



<b>Report for:</b>	<b>Strategic Planning and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee</b>
<b>Date of meeting:</b>	<b>10 October 2017</b>
<b>Part:</b>	<b>1</b>
If Part II, reason:	

<b>Title of report:</b>	<b>Development Management Update</b>
<b>Contact:</b>	Graham Sutton - Portfolio Holder, Planning and Regeneration  Author/Responsible Officer:  James Doe, Assistant Director Planning, Development and Regeneration  Andrew Horner, Interim Group Manager, Development Management and Planning
<b>Purpose of report:</b>	1. To provide an update on improvement to efficiencies in the Development Management service. 2.To provide a general overview of current and future service demand
<b>Recommendations</b>	1. That the report be noted.
<b>Corporate objectives:</b>	Ensuring economic growth.  Providing good quality affordable homes, in particular for those in most need.  A clean safe and enjoyable environment.
<b>Implications:</b>	<u>Financial</u>  Forthcoming changes to fees and levels of service demand have implications for the 18/19 budget proposals.
<b>Risk implications</b>	Risk of complaints increasing due to a change in service Provided and increased service demand

Equalities Implications	None arising from this report.
Health and safety Implications	None arising from this report.
Consultees:	
Background papers:	Housing and Planning Act 2016 Planning, Development and Regeneration Service Plan 2016/17
Glossary of acronyms and any other abbreviations used in this report:	PiP – Permission in Principle

## 1.0 Background

1.1 Development Management (DM) is one of three regulatory services provided by Planning, Development and Regeneration – the other two being Building Control and Local Land Charges. All three services are characterised by a steady flow of applications made to the Council throughout the year, and with that a series of systems and processes to ensure each service meets statutory and local policy requirements, runs as efficiently as possible and provides good value to the taxpayer.

1.2 The service plan for Planning, Development and Regeneration for 2016/17 contained proposals to improve efficiencies in each of these three regulatory services. This report focuses on the Development Management service (often known as the Planning service). The services it covers and provides are:

- Processing planning and related applications, including listed buildings
- Handling planning appeals
- Planning Enforcement
- Conservation services

This report is a follow up to the report presented to this committee on 10 January 2017 (Agenda item 7).

1.3 Development Management is provided at a net cost to the taxpayer. About 60% of the cost of the service is offset by planning fee income, which can vary annually according to economic conditions. With this, and the need for the Council to make savings, it is important to minimise the burden on the taxpayer whilst ensuring that a quality service is provided to all customers – be they applicants and developers seeking planning permission, or residents who might be affected by the developments that are proposed.

1.4 This report provides an update on the steps taken so far to improve efficiencies in the DM service and sets out some issues in response to increasing service demand that will require attention and action over the next year and beyond.

## **2.0 Changes to date and on-going changes**

2.1 At the heart of activity to improve efficiencies in the service has been the review of systems and processes. Put simply, to ensure that these cover all actions that are needed to discharge and perform the required service, and to make sure it runs as efficiently as possible. The review follows the principles of 'systems thinking', which involves mapping out what current practice and looking for opportunities to do things simpler, faster or more effectively.

2.2 The review is ongoing with some works implemented already; significant changes are noted below. Further work will be carried out and the "systems thinking" approach promotes continual improvement to reflect ongoing changes in areas such as: demand, legislation and ICT systems and software.

### 2.2 Paperless Consultation with Town and Parish Councils

This project involved supplying Town and Parish Councils with laptop computers and supporting ICT equipment such as printers and projectors to allow the Town and Parish Councils to view and comment planning application documents on line.

2.3 All town and Parish Councils have been supplied with the hardware requested and have moved to viewing applications on line. The DM service no longer prints and sends out paper consultations to Town and Parish Councils. There has been a significant saving in staff time and resources such as paper and use of printers as a result of this work. Feedback from Town and Parish Clarks has generally been positive with support being provided by DM officers during the transition period.

### 2.4 Changes To Scheme of Delegation and Operation of the Development Management Committee

2.5 The changes have involved an increase in the scope of items that can be determined without reporting to Development Management Committee (DMC); reduced frequency of meeting (monthly rather than a three weekly cycle) and a limit on meeting duration to ensure a 10:30pm finish.

2.6 The revised meeting cycle began with the current Council year and has begun to work effectively. Recent meetings have seen business concluded by or before the 10:30 cut off. There were some initial issues but these have been resolved through improved agenda management and revised arrangements for items with public speaking to ensure these items are taken at the beginning of the meeting. Operation of the meetings will be kept under review with further opportunities to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the meetings identified and implemented.

### 2.7 Planning Performance Agreements (PPA)

The planning service has entered into a number of these agreements where developers pay for additional officer resource and are able to agree a revised timetable for the determination of applications that removes the need to meet the nationally set targets for the determination of applications. The

agreements cover the pre-application process in addition to determination of the application and can encompass approval of detailed required by conditions and preparation of section 106 agreements.

2.8 Work on developing the PPA approach is ongoing with work to develop a DBC template; develop a performance/service charter and bespoke charging regime. Current agreements are developed on an ad hoc basis and the proposed enhancements will deliver greater certainty for developers on the service offered and ensure that costs are properly recovered

### 2.9 Public Access for Planning

2.10 An upgrade to the Public Access system which allows residents, Town and Parish Councils and other interested parties to view and comment on planning applications has recently been launched. The updated system allows the display of more information and easier submission of comments on applications.

2.11 Whilst delivering improved functionality there have been a significant number of technical issues with the operation of the software which have resulted in loss of service and issues with publication of some documents. There have also been functional issues with the submission of comments by Town and Parish Councils. Planning officers have been working with the ICT team to address these issues. The ICT team have sought support from the software supplier and are working to implement the changes recommended by them. This work has a high priority for the service in order to ensure that full functionality is delivered and there is no further system unavailability.

## **3.0 Future Changes and service Demand**

### 3.1 Housing White paper

The Government published a housing white paper earlier this year which looked at a range of options for speeding and increasing the delivery of new housing. The paper set out a range of proposals and options to improve delivery of new homes and supporting infrastructure. The May General Election resulted in something of a hiatus around moving the ideas from the White paper forward.

3.2 A significant White paper proposal was to increase planning application fees by 20% subject to the monies being ring fenced to support the planning function. The preliminary steps for this change have been completed but the formal regulation to allow the change has not yet been completed. Recent comment from Government suggests that the fee rise is likely to come into effect during the current financial year.

### 3.3 Service Demand

In terms of absolute demand the number applications received over the last couple of years and forecast for the current year has remained constant. This pattern, however, hides a substantial increase in the scale and complexity of major planning applications that have been received. The table below shows actual and estimated numbers of units and floor space covered by major planning applications:

**Total Number of new dwellings and floor space proposed in major planning applications 1 April 2012 – 31 March 2017**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Dwellings</b>	<b>Commercial Floor Space (square metres)</b>	<b>Retail Floor Space (square metres)</b>
12-13	431	9983	1876
13-14	662	39974	10916
14-15	831	42779	14706
15-16	842	22046	0
16-17	938	81233	13228
<b>Percentage increase between 12-13 and 16-17</b>	<b>117%</b>	<b>713%</b>	<b>605%</b>

Forecast for current and next year

<b>Year</b>	<b>Dwellings</b>	<b>Commercial Floor Space (square metres)</b>	<b>Retail Floor Space (square metres)</b>
17-18*	1436	34,228	10,500
18-19#	1150	7,433	

\*actual figures to date plus confirmed submissions for the year and/or extrapolation of data for year to date

#Schemes at pre-app and/or PPA plus allowance for reserved matters submissions on sites with outline permission

3.4 The data demonstrates a massive increase in the complexity of cases received through increase in unit numbers and floor space. The more units proposed in an application correlates to an increase in complexity and the range of issues that need to be addressed. This in turn places a much greater demand on officer time meaning that the simple application numbers do not reflect the true level of service demand.

3.5 It is anticipated that current demand levels will be maintained given the level of housing likely to be identified in the emerging local plan. In addition to housing growth there will be complementary growth in employment and retail development to support the growing population and deliver a balance between population and economic growth.

3.6 The proposed fee increases together with the greater use of PPAs will help to meet the service demand from the growth outlined above and expected to continue into the future.

### 3.7 Brownfield Land Register

The Council has to produce a Brownfield Land Register (BLR) to identify previously developed land that may be suitable for redevelopment. Through the register process it is possible to grant Permission in Principle (PiP) for the development of sites. PiP establishes the principle of development on a site but a further application for Technical Details approval is required before development can be carried out.

- 3.8 The BLR is being led by the SPAR Team but with support from a DM officer for two days a week. Once there are sites with PiP the subsequent applications for approval of details will fall to DM officers and the DMC where applications fall outside the scope of the scheme of delegation. The applications are likely to be in addition to existing caseload and represent further growth in service demand; application fees will apply to these applications but levels have not yet been confirmed.

### 3.9 Replacement of Acolaid

The DM service (along with Building Control and Land Charges) use Acolaid software to manage planning and other applications as the primary back office system. Acolaid also links to Public Access for Planning and other systems including Information@Work (the document storage system). The supplier of the software has advised the product will no longer be developed and technical support for the product will end in the medium term. It is, therefore, necessary to secure a replacement for Acolaid.

- 3.10 Delivering a replacement for Acolaid will be a complex and challenging process to ensure that current functionality is maintained and efficiencies are delivered through making best use of the latest developments. Mobile working will be a key requirement in the new specification to remove the remaining paper documents used in the planning application process.
- 3.11 Initial work has begun on setting up the replacement programme and setting up a governance framework. Initial soft market testing is being programmed to allow potential suppliers to demonstrate their products. There is already a Capital allocation in the current budget to support the delivery of this project.
- 3.12 As Acolaid is part of a public phasing system it will be essential to ensure that the transition is effective and all historic data and documents are transferred and remain available.

## **4.0 Conclusion**

- 4.1 Progress on efficiencies has led to reducing the amount of paper we are using and streamlined the Development Management Committee process. The service continues to face challenges with increased workload and changing legislation.
- 4.2 Replacing the Acolaid software will be a major challenge and delivering a seamless transition to the new system will be a key objective for the move.

- 4.3 We will keep up to date with changing statutory legislation, particularly the impending changes to fee regulations and further changes arising from the Housing White Paper as this is likely to have an impact on our income, resources and planning decisions.