in Cambridgeshire.
2. Number of essential rural services maintained.
3. Number of new rural enterprises set up.
4. Number of Cambridgeshire parish councils using the Well-being Power.
5. Number of broadband notspots and slowspots in rural Cambridgeshire.

How will we know what's been achieved? (continued)

6. Number of people that work within five kilometres of their home address.
7. % of apprenticeship opportunities located in Cambridgeshire's rural villages/market towns.
8. % of Cambridgeshire communities with a green infrastructure section within their community led plan.
9. Number of village design guidance documents adopted by parish councils to inform their response to planning consultations.
10. Number of organisations taking part in developing and signing up to a Cambridgeshire Food Policy.

These KPIs will be measured each year and an annual report on progress towards achieving the ambitions of this Rural Strategy will be issued.

What actions will be taken?

LIVING IN THE COUNTRYSIDE

Priority 1: Preventing rural deprivation

- Use OCSI (Oxford Consultants for Social Inclusion) data to develop and interpret the Cambridgeshire rural evidence base to influence how local services are provided in rural parishes.
- Liaise with parish councils and attend rural community events (such as meetings and fairs) in order to raise awareness of fuel poverty, energy efficiency, grants for repairs and assistance available for vulnerable rural households.
- Ensure each parish has at least one local service / meeting place that provides a 'social hub'.
- To achieve one new intervention in an agreed area of deprivation in each district.
- Develop Neighbourhood Forums as a way of clustering parishes in rural areas in order to develop wider approaches to local issues and needs.

Priority 2: Building local homes for local people

- Build relationships and gather best practice information from Rural 80 and Rural 50 local authorities on how they deliver affordable housing through all available methods, including Section 106 agreements.
- Develop a Countywide set of principles to ensure effective development in rural communities on rural exception sites, in agreement with the Regional Spatial Strategy.
- Rural-proof District Local Development Frameworks to ensure rural housing provision is catered for and that it will aid rural community sustainability.
- Continue to conduct an independent Housing Needs Survey where applicable to ascertain local needs and make people aware of the results.
- Set affordable rural housing development targets for rural exception sites.
- Continue to develop Cambridgeshire's Affordable Rural Housing service bringing together Local Authority Housing Providers (RSLs), Local Authorities and parish councils in order to address proven need in rural areas.
- Explore the concept of Community Land Trusts for delivering affordable rural housing in Cambridgeshire.
- All statutory agencies to assess their own estates for land which could be released for the provision of affordable housing.

Priority 3: Protecting and enhancing rural services

- Monitor the change in provision of rural services by repeating the Rural Services Survey (last undertaken in 2007).
- Build relationships and gather best practice information from Rural 80 and Rural 50 local authorities on how they are supporting reducing the decline in rural services.
- Support multifunctional mobile service facilities, such as libraries, police, citizens advice bureau and health services, to work together to bring services to rural areas.
- Support communities with saving essential rural services that are under threat.
- Provide support to community groups / parish councils for widening the use of existing buildings (e.g. village halls, churches, libraries, etc.).

What actions will be taken?

LIVING IN THE COUNTRYSIDE (continued)

Priority 4: Providing access to local healthcare

- NHS Cambridgeshire to promote local service provision in order to allay fears.
- Work with parish councils and other community groups to identify gaps in local service provision and consider what services could be provided.

Priority 5: Widening transport options

- Undertake a consultation to understand attitudes towards public transport.
- Rural-proof new Local Transport Plan to ensure that it reflects local rural needs.
- Support the development and implementation of accessibility action plans in the LTP priority action areas, informed by a robust evidence base and genuine stakeholder participation.
- Roll out of a Demand Responsive Transport scheme across Cambridgeshire and evaluate its success.
- Map community transport provision in each District in order to identify gaps and opportunities for integration of services.
- Encourage cycling and walking between rural communities by making footpaths and bridleways suitable for everyday, year round use – perhaps by introducing a network of ‘inter-village routes’ that are off-road but surfaced (and possibly lit) in such a way that make cycling and walking possible at all times.

Priority 6: Supporting and strengthening local communities

- Co-ordinate a training programme for all parish councils that supports the increased use of the Well-being Power.
- Support parish councils to own and run community assets through the Well-being Power.
- Support and encourage parishes to achieve Quality Parish status.
- Support and encourage the development and delivery of Community Led Plans by ensuring appropriate mechanisms at all levels for responding to actions identified.
- Provide training and support for local people to develop the community leaders of the future.

What actions will be taken?

ECONOMIC WELLBEING

Priority 1: Improving employment opportunities

- Encourage specialist business advice for self-employed people at all stages of work to gain skills and develop their business.
- Ensure full allocation of the funding available through the Fens Adventurers Rural Development Programme in order to increase land-based businesses.
- Attract a wider range and larger number of businesses to set up and expand in rural Cambridgeshire.
- Encourage the development of rural workspaces in appropriate locations by ensuring that appropriate references are made in Local Development Frameworks.
- Encourage the growth of home-based businesses.
- Investigate the potential for reduced business rates as a means of encouraging rural business growth.
- Influence decision-makers to draw attention to the consequences of digital exclusion.

Priority 2: Maintaining and enhancing market towns as essential service hubs

- To increase support for tourism in market towns through local farm diversification and business development.
- Produce a master plan for each market town.

Priority 3: Improving skills through education and training

- Support initiatives which increase qualification attainment levels (both higher and basic skills) in sectors where there are emerging employment opportunities.
- Work with rural employers to improve the skills of their workforce, in order to equip them for the business challenges of the future.
- Encourage collaboration between businesses and further education facilities to develop apprenticeships with the intention of encouraging young people to stay in rural Cambridgeshire.

What actions will be taken?

LAND AND ENVIRONMENT

Priority 1: Making the most of Cambridgeshire's unique landscape

- Develop a project where parishes are supported to create green infrastructure plans.
- Support communities to develop projects that increase biodiversity and access.

Priority 2: Mitigating the impact of climate change

- Work with parish councils to increase the awareness of the impacts of climate change to allow them to lead communities in making a difference.
- Undertake Cambridgeshire-specific scenario planning on the effects of peak oil and peak water on rural communities, using existing projection models.
- Encourage businesses to take up renewable energy schemes, green technologies and energy efficiency measures.

Priority 3: Ensuring sympathetic development

- Investigate the use of Village Design Statements as a mechanism for influencing decisions on design and development so as to respect the local identity.

Priority 4: Promoting Cambridgeshire's food

- Develop a 'Cambridgeshire Food Policy' to enhance local food supply chains and encourage stronger loyalty to local food production.
- Encourage retailers and local businesses to promote and source local produce.
- Continue support for projects that localise local food and farming such as community orchards, farmers markets and community food projects.

Glossary

Affordable Housing: Housing which is built on rural exception sites with a subsidy from a Housing Association, made available for rent/shared ownership, allocated (in priority) to households with a local connection and is kept affordable for local people.

Biodiversity: The variety of life forms in a given area.

Fuel poverty: Those who spend more than 10% of their annual income on heating their home.

Global Food Insecurity: The result of rising food prices and increased demand for food. Rapidly increasing energy costs, increased global population and lower yields due to volatile weather result in global food insecurity.

Green Spaces: Protected areas of undeveloped landscape and the natural environment.

Local Transport Plan: A Local Authority plan which sets out local transport strategies, policies and an implementation programme.

Material Deprivation: A relative term to describe the inability of individuals /households to afford those goods and activities that are typical in a society at a given point in time.

Notspot: An area where broadband or mobile phone signal is unavailable. (Slowspots refers to those areas where broadband speed is less than 2 Mbps)

Peak Oil: The point at which oil is being extracted at maximum rate is known as the peak, after which oil production decreases as it becomes harder to extract.

Peak Water: The point at which demand for fresh water is greater than the natural rate of replenishment. Peak water will effect some locations more than others.

Rural Exception Sites: Small plots of land, solely for affordable housing developments, within or bordering an existing rural settlement which would not otherwise be available for market housing.

Social Hubs: Places which encourage community activities, inclusion and regeneration.

Well-being Power: Passed in 2000, it allows local authorities in England to do anything they consider likely to promote the economic, social and environmental well-being of the area unless forbidden elsewhere in legislation.

Enjoyed reading this and want to know more?

To read the research and evidence that underpin the Rural Strategy, please visit www.cambsacre.org.uk where you can download :

 Evidence Base

 Summary of Evidence

 Reports on the District-based Consultation Workshops

 Summary Report on the Countywide Consultation undertaken in September and October 2009

 Full Cambridgeshire Rural Strategy Action Plan

The Cambridgeshire Together Rural Strategy was produced by the partners of Cambridgeshire Together, in conjunction with local stakeholders throughout the County .

Strategy production was led and facilitated by Cambridgeshire ACRE

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**RURAL STRATEGY FOR CAMBRIDGESHIRE 2010 - 2015
(Report by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being))**

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 At its meeting on 2nd March 2010, the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) considered a report by the Head of Environmental and Community Health Services on the draft Rural Strategy for Cambridgeshire 2010-2015. Key stakeholders and partners currently are being consulted on the Strategy. The consultation period ends on 23rd April 2010. This report contains a summary of the Panel's discussions.

2. COMMENTS

- 2.1 The Panel has been informed of the background to the Strategy and noted that the Cambridgeshire Together Board commissioned Cambridgeshire ACRE to undertake this work with a view to identifying the challenges of living and working in a rural community. The Panel's attention has been drawn to the actions and "Ambitions" identified under the three themes of living in the countryside, economic well-being and land and environment.
- 2.2 The Panel has received details of the consultation undertaken to date with statutory agencies, community organisations, rural businesses and residents, with particular attention being drawn to Appendix A of the document which contains a summary of District Council Officers' responses to the actions proposed within the Strategy. Members have endorsed the comments outlined in Appendix A, but have also registered their concern at the lack of ownership, prioritisation and identification of funding to implement the Strategy.
- 2.3 The Panel has stressed the importance of recognising that rurality is an equalities issue. Comment has also been made that the Strategy sometimes lacks evidence of partnership working where it is required and Members are of the view that work carried out under the Strategy should be carefully co-ordinated. It appears there is potential for duplication in service provision. Indeed, the point has been made that efforts should be made to ensure that all organisations that could potentially be involved have not been excluded from contributing to the achievement of the Strategy. Members have particularly recognised the fact that Town and Parish Councils will be important in delivering many of the actions.
- 2.4 Having regard to the theme of living in the countryside, specific comment has been made on the need for retirement homes to be provided on "exceptions sites" in rural areas. This would enable elderly individuals to remain close to their families and communities.
- 2.5 With regard to the actions identified within the "Widening transport options" priority, the Panel is of the view that this matter requires action at the national level.

- 2.6 Finally, comment has been made on the difficulties faced by residents living in rural areas who do not have their own transport and who are reliant on other transport providers to attend health service facilities. While there are some local providers, including volunteer car schemes, it is evident that there are gaps in provision and this is something that could be addressed under the Strategy.

3. CONCLUSION

- 3.1 The Cabinet is invited to consider the comments of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) as part of its deliberations on the report by the Head of Environmental and Community Health Services.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Minutes and Report of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) on 2nd March 2010.

**Contact Officer: Miss H Ali, Democratic Services Officer
(01480) 388006**

CABINET

18th March 2010

DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT PROCESS (Report by the Overview and Scrutiny Environmental Well-Being Panel)

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 At their meeting held on 14th July 2009, the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being) decided to establish a working group to investigate the process for the determination of planning applications and make recommendations where appropriate. The working group comprised Councillors M G Baker, P Godley, M F Newman and J S Watt and has met on a number of occasions in the ensuing months. Councillor Baker has acted as rapporteur.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Panel's interest in the subject was prompted by anecdotal evidence from members of the public's concern over the pre-decision planning process. The Panel acknowledged at the outset that planning can be a contentious subject with "winners and losers". The views of the public therefore have to be tempered accordingly.
- 2.2 It was decided that the review of the development management process should concentrate on the process leading to the determination of planning applications, rather than the decision making process itself or the merits of decisions. The working group decided to look at the practices and procedures from first enquiry by potential applicants to the preparation of an officer's final report and recommendations, involving pre-application advice, public consultation, plans and amendments, duration of the process and other related matters.

3. EVIDENCE AND INVESTIGATIONS

- 3.1 The working group carried out extensive consultation to ensure that any recommendations that it made would be evidence based as opposed to personal anecdotes and the views of parties aggrieved by a decision. The following investigations and enquiries were therefore made -
- A questionnaire to town and parish councils, given their role as statutory consultees and frequently raised comments about the planning process. This generated a healthy 58% completion rate, the results of which are summarised at Appendix A.

- A press release which was reported in the local media which generated a total of 17 replies from individuals expressing views and concerns about the planning process.
- A search of other local authority websites and personal enquiries with other authorities on their policy of charging for pre-planning advice.
- An interview with the Planning Services Manager (Development Management) on the Council's current processes and performance.
- An interview with representatives of two local planning agents (both of whom are former employees of the Council's Planning Division).
- An interview with two applicants for planning permission to obtain a personal perspective of the process.
- An interview with the Council's Scrutiny Manager on complaints regarding the planning process that are dealt with locally under the Council's feedback system and through the Local Government Ombudsman.
- A further interview with the Planning Services Manager accompanied by the Chairman of the Development Management Panel on the working group's provisional findings.

3.2 Having conducted their investigations the working group has found that the Council's processes compare favourably with other authorities and there is no significant cause for concern. However development management decisions can have very personal consequences for individuals affected by them which can colour their perception of the process and the decisions themselves. In particular the working group found that:-

- a growing number of authorities charge for pre-planning application advice;
- although not legally required, the Council has a procedure of posting notification letters to households that may be affected by a proposed development;
- the Council is not obliged to accept amendments to applications once they have been submitted, although officers tend to be flexible providing this does not delay the determination of an application unduly;
- the Council consults again on amendments to applications where they are deemed significant;

- out of several thousand applications determined each year, there are a handful of instances where a case officer's recommendation is overruled by a line manager;
- the Council has a 100% success rate in registering applications within three days;
- in the view of the agents interviewed, the Council's performance compares favourably with other local authorities;
- from the agents' perspective, policies sometimes can appear to be interpreted slightly differently by the three area planning teams in the District;
- in the views expressed by the public, lack of communication was frequently cited as a complaint; and
- the majority of complaints received by the Ombudsman from Huntingdonshire residents are planning related but it is rare for the Ombudsman to find maladministration in the Council's actions.

3.3 In order to consider all the evidence that has been obtained throughout the review, this report will focus on each sequence of the development management process in turn.

4. PRE-PLANNING APPLICATION ADVICE

4.1 At an early stage in its investigations, the working group was informed that the Council is not obliged to provide advice at the pre-submission stage of a planning application. Some authorities offer limited advice, some charge for detailed advice and others decline to provide any pre-submission advice. The Planning Division currently do offer advice and endeavour to respond to requests within four weeks. However this is achieved in only two thirds of cases.

4.2 The Planning Services Manager advised the working group that, in his opinion, pre-submission advice does present benefits for the authority and officers in his team by improving the quality of applications. It tends to deter speculative enquiries that would be unlikely to receive permission, design quality is improved and it helps to expedite the determination process by reducing the level of discussions required with applicants or amended plans. However, it was clear to the working group that, at the pre-submission stage, a potential applicant is receiving the view of a case officer prior to the receipt of views from consultees and, in most cases, the opinion of a team leader or other more senior officer.

4.3 The Planning Services Manager informed the group that he is keen to ensure that the Division continues to offer advice on proposals that are likely to come forward but he does acknowledge that resources are finite and there is a

- need to ensure that they are used in the most efficient and effective way possible.
- 4.4 Having interviewed the Council's Scrutiny Manager, the group learnt that the majority of complaints received by the Ombudsman from Huntingdonshire residents are planning related and that these number approximately six per annum. Of those, the majority have been concerned with the nature of advice given by case officers, particularly where a decision has differed from the advice given. The working group regard this as an almost inevitable consequence of the process. The advice of a case officer will always be without prejudice to the outcome of the consultation process and the view of a more senior officer or indeed the Development Management Panel itself where recommendations can be rejected. It is not clear that this is always fully appreciated by applicants.
 - 4.5 The working group did consider the option of recommending that the availability of pre-submission advice is withdrawn. Most applicants employ agents when applying for planning permission who should be aware of planning policies. If an application is then refused on design grounds, the applicant has the opportunity of re-applying free of charge a second time to address the reasons for the initial refusal. This again has its flaws in that a greater proportion of applications might be refused, some unsatisfactory decisions may be successful on appeal that could have been influenced at the pre-submission stage and it is likely to appear unhelpful and unpopular.
 - 4.6 Another option is the possibility of charging for pre-submission advice which the working group considered at length. Following clarification on the legal basis for charging, a number of authorities have followed this route in recent years as a way of recovering part of the costs being incurred in providing advice. In the opinion of the agents who were interviewed, obtaining pre-submission advice currently was often a lengthy and frustrating process with delays in receiving a response. Moreover, advice tended to be policy based with little attempt at local interpretation which the agents felt was not particularly helpful and did not justify the introduction of charging. If a fee were to be charged, the agents' view was that the majority of applicants would be unlikely to seek pre-submission advice unless a greater degree of interpretation and assistance was offered.
 - 4.7 A further consideration is the weight that is placed on advice for which a charge has been made and whether this will lead to a presumption on the part of both applicants and objectors that permission will be granted. It is the opinion of the Planning Services Manager that the amount of revenue that might be generated from the introduction of charging is often over estimated by those authorities that have decided to charge and that this is not borne out by subsequent events, especially as most authorities do not charge for householder type applications.
 - 4.8 Rather than carry out more in-depth investigations on the subject, the working group relied on a recent report to Cheltenham Borough Council in which the various benefits and drawbacks of charging have been captured (appendix B attached). In considering whether to continue to offer pre-submission advice

and, if so, whether to charge, the working group was advised by the Planning Services Manager that on balance it was his view that the drawbacks of charging were not outweighed by the income that might be achieved.

- 4.9 In a growth area where substantial development has taken place and is expected to continue, this was not a view that the working group could adhere to. In difficult financial circumstances with reductions in expenditure required by the Council, the working group question whether it is sustainable for the Council to continue to provide pre-submission advice free of charge when this is a time consuming exercise for which no income is received. On balance, the working group considers that a free service should no longer be offered, other than for small, householder type applications. For residential and commercial developments, the costs involved in bringing forward a successful scheme are considerable and the working group sees no reason for one part of that process to be offered free of charge by the planning authority. Careful consideration will be necessary to ensure that the determination and local democratic processes are not compromised by the advice given but, subject to those caveats, **the working group recommends that the possibility of charging developers for pre-submission advice be investigated further by the Council.**

5. RECEIPT OF APPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The Councils current procedure requires applications to be registered within 3 days of receipt which the working group was pleased to see was being achieved. In terms of the determination of planning applications, the targets set by the set by Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) is 8 weeks for minor applications and 13 weeks for major applications. The timescale for consultees to respond if they wish to submit comments is 21 days, although the working group was informed that some consultees were traditionally slow in responding within the allocated timeframe.
- 5.2 The results of the parish and town council questionnaire (Appendix A), show that 51% of town and parish councils who responded felt that 21 days was sufficiently long enough to enable them to submit their comments on an application. A number of parish councils did express a view that the 21 day consultation period did not fit into their cycle of meetings, with several stating that 28 days would be preferable. The working group recognise that the 21 day process forms part of the statutory process and cannot be changed.
- 5.3 The Planning Services Manager has explained that case officers do endeavour to be flexible and will, on request from town and parish councils, extend the deadline for comments where the extension of time requested is not unreasonable. The working group was conscious that the timescale set by the DCLG will inevitably be inconvenient for some town and parish councils but the group recognised that this is beyond the Council's control and greater flexibility on the part of town and parish councils in the way in which they formulate their responses would help.

6. APPLICATION AMENDMENTS

- 6.1 The working group found this to be one of the more contentious aspects of the process. The Council is not obliged to accept amendments to applications but, following negotiation, case officers do accept amendments from applicants providing this does not result in an undue delay. Upon receipt of amended plans, the Council's approach is to re-consult only if the change in the opinion of the case officer is significant. Major changes are not accepted and require a fresh application to be made. The exercise of that judgement is subjective and reliant on the experience of the case officer.
- 6.2 The working group found that in exercising that judgement, problems can occur. If, for example, a neighbour has decided on balance not to object to a planning application and amended plans are subsequently approved, the first that the neighbour may be aware of the amendment is when the building work is underway. What may have been judged a relatively minor change on the part of the case officer may, in the opinion of the neighbour, be of sufficient magnitude that he would have objected to the application, the opportunity for which has now passed. Town and parish councils also may be unaware of any change which can prompt calls to the Planning Division that development is taking place that is contrary to plans that they commented on. It was the overwhelming view of the towns and parishes (95%) that further consultation should take place.
- 6.3 The working group acknowledges the dilemma for case officers. Further consultation on amendments will inevitably delay the determination of applications which may impact on the achievement of DCLG targets. If towns and parishes are consulted again, this could lead to plans being submitted to a further round of meetings or complaints that there is insufficient time to comment.
- 6.4 Solutions to the question are limited. Case officers could simply process an application as submitted and if the design is unsatisfactory, refuse permission which would enable the applicant to re-apply free of charge with suitably amended plans. While helping to achieve DCLG targets and providing consultees with the opportunity to comment, this is unlikely to be popular with applicants and will lead to further work on the part of the Planning Division in registering the application again and carrying out the consultation process for which a fee has not been received. This was therefore discounted by the working group.
- 6.5 The exercise of judgement in determining the significance test on whether to re-consult is a subjective one that is applied by individual case officers. The working group was informed that this could lead to complaints under the Council's feedback system and to the Ombudsman. On balance, therefore the working group does not feel that it is equitable for neighbours (and other consultees) to be denied the opportunity to comment again on amended plans, except where the change is of very minor significance. Although this will still involve an exercise of judgement on the part of case officers, the working group suggests that a liberal approach be taken to ensure that the

fundamental rights of neighbours to be able to comments on applications which may affect the enjoyment of their own homes is not compromised.

- 6.6 **The working group therefore recommends that relevant consultees and neighbours be consulted again on amended plans, except for those of very minor significance, with a 7 days deadline for reply.**

7. CONSULTATION

- 7.1 The working group was advised that the Council is not required to write to neighbours who are affected by a proposed development. The legal requirement is simply to give notice of an application which could be satisfied by an advertisement in a local newspaper, a site notice(s) visible to the general public, or by neighbour notification to owner and/or occupiers of adjoining properties by post. The Council's procedure is to send notification letters to those households that are considered appropriate which again can lead to problems.

- 7.2 The choice of which household to write to is again a subjective one and there have been complaints to the Ombudsman that neighbours affected by a development have not been consulted. This can tend to arise where a neighbour lives in an adjoining street that backs on to a development site. The likelihood of passing the site notice may be limited and neighbours have claimed from time to time that they did not receive a notification letter. The latter situation in terms of neighbours claiming not to have received consultee letters is a not uncommon occurrence. Registered post is clearly out of the question on financial grounds and so much 'junk mail' is now delivered addressed to the householder that it can be difficult to distinguish what is genuinely of interest and as opposed being speculative in nature.

- 7.3 The working group does not see any necessity to change the present arrangements but **recommends that care is required by officers to ensure that all of those households that abut a development site, as a minimum, be sent a consultee letter and that the envelope be suitably overprinted with a suitable message to indicate that it is an important communication concerning a planning application.**

8. COMMUNICATION

- 8.1 A commonly recurring theme throughout the working group's investigations was a perceived lack of communication between case officers and applicants throughout the whole application process. A press release was circulated (Appendix C) at the outset of the working group's study which invited the public to share their views on their experience of the development management process. A summary of the responses from the public is attached (Appendix D). Of the comments received, almost 60% cited lack of communication and co-operation from the Planning Division as an issue. The agents who were interviewed also felt that what they perceived as a reluctance on the part of case officers to share their views or opinions on an application was frustrating, especially when an application was later refused.

- 8.2 Suggestions made by the agents included the establishment of an 'Agents Forum', which would allow agents, officers and Development Management Panel Members an opportunity to discuss relevant issues and share views and opinions. The working group was not persuaded that this was necessary however and could potentially lead to a perception that the Council was working too closely with planning agents as a group.
- 8.3 The agents also suggested that the Council consider implementing a duty planning officer system which is in place at a number of other authorities. This would enable the public and agents an opportunity to access planning advice of a general nature but the drawback is that the person on duty is unlikely to be able to deal with specific applications, unless he or she happens to be the relevant case officer. This would overcome the problem of the public being unable to access advice because officers are on site, in meetings, writing reports etc. but the agents also mention that some authorities publicise (through their website/letterhead) when planning officers are available, outside of which time general enquiries are dealt with by the duty planning officer. It was felt on the whole that the idea has much to commend it as the public and agents have access to an officer during normal working hours while case officers are not distracted by general enquiries. Although this possibility was recommended by the working group, the Panel felt on balance that there was significant opportunity to contact planning officers.
- 8.4 The working group acknowledged that problems can arise due to applicants not being made aware of issues with their application until towards the end of the eight week determination timeframe. Usually those issues will have arisen as a result of comments raised by consultees such as the internal conservation team. It can therefore come as something of a surprise to an applicant to be informed that issues have arisen shortly before they were hoping to receive an approval certificate. Therefore, **the working group recommends that applicants be advised in the clearest terms at the outset of the process that they are unlikely to receive any further communication until all of the consultees' views have been received, which could be towards the end of the eight or thirteen weeks determination period.**

9. DETERMINATION OF APPLICATIONS

- 9.1 In order to make the process manageable given the volume of applications received by the Council, a scheme of delegation is in place that enable the majority of applications to be determined by the Head of Planning Services or his staff, except in certain circumstances where an application is determined by the Development Management Panel or, very infrequently, the Council.
- 9.2 Where applications are determined by officers, the recommendation of a case officer is subject to approval by a team leader or more senior officer. In more complicated or contentious applications, the Planning Services Manager or the Head of Planning Services personally may have a contrary view to the team leader. The working group found that this on occasion can also lead to complaints from applicants. For example, an applicant can incur expense on

- preparing amended plans following discussion with a case officer, only for the application to be refused because the team leader or more senior manager then disagrees with the design or principle of the development. An applicant somewhat naturally can feel aggrieved that they have incurred additional expense unnecessarily.
- 9.3 However, the working group was encouraged to find that out of several thousand applications determined each year, there are only a handful of cases where a case officer's recommendation is not accepted by a more senior officer. In those circumstances, the working group does not recommend any change to the current process and regards the occasional complaint as an inevitable by-product of the process.
- 9.4 In terms of applications submitted to committee for determination, the working group was advised that DCLG guidance suggests that planning committees should consider no more than 10% of applications received by an authority. As the Council's Development Management Panel currently considers 5.8% of the applications submitted, the working group concluded that there was no need to investigate the delegation scheme that has been adopted by the authority.
- 9.5 The results of the town and parish council questionnaire (Appendix A) show that the majority of respondents (93%) feel that they are supplied with sufficient information to comment on an application and 67% feel fairly confident that they have sufficient knowledge of government guidance, regional strategy and district plans and policies to formulate recommendations on planning applications. The majority of respondents (64%) also feel that the opportunity for a town and parish council representative to speak at the Development Management Panel meetings is very useful. However, 57% of town and parish councils feel that the District Council does not offer sufficient training and that more should be made available. **The working group therefore recommends that further training be made available for town and parish councils on all aspects of the development management process.**
- 9.6 Returning to the question of DCLG timescales for the determination of applications, the working group recognised that the Council currently is performing well with the figures as at September 2009 being 93% of major applications determined within 13 weeks (against a target of 60%), 81% of minor applications within 8 weeks (65% target) and 89% of other applications within 8 weeks (80% target).
- 9.7 A number of issues were raised however by the agents who were interviewed. It was their view that case loads could sometimes appear disproportionate which could delay the determination process and on occasion delay the site visit by a case officer until some way through the determination process. Any issues that arose from that visit meant that there was limited opportunity to negotiate amendments within the required timescale. Although the agents suggested that Huntingdonshire was not unique in this respect, the working group felt that this is an issue for the

Planning Services Manager to address and not one on which it could usefully comment.

- 9.8 The decision to allow agents and applicants to speak at Development Management Panel meetings was welcomed by the agents but they felt that the time allowed of 3 minutes was insufficient and they expressed concern at the lack of opportunity to respond to what they regarded as factually incorrect statements either by objectors or as part of the debate. The latter view was echoed by the comments received by the working group from members of the public and town and parish councils. While the working group has some sympathy with those sentiments, it was also aware that the process for determining applications by the Development Management Panel has to be scrupulously fair to all parties and that while ward councillors, town and parish council representatives, applicants and objectors are allowed to speak, this is not an open debate. Moreover one person's perception of misleading information is likely to be contrary to that of the person supplying that information and members of the Panel are experienced in assessing the relative merits of the arguments presented. Nevertheless this is a matter of some concern that both some councillors and the public feel strongly about and **the working group recommends that when the public speaking procedure at the Development Management Panel meetings is next reviewed, consideration be given to the introduction of a mechanism that allows external speakers to respond to what they perceive to be factually incorrect information so that the Panel can make well informed decisions.**
- 9.9 Finally on this point, the agents suggested that there was sometimes an element of inconsistency in the interpretation of policies across the three planning teams into which the District is split. This view was reiterated in the response from the public, with five individuals citing that inaccurate and inconsistent advice was given and a person interviewed expressing concern over what he regarded as conflicting advice received from planning and conservation officers. The working group found no firm evidence to justify the views expressed however and acknowledge that planning is a discipline where different interpretations of guidance and policy will always occur.
- 9.10 It was suggested to the working group that case officers be moved around area teams to achieve a more consistent approach but the working group discounted this approach on the basis that this would detract from the local knowledge that case officers built up and the relationships that they established with town and parish councils etc. within their respective area. Nevertheless this is clearly an issue of concern to some parties and **the working group wishes to draw those concerns to the attention of the Council.**

10. RETROSPECTIVE PLANNING APPLICATIONS

- 10.1 A frequent cause for concern drawn to the working party's attention is the determination of retrospective planning applications. The working group has been assured by the Planning Services Manager that retrospective applications where permission has not been granted or construction is not in

accordance with approved plans are not dealt with differently. However there is a perception, rightly or wrongly, that where a decision is finely balanced, case officers tend to allow development to remain rather than require it to be demolished and re-built. The working group has been given examples by the Planning Services Manager of instances where the Council has required works to be changed and developers have been prosecuted successfully for having carried out works without permission. **The working group recommends that the Council reinforces the message wherever possible that development that takes place without permission is discouraged and that the Council will take a robust approach concerning the retention of development where permission is subsequently refused.**

11. ACCESS TO INFORMATION

- 11.1 During the course of the working group's investigations, the Council's website was re-launched and the investigations that were undertaken into the public's access to planning information via the web was based on the old web pages. Following comments about the Council's public access software system by the agents who were interviewed, the working group reviewed the planning information on the websites of a number of other authorities, including those recommended by the agents. Although styles differed, the working group considered the content and functionality of the planning information on the Council's website to be as extensive and helpful as that of other Councils' websites viewed.
- 11.2 The responses to the town and parish council questionnaire also indicated that the website is well regarded and frequently used, with 51% of respondents indicating that they found the information on the website about planning applications very useful and 78% of respondents using the website at least once a month to obtain information about planning applications.

12. APPEALS AND COMPLAINTS

- 12.1 The working group was conscious of the fact that there is an appeal mechanism for those applicants who are dissatisfied with the Council's decision to refuse planning permission. Although the volume of appeals is small, it should be recognised that the number of applications refused is relatively low in comparison with the total number processed by the Council. Unlike the licensing system where both applicants and objectors can appeal to the courts, there is no avenue of appeal for objectors aggrieved by a planning decision to approve permission, other than the relatively expensive option of judicial review through the courts. The only other option is for an aggrieved person to complain to the Local Government Ombudsman or through the Council's internal complaints system. However such complaints cannot challenge the merits of a decision and are restricted to potential maladministration and an alleged failure to follow approved processes and procedures. Decisions therefore cannot be overturned, although compensation can be paid if the complaint is upheld.

When informed that permission has been granted, objectors are not routinely told that there is a complaints procedure. However if concerns are raised subsequently that due processes have not been followed, this is brought to the complainants attention. The working group has considered whether objectors should be advised of the opportunities available to them to submit a complaint or apply for judicial review. On balance, the working group decided against recommending that this be introduced, partly because this cannot lead to a decision being overturned, except in the case of judicial review, and partly for the very practical reason that the Council is unlikely to be able to handle the potential increase in the number of complaints that this may generate.

13. CONCLUSION

- 13.1 Members of the working group wish to extend their appreciation to all those who were interviewed, responded to the questionnaire and press release and took the time to contact them with their views on the development management process. They were also grateful for the advice given to them by the Planning Services Manager (Development Management).
- 13.2 The working group has acknowledged that planning is a contentious subject which, by its nature, can generate strong feelings and concerns. The origins of the study lay in the anecdotal evidence presented to Members by their constituents about failures and discrepancies in the system. Although these were reinforced to some degree by the responses that were received, the working party found it difficult to obtain firm evidence to reinforce the concerns that the members of the public had expressed without delving into individual cases in some detail. The information collated will nevertheless be passed to the Planning Services Manager for his attention.
- 13.3 The working group concluded that in overall terms the development management process works well and planning officers are to be commended in the often pressured and difficult environment in which they are working. Nevertheless there are some improvements that the working group suggest should be implemented as a result of their investigations which have been highlighted in the report and are reproduced below.

14. RECOMMENDATIONS

14.1 The working group therefore

RECOMMENDS

- (a) that the possibility of charging developers for pre-submission advice be investigated further by the Council;
- (b) that relevant consultees and neighbours be consulted again on amended plans, except for those of very minor significance, with a 7 days deadline for reply;
- (c) that care is required by officers to ensure that all of those households that abut a development site, as a minimum, be sent a consultee letter and that the envelope be suitably overprinted with a suitable message to indicate that it is an important communication concerning a planning application;
- (d) that applicants be advised in the clearest terms at the outset of the process that they are unlikely to receive any further communication until all of the consultees' views have been received, which could be towards the end of the eight or thirteen weeks determination period;
- (e) that further training be made available for town and parish councils on all aspects of the development management process;
- (f) that when the public speaking procedure at the Development Management Panel meetings is next reviewed, consideration be given to the introduction of a mechanism that allows external speakers to respond to what they perceive to be factually incorrect information so that the Panel can make well informed decisions;
- (g) that the Council reinforces the message wherever possible that development that takes place without permission is discouraged and that the Council will take a robust approach concerning the retention of development where permission is subsequently refused.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Notes of the Development Management Process Working Group
Planning Advisory Service Case Study – A Material World: Charging for Pre-Application
Planning Advice

www.huntigndonshire.gov.uk

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

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

Cheltenham Borough Council Cabinet Report 20th January 2009 – Charging for Pre-
Application Planning Advice

The Planning Portal

APPENDIX A

DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT PROCESS **QUESTIONNAIRE FOR PARISH COUNCILS.** **RESPONSE SUMMARY** **42 responses received.**

- 1) **How useful do you find the Council's website in terms of the information that it contains about planning applications?**

Have not used it	5%
Not very useful	5%
Fairly useful	39%
Very useful	51%

- 2) **How often each month do you access the Council's website to obtain information about planning applications?**

Have not accessed it	2%
Less than once a month	20%
1-5 times a month	54%
5-10 times a month	7%
More than 10 times a month	17%

- 3) **Bearing in mind that planning applications are listed on the Council's website, would you be happy if the Council ceased issuing you with a paper copy of each application for comment?**

Yes	5%	No	95%
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- 4) **If no, please explain the reason(s) why you would like to continue to receive a paper copy of each planning application (Please tick all that apply)**

No access to a computer/ the internet	19%
Problems with potentially missing deadlines for consultation response	52%
Inability to print large plans for inspections/meetings	83%
Neighbours and others ask to see applications received	52%
Other (please specify)	

Applications are circulated for all Councillors to comment, 4 out of 11 have no internet access;

Problems that on many occasions Councillors can not access your website;

Internet does not provide a reminder that plans are there;

Not all Councillors will access plans on internet;

Plans are difficult to view adequately online;

Online plans no good for a site visit;

The Parish Council would have to cover the cost of printing all documents to ensure Councillors could view the plans before commenting, do not have an A3 printer;

Do not have a projector or internet access at meetings to view plans;

Still need paper copy for meeting;

Council Chamber ill-equipped to show screen;

Not everyone is computer literate and some times the reproduction is not clear;

I am a part time clerk and if away for any reason then arrange for any paper work to be seen by parish councillors for action if necessary;

*No access to projector – it would be useful if a parish council could borrow a laptop and projector to try out at meetings before committing to purchase (Spaldwick);
No access to a projector – it would be useful if a parish council could borrow a laptop and projector to try this out at a meeting before committing to cost of purchase (Stow Longa);
Not all Councillors have internet access;
Internet access is at work and I can not print off documents for parish council purposes;
Printed plans are necessary for discussion at DC meetings;
It is virtually impossible to judge scale and impact or to read the data, in addition the scans are often very poor quality and thus almost illegible.*

5) Is the information supplied by the Council with a planning application sufficient to enable you to comment on the application?

Yes 93% No 7%

6) If no, please explain what further information you would like to receive.

*At Parish Council level need full information that DM Panel have;
Plans can be sparse in detail and lack clarity;
Not always sufficient information on plans e.g missing compass, scale, some elevations;
Occasionally HDC send out plans to the parish council apparently unchecked, e.g all plans should show the street scene for new building work in relation to existing, this is often missing;
In the case of planning applications relating to listed buildings it would be valuable to see more detail and have knowledge that listed building consent has also been sought.*

7) Do you think that the consultation period of 21 days is sufficiently long enough to enable you to submit your comments on an application?

Yes 51% No 49%

8) If the answer is no, please explain why not and how long you would ideally prefer to have to comment on an application (bearing in mind that there are government performance measures to be met by local planning authorities in terms of determination of planning applications).

*Due to the need to circulate each application to 11 Councillors in turn;
Doesn't fit our cycle of Parish Council meetings;
This Parish Council meets once every two months and have to call special meetings several times a year which is costly to the Council in money terms as well as time -8 weeks;
Ideally 4 weeks – Plans are sent to the clerk, who is not in this village. There is thus at least a week's delay before consultation process starts. For most plans we require a Parish Council meeting (we only have 5 Councillors – so are too small for a planning committee). Meetings take time to be arranged to suit all;
28 days;
Due to timings of Council Meeting dates – 30 days minimum;
Short consultation times can some months be very tight, especially if a public holiday is involved;
Full month would be better- to enable all Councillors to look at and fit in with set meeting;
28 days would be better to allow for receipt and distribution of plans, inspection and reports back to parish council and HDC;
Plans need to be circulated and 21 days can be insufficient;
Extension to 30 days would be helpful on occasions when meeting has just passed, otherwise additional meetings have to be arranged at extra cost to Parish Council, so flexibility needed;*

Small parish councils don't have the ability to have a planning committee and only meet on a monthly basis 'ad hoc' meetings are not possible so suggest 6 weeks from submission for decision from HDC;

In the event of issues such as 'Northbridge' the impact deserves serious and complete investigation;

Not always as parish council only meets once a month, first Monday of the month – 28 days would suit better;

It would be preferable if the time period was 28 days;

Being a small council (5 members) it is sometimes difficult forming a quorum at short notice;

It is occasionally necessary to request an extension beyond 21 days to avoid an excessive number of meetings;

Some months we have to have a special meeting sometimes for one application – 28 days would be better;

Meeting schedules mean that we may miss deadlines;

I think 28 days would be better. We hold a planning meeting monthly and the 28 days period is not always sufficient;

Would prefer 1 month, to minimize calling for extraordinary meetings for each set of plans;

Small parish councils like Hemingford Abbotts without a planning sub-committee frequently need to call additional or extraordinary council meetings to meet deadlines. 35 days would obviate this need, 28 days would significantly reduce it;

In most cases of minor planning applications, 21 days is fine but for changes to the village scene 28 days or more would be valuable, and for major changes, large industrial projects or more than one house for a small Hamlet – longer would be better – say 6 weeks. N.B all applications that come in from mid-July to August should have a September deadline because of school and other holidays.

9) Do you find it helpful if neighbours supply you with a copy of their comments on an application to assist you in formulating your recommendations?

Not very helpful	
Fairly helpful	40%
Very helpful	60%

10) How often is your council/meeting contacted by applicants/objectors with regard to planning applications in the parish?

Never	
Less than once a year	10%
1-5 times each year	59%
5-10 times each year	12%
More than 10 times each year	20%

Dependant on number of applications per year.

11) Do you allow members of the public to address your council/planning committee when they are considering a planning application and before a recommendation is determined?

Yes	95%	No	5%
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12) If yes, how often does this occur?

Less than once a year	13%
1-5 times each year	61%
5-10 times each year	18%
More than 10 times each year	8%

*Dependant on number of applications per year.
This is allowed during public forum.*

13) Do you think you should be consulted again if an application or plans are amended by an applicant before they are determined?

Yes	98%	No	2%
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14) Do you think that neighbours should be consulted again if an application or plans are amended by an applicant before they are determined?

Yes	98%	No	2%
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15) Does your council/meeting feel confident that it has sufficient knowledge of government guidance, regional strategy and district plans and policies when determining your recommendations on planning applications?

Not very confident	24%
Fairly confident	67%
Very confident	10%

16) Do you think that the District Council offers sufficient training to town and parish councils/parish meetings on planning policies and processes?

Yes- sufficient training is offered	43%
No- insufficient training is offered, more training should be available	57%

17) If you think that more training is required, what subjects would you prefer to be offered? (Please specify)

Criteria;
Not training that is required, but more accessible times;
No training is offered at present as far as I know;
Planning Policy, as it affects applications in rural communities;
Planning Policy;
Material Considerations;
How to make good comments;
The major changes to LA planning procedures i.e development framework and linking documentation needs explaining more fully;
All aspects of planning process;
Planning guidelines and appeals process;
Specifying and interpreting planning guidance;
Something similar to the South Cambridgeshire parish planning pack updated regularly with briefing sessions;
We would like training to include examples of what is acceptable and what isn't;
Information on the new rules for developer contributions;
Overview of strategy for the region and area;
How development will impact on transport and services;
All those mentioned in question 15;
All those mentioned in question 15;

All those mentioned in question 15;
 Those mentioned in question 15;
 Those mentioned in question 15;
 The role of the parish council in the planning process – they currently get involved in larger issues that district and county take care of;
 Explain why two applications that are very similar get different outcomes – this can cause great confusion;
 Planning policies,
 Reasons for refusal;
 Local development framework overview;
 Changes in policy;
 I didn't even know HDC makes training available! We have new Councillors who would appreciate an introductory course on planning policies and procedures. I (Clerk) would also attend to refresh my knowledge and learn what's where on the different internet sites;
 Planning rules: Enforcement processes;
 Greater clarification of HDC rulings on enforcement issues, and in relation to the forthcoming new core strategy when ratified.

18) Do you think that the opportunity for a town/parish council/parish meeting representative to speak at Council Development Management Panel meetings is useful?

Not very useful	7%
Fairly useful	29%
Very useful	64%

Further Comments

Waresley – What would be most important would be some feedback from the officer concerned, if there is a disagreement between the Parish Council and the officer. It would be nice to have the opportunity to comment further in this case. Feedback and further comment from the Parish Council could mean that an application might be decided without recourse to the planning committee. We'd also like to see a faster reaction from enforcement, if we alert them to planning infringements.

Ramsey – Far too little weight is placed on town council representation, we know what we want in our area. We are far more consistent than Development Control at HDC.

Spaldwick – Finalisation of HDCs plans and policies would help. Why couldn't it be the clerk that speaks at Development Management Panel meetings?

Stow Longa – Completion of HDCs plans and policies would help. I do not see why representation is limited to Councillors – why should the clerk not represent the Council?

It should not be expected that Parish Clerks have the time to constantly trawl HDC's website in case there is a planning application.

Cheltenham Borough Council

Cabinet – 20 January 2009

Charging for pre-application planning advice Report of the Strategic Director Environment

1. Executive summary and recommendation

1.1 The purpose of this report is to propose a charging scheme for pre-application planning advice given to applicants prior to the submission of a planning application. This proposal will contribute to the cost of providing the service.

1.2 I therefore recommend that Cabinet:

1.2.1 Approves the introduction of a charging scheme for pre-application planning advice and set fees to be effective from 1st April 2009 in accordance with the flat rate fee banding structure detailed at Section 8 below;

1.2.2 Delegates authority to the Strategic Director Environment to make minor changes to the approved scheme as required. This will include the development of customer guidance notes, application forms and website information to support the scheme, similar to that adopted by other local authorities.

1.3 Summary of implications:

1.3.1 **Financial** – Given the extent of pre-application advice the Council currently gives out for free, the possibility of charging is something that must be given serious consideration given the Council's revenue position over the medium term. It is anticipated that the recommended flat fee charging for pre-application advice outlined at section 8 will create an additional projected income generation in the region of £30,000 for 2009/10.

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1.3.2 **Legal** - Section 93 of the Local Government Act 2003 introduced a general power for authorities to charge for "discretionary" services. In the case of planning, this applies to activities outside the scope of the existing fees structure, such as pre application advice. The Act restricts the amount of the charges recoverable to the costs of providing the service with no ability to make a profit. In deciding whether or not to charge for any discretionary service the Council must have regard to any guidance issued by the Secretary of State. Consultative draft guidance has been issued and whilst this is still a draft document regard should be made to it although the weight to be attached is limited. The draft guidance states that the power in Section 93 will operate on the basis that the discretionary service is offered at a charge and that anyone who requires the service agrees to take it up on these terms. Where existing services are charged for, payment in advance or on application is the usual practice. This should also be the case for

charging for pre-application advice as it avoids extra costs associated with debt recovery should payment in arrears not be made. Any pre application advice given is without prejudice to the final decision made on the application. There will be no refund of the fee when an application is refused.

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1.3.3 Human Resources

No direct HR implications arising from this report. However, a review of the impact of officer time is recommended after first six months of the scheme being operational.

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01242

1.4 Implications on corporate and community plan priorities

- 1.4.1 Fee income from pre-application charging is identified as one of the Bridging the Gap programme board projected income generation of £30,000 in the draft general fund budget for 2009/10.

1.5 Statement on risk

- 1.5.1 There is a perception that charging for pre-application advice raises the customer's expectations about the level of service they can expect to receive, and this has to be carefully considered and aligned with resources.
- 1.5.2 It is proposed to monitor the nature of decisions issued to identify if the charging procedure results in an increase in the refusal of planning permission. Officer time spent on charged pre application advice will also be recorded. The procedure, including the rate of the charge, and types of proposal that attract the charge, will be reviewed after 6 months of coming into effect. This will include giving consideration to whether there is scope for extending charging into other areas of planning work.
- 1.5.3 The projected income has been based on those major and minor applications in the 2007/08 where pre-application advice was sought. There is a risk that future volumes may be different resulting in different income levels to that projected in this report. Pre application advice income levels will need to be carefully monitored alongside existing development control fee income levels.
- 1.5.4 A risk assessment is attached at Appendix 1.

2. Introduction

- 2.1 Many local planning authorities devote considerable time and effort to offering pre-application advice, seeing it as part of delivering a good planning service. Many requests for advice are of a speculative nature and do not lead to the submission of an application. If an application is eventually submitted the application fee is for considering the application, rather than for the cost of the pre-application discussions – which clearly have cost implications for the Council.
- 2.2 The Local Government Act 2003 gave planning authorities a discretionary power to charge for giving pre-application advice (as a service that an authority has the power, but is not obliged, to provide) and therefore allowed authorities to recover at least some

of the costs incurred *before the application is submitted*. However the income raised must not exceed the cost of providing the service. In January 2008 the Audit Commission published a report 'Positively Charged – Maximising the Benefit of Local Public Service Charges.' The report provides advice and recommendations on the approach to charging for services by local authorities.

3. Key issues considered

- 3.1 Whether to charge for all pre-application advice given or only for specific types of development proposed or nature of applicant.
- 3.2 How to charge for officer time, either by size of development, percentage of planning fee, seniority of officer involved, or to adopt a flat rate.
- 3.3 What rate the charge should be.
- 3.4 Whether to charge for advice given on schemes that involve Council owned land.

4. Options appraisal

- 4.1 There are a number of local authorities that charge for pre-application advice but there is no consistent approach in the way that the charge is levied. It is however clear that most authorities do not charge for advice relating to the extension of householder / domestic properties. There are some however including Bracknell Forest who charge £20.00 for householder enquiries with exemptions for disability conversions or listed building / conservation consents. Taunton & Deane charge £40.00 per meeting plus VAT. Whilst this type of application represents a significant proportion of the applications submitted to Cheltenham Borough Council, the no fee approach is favoured for householders, small businesses, and developments on Council owned land. It is important that the charge is easy to calculate and collect, and reflects the different levels of complexity and time taken to give the advice. Most authorities have adopted a practice where developers submit a written request for a meeting and the fee for such is then paid in advance of the meeting taking place. This approach is favoured for Cheltenham. There are various methods of charging for meetings / written advice in these examples -

4.1.1 A fee based on a percentage of the planning fee:

Hart District Council charge 25% of the planning fee for pre-application advice. Bath and North East Somerset charge for meetings on major applications on the basis of 10% of the planning fee.

This approach is not favoured because of the complexities of calculating the fee, particularly when schemes are in their infancy and the precise floor space / number of units may not be known.

4.1.2 A fee based on the length of time of the meeting:

This approach is taken by Surrey Heath with a one hour meeting attracting a fee of £350.00 and a three hour meeting £700.00.

This approach is not favoured because it presents difficulties when meetings overrun (for maybe good reasons) the allocated time. The planning officer clearly could not demand more money before allowing the meeting to continue.

4.1.3 A fee based reflecting the seniority of the planning officer at the meeting:

This approach is adopted by Windsor and Maidenhead who charge £30.00, £50.00 or £70.00 per hour depending on the seniority of those attending the meeting.

Such a system can however result in greater pressure for meetings with more senior staff and also has the same disadvantages of 4.1.2 above.

4.1.4 **A flat rate per meeting based on the size of the development:**

Developments are already categorised by the Government according to their size. "Major" applications include all residential schemes of 10 or more units and commercial schemes which create more than 1000m² floor space. "Minor" applications exclude all householder proposals but include residential schemes from 1 to 9 units and commercial floor space up to 1000m². Mid Sussex, whilst not differentiating between application type, charge a flat rate £100.00 per meeting.

A flat rate fee is considered to be the most suitable approach for Cheltenham primarily because the fee scale is easily calculated and understood and can be adjusted to reflect the complexity of the proposal. It is also likely a flat rate for a meeting would bring a higher income on smaller schemes. Tewkesbury Borough Council and Cotswold District Council have already introduced a pre-application charging scheme based upon this option. The Council have a similar regional customer / agent base and therefore the resistance to introduction of fees should be reduced.

However, even with the majority of local authorities nationally adopting a flat rate approach to fees the banding is complex and varies wildly from £100.00 up to a £3,000.00 rate introduced by Tewkesbury BC.

4.2 **Cotswold DC and Tewkesbury BC scheme comparisons**

4.2.1 Cotswold DC have adopted a flat rate pre-application advice fee of £1,000 for all major developments whatever the size. Householder and small developments are exempt. In addition for subsequent meetings an hourly rate is applied based upon the seniority of the officer and numbers attending as outlined in 4.1.3 above. Cotswold DC approach is shown in Appendix 2.

4.2.2 Tewkesbury BC have adopted a flat rate pre-application fee of £500 for minor residential developments (2-9 dwellings) plus a £125 fee for subsequent meetings with officers. Some householder charges apply for officer visits and written requests.

The major developments have been banded into -

small scale (10-49 dwellings) = £1,000 plus a £500 fee for subsequent meetings;
medium scale (50-199 dwellings) = £2,000 plus a £750 fee for subsequent meetings;
and large scale (200+ dwellings) = £3,000 plus £1,000 fee for subsequent meetings.
Tewkesbury approach is shown in Appendix 3.

4.3 **Regional variation and scheme comparisons**

4.3.1 In its paper on local authority charging practices, *Positively Charged*, the Audit Commission recommends that local authorities take into account their unique demography when setting fees and charges. The combination of a rising population, a reputation as a cultural centre, an attractive location for employers and imminent urban development, provide a solid foundation for pre-application charges.

4.3.2 An example of the number of the varied approaches to pre-application advice charges are given in Appendix 4. This demonstrates the complexity and difficulty in arriving at an appropriate fee structure for the Council.

5. **Affordability**

5.1 Affordability should not be a significant issue. Major developments are multi-million pound enterprises. In that financial context, a pre-application charge of a few thousand pounds is not going to deter a serious developer. As we have seen from other

authorities, developers are generally content to pay if they get a clearly specified level of service in return.

- 5.2 The majority of planning applications are small-scale householder schemes. Such applications would be exempt from any pre-application advice charge, should the Council choose to impose one. The issue of affordability would therefore not arise in relation to these applications.

6. Benefits and sustainability

- 6.1 Introducing charges would have the following advantages –

6.1.1. The customer would pay for the service not the council tax payer;

6.1.2 Income could be used to fund improvements to the planning service;

6.1.3 Income could be used to reduce the call on council tax or built into overall budget savings.

6.2 It has proved very difficult to arrive at a realistic estimate of income. There are many unknown factors: for example, we do not know how the development sector will react to the introduction of a charge and the current economic climate has added to the uncertainties. The charging structure proposed appears reasonable based on the practice elsewhere. It is reasonable to expect that the £30,000 income generation identified in the Bridging the Gap Programme is achievable.

- 6.3 On the other hand the disadvantages could be –

6.3.1 The applicant could choose not to seek pre-application advice and problems may arise later which could have been avoided. This may result in poorer developments proposed, more refusals and subsequent appeals.

6.3.2 Charges for advice will require additional officer time in respect of the collection of fees and arrangement of meetings. Planning officers will need to give more time to preparing for meetings and provision of written minutes. This may impact on officers' ability to determine applications within the target period.

7. Consultation

- 7.1 A consultation exercise has been carried out with stakeholders in the form of 36 agents who regularly use the Council's Planning Service. We received 5 written and 2 verbal replies and the comments received are summarised as follows –

- Why should an additional charge be levied for a service which is under-resourced and has little time to analyse the detail of the proposal.
- Planning system has already moved backwards with contributions being requested. Clients have to pay for various surveys already. Pre-application fees are a payment too far.
- Minor applicants will avoid having pre-application discussions. This will lead to more work for the officers.
- Another admin process which will cause unacceptable delays
- Some simple discussions are short and not worth charging for
- Charge objectors, stakeholders and neighbours too, for explanation of proposals
- Application fees should cover these costs
- This is a public service and is already paid for
- There is no certainty that the advice will be adhered to and therefore be of benefit. We do not meet the officers in charging authorities now but wait for the decision and

then appeal or negotiate a resubmission. This is more work for everyone and counter-productive

- If advice includes detailed input from all consultees, charging would have some merit – but difficulty with getting replies within certain timeframe.
- Applicants will use first application as the pre-application discussion and then address refusal with the fee go. Might lead to more applications but less revenue.

The verbal replies were to the effect that this was another charge that would be placed with the client; there was no particular problem.

7.2 We have been advised that Gloucestershire County Council has intentions to start charging for pre-application advice and this element will have to be absorbed into any charges, unless a separate fee is charged – this is not recommended.

7.3 Tewkesbury Borough Council and Cotswold District Council are operating different charging schemes their year one projections of income (extrapolated from first quarter of operation) are –

Cotswold £16,000

Tewkesbury £26,000

Note: these figures do not take into account the steep decline in economic activity since the charging regimes started in July 2008.

8. Recommendation

8.1 Cheltenham has a good reputation locally for provision of helpful and timely pre-application advice. There is potential for introducing pre-application charges into the planning process, provided that the scheme is easy to understand and administer. The format must be simple and it should be fully explained on the Council's website with clear information on what is required to process a request. There must also be a clear indication of the scope of the response to be provided. In the spirit of joint working with other Districts in Gloucestershire, it would be helpful to have a scheme that follows the principles adopted elsewhere. Unfortunately, the two districts that have started charging have different regimes.

8.2 The recommended fee structure to be adopted by the Council is detailed below. It is similar to the Tewkesbury BC model except that householder pre-application advice is not chargeable and there is no proposal for charging for schemes relating to developments on Council owned land and small scale employment proposals under 1000 m². These fees would be subject to an annual review and inflationary price increases.

Charges would be introduced from 1st April 2009.

Householder development and single dwellings	Exempt – no charge
Minor Residential Development (2-9 dwellings)	£500 + VAT Each additional meeting with officers - £125 + VAT
Category C Major Residential Development (10-49 dwellings)	£1,000 + VAT Each additional meeting with officers - £500 + VAT

Category B Major Residential Development (50-199 dwellings)	£2,000 + VAT Each additional meeting with Officers - £750 + VAT
Category A Major Residential Development (200+ dwellings)	£3,000 + VAT Each additional meeting with Officers - £1000 + VAT
Other developments including changes of use under 1000 m ² .	Exempt – no charge
Other developments including change of use: 1,000 to 4,999 m ² of floor space, or where the site area is between 0.5 and 2.0 hectares.	£1,000 + VAT Each additional meeting with officers - £500 + VAT
Other developments, including change of use: 5,000 to 9,999 m ² or more of floor space, or where the site area is between 2.0 and 4.0 hectares	£2,000 + VAT Each additional meeting with Officers - £750 + VAT
Other developments, including change of use: 10,000 m ² or more of floor space, or where the site area is 4.0 hectares or more	£3,000 + VAT Each additional meeting with Officers - £1000 + VAT

Officers are preparing guidance notes for applicants, which will set out the procedures for pre-application discussions. These notes will be available in draft in January 2009 and will be published prior to the commencement of the charging regime.

Background papers: Audit Commission report 'Positively Charged – Maximising the Benefit of Local Public Service Charges'

Planning Advisory Service (PAS) case study – A Material World: Charging for pre-application planning advice

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Accountability: Cabinet Member Built Environment

Scrutiny function: Environment Overview and Scrutiny committee

Appendix 1

Risk identified		Impact Assessment	Impact score (1-4)	Likelihood score (1-6)	Initial risk score (1 - 24)	Managing the risk: Control / mitigating action	Ownership	Residual risk score
	Existing risk ref.							
Identify the event or trigger which may generate some new or additional risk to the council. Significant risks which already identified are recorded on the corporate risk register, or on division risk models on TEN, and should be referenced in column B.	If the risk is already recorded, note either the CRR or TEN reference	Use the corporate risk scorecard to identify the category of risk impact e.g. potential for litigation, financial uncertainty, reputation. There can be more than one impact.	Use the scorecard to evaluate the severity of impact(s); enter the highest score.	Assign a score according to probability, timing or frequency.	This is the raw risk score, without any controls in place to mitigate the risk	There are usually things the council can do to reduce either the likelihood or impact of a risky event. Mitigating controls can already be in place, such as budget monitoring. New controls or actions may also be possible, such as agreeing SLA's with partners, or obtaining additional funds.	Identifying the officer who will manage the risk will link mitigating actions to responsibilities in the business plan.	The initial impact or likelihood score can be lowered, to demonstrate the potential to reduce risk levels through actions noted in column G. Record the revised risk score as Impact x Likelihood = Risk
A	B	C	D	E	F = D x E	G	H	6 Accept
Charging for pre-application planning advice is a drain on planning officer resource.		Reputation Service provision Morale	2	3	6	Continually monitor published service levels and workload and conduct review after first six months of the scheme being operational.	Assistant Director Built Environment	6 Accept
Charging for pre-application advice leads to a decrease in applicants seeking advice and in turn an increase in refusals and appeals.		Reputation Service provision Financial	2	3	6	Continually monitor the trend in the number of refusals and appeals and conduct a review after first six months of the scheme being operational. Amend the scheme where necessary.	Assistant Director Built Environment	6 Accept
Projected income from charging for pre-application planning advice is not as projected due to either a reduced number of applicants requesting service or recession.		Business Plan objectives (BtG) Financial cost	3	3	9	Continually monitor income trends and conduct a review after first six months of the scheme being operational.	Assistant Director Built Environment	9 Accept

Cotswold District Council

For all pre-application advice there is a fixed initial standard charge of **£1000**, which comprises the amount of time taken on a case by officer(s), from the investigation stage to the actual meeting with the applicant and the final written comment. For subsequent work there will be an hourly charge based on the following rates:

Hourly rates for pre-application advice:

Officer	Hourly rate
Director	£110
Manager of Service	£75
Principal Planners/Heritage Officers	£50
Major Applications Officer	£55
Senior Planners/Heritage Officers	£48
Planners	£44
Assistant Planners	£40

All above charges are exclusive of VAT.

Appendix 3

Tewkesbury Borough Council

Professional Agents Replies to Written Requests for information or documents received from Solicitors, Developers or Professional Agents	£50 + VAT
Householder development and single dwellings – Site visits and written advice	£100 + VAT
Minor Residential Development (2-9 dwellings)	£500 + VAT Each additional meeting with Officers - £125 + VAT
Small Scale Major Residential Development (10-49 dwellings)	£1,000 + VAT Each additional meeting with Officers - £500 + VAT
Medium Scale Major Residential Development (50-199 dwellings)	£2,000 + VAT Each additional meeting with Officers - £750 + VAT
Large Scale Major Residential Development (200+ dwellings)	£3,000 + VAT Each additional meeting with Officers - £1000 + VAT
Other Minor development*	Written advice - £75 + VAT Meeting with officers - £125 + VAT
Other Small Scale Major development **	Written advice - £250 + VAT Meeting with officers - £500 + VAT
Other Large Scale Major Development***	Written advice - £500 + VAT Meeting with officers - £1,000 + VAT

***Minor Development** = all other developments, including change of use, floor space of up to 999 square metres or site area of up to 0.99 hectares. Gypsy and Traveller Pitches – 1-9 pitches.

****Small Scale Major Development** = all other developments, including change of use: 1000-9,999 square metres or more of floor space, or where the site area is between 0.5 and 2.0 hectares. Gypsy and Traveller Pitches – 10-199 pitches.

Cabinet 20 January 2009
Charging for pre-application planning advice

*****Large Scale Major Development** = all other developments, including change of use: 10,000 square metres or more of floor space, or where the site area is 4.0 hectares or more. Gypsy and Traveller Pitches - 200 or more pitches

Extracts from local authority web sites – Appendix 4

Bracknell Forest Council – pre-application advice charges

Residential Development	Initial fee (per site)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1-5 homes - £205.53
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6-10 homes - £293.62
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 11-50 homes - £489.36
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 50 + homes - £978.72
	Plus Officer recharge rate at £73.40 per officer in attendance at a meeting
	Traffic model - at cost
Commercial Property Development (including change of use)	Initial fee (per site)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1-1,000 sq m - £244.69
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1001-10,000 sq m - £489.36
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • over 10,000 sq m (1Ha)- £978.72
	Plus Officer recharge rate at £73.40 per officer in attendance at a meeting
	Traffic model - at cost

London Borough of Merton – pre-application advice charges

Major/Complex: The initial charge for this service is £800 (plus VAT)

Minor/Conversions: The initial charge for this service is £400 (plus VAT)

Fees are non-refundable.

The fee will cover the time taken on a case by a planning officer from the investigation stage through to the actual meeting with the applicants and the written response.

Where additional officers are required at meetings then additional charges will apply. The hourly rate for officers is shown below:

- Head of Service £250 per hour
- Team leader/Section Manager £170 per hour
- Design officer £100 per hour
- Senior planner £ 80 per hour

London Borough of Barnet – pre-application advice charges

Category ‘A’ Proposals £2,935 (including VAT)

Large Scale, Complex Development

25 or more residential units

2000m² or more of commercial floor space

Category ‘B’ Proposals £1,468 (including VAT)

Other Major Development

Provision of 10 - 24 dwelling units

Provision of 1000m² - 2000m² of commercial floor space

Development involving a site of 0.5ha and over

Mixed use developments

Complex Proposals

Large or complex change of use or development proposals e.g. sport and leisure proposals

Development requiring an EIA*

Planning proposals which are associated with complex heritage listed building or conservation issues

Entertainment uses

Telecommunications equipment and masts – composite proposals for 10 or more sites.

Note:

* EIA (Environmental Impact Assessment) refers to development proposals which fall under the provision of categories 1 and 2 of the Town and Country Planning (Environment Impact Assessment) Regulations 1999.

Planning / development briefs / frameworks / master planning

Sites for which the landowner wishes to establish their potential value, or where a clear and consistent advice for potential developers will expedite the development process.

Category ‘C’ Proposals £646 (including VAT)

Minor development

Provision of commercial development of 100-999 m²

Creation of 2-9 new residential units

Changes of use of 100m² -999m²

Advertisement application for hoardings

Individual proposals for Telecommunications equipment and masts

Exemptions - no fee

The charging scheme will not apply to discussions in connection with very small business premises, and related advertisement proposals, or very minor schemes or householder schemes (small extensions / alterations), certificates of lawfulness, enforcement or advice to any local resident affected by a development. Such advice at this time will continue to be provided free of charge.

Reigate & Banstead Borough Council – pre-application advice charges

For 2007/08, the fee scale will be as follows:

- £200 for meetings lasting up to one hour
- £500 for meetings lasting between one and three hours.

Charges for meetings taking longer than three hours would be a matter of negotiation.

Doncaster Council – pre-application advice charges

We welcome pre application discussions for all types of development proposal and believe they are of value to all parties. Development proposals that will be subject to the chargeable pre application advice scheme are the following types of development:

- Provision of 50 or more residential units
- Provisions for over 5,000 m² of commercial or industrial floor space
- Development sites over 5 hectares
- Developments that are of significant size / scale and are potentially of major public interest, where an Environmental Impact Assessment would normally be required.

All developments that fall below these levels will not be offered the chargeable detailed service unless specifically requested in order to take advantage of the project led approach to the process. All other developments will be subject to general pre application advice, which will be FREE of charge.

Chargeable detailed service

When your development proposals falls within the chargeable criteria, you will have three options available, these being;

- Take advantage of the 1 meeting and detailed written advice option, or
- Take advantage of the 5 meetings and detailed written advice option, or

- Have no pre-application advice and submit your application.

We would advise one of the top two options. The charges for the service are;

- 1 meeting and detailed written advice - £800
- 5 meetings and detailed written advice - £3500

If you require any additional meetings, or advice from the Council, these can be arranged at appropriate hourly rates for the staff involved. Please read the document below to find the full information about this.

APPENDIX C

PLANNING PROCESS UNDER REVIEW

Submitted a planning application lately? Or perhaps you have objected to an application? Huntingdonshire District Council would like to have your views on what you thought of the process. Were you satisfied with the way in which your application or comments were dealt with for example? Did you think the process took too long?

One of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Panels is looking into the way in which planning applications are determined and would welcome comments from anyone who has recently been involved in the process. The Panel cannot deal with decisions themselves for which there are avenues of appeal for aggrieved parties, but would like members of the public to share their experience of the way with which they were dealt with and whether they have any suggestions for improvements.

If you would like to comment please do so in writing or email to: Mrs Jessica Walker, Democratic Services, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon, Cambridgeshire, PE29 3TN. Jessica.walker@huntsdc.gov.uk by Wednesday 30th September.

APPENDIX D

Development Management Process
Summary Of Views Received From The Public
17 views received

Recurring Themes.

- Lack of communication and co-operation from the planning department. **(10 times)**
- Inaccurate and inconsistent advice given. **(5 times)**
- Negative, arrogant and unhelpful attitude. **(3 times)**
- Remit for neighbour notification letters isn't inclusive enough. **(4 times)**
- Notifications are placed in newspapers – however publications are not delivered to all areas. **(3 times)**
- Once received and catalogued, applications should be sent to parish council's straight away for consideration at their monthly meeting. If necessary the consultation period for applications should be extended to accommodate this. **(2 times)**

Other Matters Raised.

- The planning form (one size fits all) causes difficulties for applicants.
- Civic Society of St Ives suggested that they should be a formal party to any planning applications which involve conservation areas or historic buildings.
- HDC website does not contain as much information as neighbouring authorities.
- More attention is paid to central government and quangos than local residents and businesses.
- Satisfied that planning officers have been willing to give their time and expertise to listen to concerns and provide assistance – particularly Louise Platt – appreciative of her open and honest attitude.
- The planning authority does not use its enforcement powers as it should.
- Significant documents for large scale developments should be available on the planning portal.
- Pleased that contributions to the consultation process have shown to make a difference.
- The planning authority should prioritise environmental concerns for the wellbeing of residents.
- South Cambridgeshire District Council set a better example of working with developers and the public to get landscaping and biodiversity measures achieved.
- Concern that planners are using their time and tax-payers money impeding householders trying to carry out essential repairs rather than concentrating on major development issues.

- Development Management Panel Members do not seem to have a grasp of planning policies and appear confused by planning terms.
- Development Management Panel Members appeared to have their minds made up before discussions on an application have taken place.
- Planners and Members do not have to justify their decisions, even when they go against their own guidelines.
- Minor amendments can be agreed without further consultation as long as they are not a 'material change', what constitutes a 'material change'?
- 3 weeks is not long enough for neighbours to respond to larger applications.
- More help should be given to individuals trying to understand planning policies.
- Parish Councils need to seek the opinions of neighbours – at the very least residents should know the timescale that Parish Councils work to.
- Guidelines need to be rigid and more consistently applied.
- 3 minutes to speak on an application is not long enough.
- Development Management Panel Members should not rely on a case officer's summary, they should read objectors letters to get a better understanding of the case.
- Pertinent parts of the planning process not adhered to by the case officer.
- When applying for planning permission comparable evidence should be considered fairly.
- There should be a simple procedure for updating temporary permission to full permission, and the fee seems very high.
- Some large developments seem to be granted permission despite public criticism.
- Unclear for people with no experience whether the planning department is here to help with applications, recommend approval/refusal, offer honest and current advice or deter alterations and developments overall.

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