

Public Document Pack



Democratic Services
White Cliffs Business Park
Dover
Kent CT16 3PJ

Telephone: (01304) 821199
Fax: (01304) 872452
DX: 6312
Minicom: (01304) 820115
Website: www.dover.gov.uk
e-mail: democraticservices@dover.gov.uk

09 May 2014

Dear Councillor

I am now able to enclose, for consideration at the meeting of the **COUNCIL** on Wednesday 14 May 2014 at 6.20 pm, the following reports that were unavailable when the agenda was printed.

5 **REGENERATION AND DEVELOPMENT RESOURCES** (Pages 3 - 22)

To consider the report of the Head of Paid Service (to follow).

The Cabinet at its meeting on 12 May 2014 considered the attached report of the Head of Paid Service upon the Regeneration and Development Resources.

The Cabinet recommendation will be circulated at the meeting.

8 **BYELAWS WITH RESPECT TO ACUPUNCTURE, COSMETIC SKIN PIERCING, TATTOOING, SEMI-PERMANENT SKIN COLOURING AND ELECTROLYSIS**

Please note that this item has been withdrawn from the agenda.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "Nicky", written over a white background. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Chief Executive

This page is intentionally left blank

Subject:	REGENERATION AND DEVELOPMENT RESOURCES
Meeting and Date:	Cabinet – 12 May 2014 Council – 14 May 2014
Report of:	Nadeem Aziz – Head of Paid service
Portfolio Holder:	Nicholas Kenton, Portfolio Holder for Environment, Waste and Planning
Decision Type:	Key
Classification:	Unrestricted

Purpose of the report: To seek additional financial resources for the Council's Regeneration and Development function

Recommendation: It is recommended that Cabinet:

Approves the changes to fees and charges for pre-application advice and the use of fee income to create a pre-application service as set out in Appendix 2 to this report.

It is recommended that Cabinet recommends to Council:

That the Regeneration and Development budget is increased by £230k to enable an increase in staff resources to improve handling of the planning application caseload and that the Legal Services budget is increased by £100k to provide the necessary level of legal support to support the function.

It is recommended that Council:

Approves the increase of £330k in the Council's General Fund budget.

1. Summary

- 1.1 Stimulated by inward investment initiatives and the confidence provided by the Council's development plans, investor interest in the District is at an unprecedented level. There is every prospect that long planned for regeneration and growth schemes will be delivered. This success is reflected in the planning application caseload which now includes a higher proportion of strategically important major applications and resultant increased fee income, which for 2013/14 was around 90% higher than originally projected, at circa £900k.
- 1.2 The economic recovery in general, and increases in activity in the Dover district in particular, have, over the last couple of months, given us the grounds to work on the assumption that the bulk of this increased activity is likely to be sustained, and provides a reasonable basis for on-going resource planning.

- 1.3 In addition, there is ongoing and considerable inward investment and planning input to pre-application discussions on further strategic schemes, which indicates that this welcome trend is set to continue.
- 1.4 Whilst very welcome, this trend has however put pressure on the staff in the Regeneration and Development Department, who are now working above capacity. Major applications are, by their very nature, more complex and time-consuming to deal with and often need a team approach involving several members of staff. In addition, they often generate the need for complex Section 106 legal agreements and complicated follow-on work to approve details and deal with conditions. The demands of the caseload have prevented the Department from meeting any of the national targets on speed of decision making despite various management initiatives to improve the situation.
- 1.5 Staffing levels are mainly a reflection of the restructure of the Department in 2012, which took account of economic conditions and the level of developer interest at that time. Since then, however, staff resources have continued to fall while the demands of the caseload have increased.
- 1.6 Without action to increase the staff resource (including related legal support) these pressures are set to continue with the result that the Council will not have sufficient capacity to keep pace with the Council's regeneration and growth programme. It will not be possible to deal with planning applications in the timescales expected nor in the pro-active way required. This would slow-down the regeneration process and risk losing investor confidence in the District.
- 1.7 While the recommendations of the report represent a significant increase in the Department's budget this can be managed, and will be kept under careful review such that should income/workload not be sustained measures to reduce expenditure can be taken.

2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1 The Regeneration and Development Department was restructured in 2012. While the restructure was designed to achieve improved management, working arrangements and performance it was carried out against a background of budget reductions in response to the general economic downturn. Although there have been, and continue to be, improvements in working practices and use of electronic systems, good progress on plan making and related projects, performance in terms of speed of decision making on planning applications has been variable with little or no overall improvement. Table 1 in Appendix 1 provides summary information on this.
- 2.2 The main factor behind this is a combination of a decrease in staff and an increase in the complexity of the workload. The Department has fewer Development Management staff members available now than it did in 2012 because as staff have left, retired or taken maternity leave, they have not been fully replaced. At the same time, there has been a very strong upturn in the number of major planning applications particularly in 2013 (see Table 2 in Appendix 1). Many of these are of strategic importance to the District and, by their very nature, complex and time consuming. The receipt of these applications is in large part the result of the success of the Council's Inward Investment initiatives combined with the advanced stage of the Council's Development Plans, which allocate land for development and pave the way for applications to be made. This pattern is set to continue with several further development schemes known to be in preparation. While it is anticipated that the

members of staff who are on maternity leave will return to work this may not be on a full-time basis and, in any event, there are two other members of staff due to start maternity leave in the middle of this year. In addition, another member of staff has confirmed his intention to retire in June.

- 2.3 In response to these issues flexible working between the Development Management and Policy and Projects sections has been encouraged over the last year. Two members of staff within the Policy and Projects section are developing their skills and experience in dealing with planning and related applications but this has a limit beyond which it would harm the section's ability to carry out its own work programme. A flexible system of contracting the use of private sector town planners to process selected planning applications has also been developed. Whilst this has undoubted benefits in helping to manage the workload it also has limitations in that those contractors still need to be overseen by in-house staff and it is, generally, a more expensive option on a direct time basis compared with the cost of in-house staff. It is most effectively an option for dealing with unexpected increases in workload, one-off cases or covering for temporary in-house staff absence, rather than as a general substitute for insufficient in-house staff resource
- 2.4 In terms of the speed of decision making it remains the Department's aim to meet the Government's targets on the time taken to determine the various categories of application and the soundness of decisions as measured through our success rate at appeal. In addition, and perhaps more importantly, there is a need for the service provided to match the breadth and pace of Council's regeneration agenda. In order to maintain investor confidence, the service needs to have the skill and capacity to deal with the most complex and large-scale developments in a responsive and timely way. Currently, and in the foreseeable future, the service does not have sufficient capacity to achieve this.
- 2.5 There are two other important aspects of the planning application process that need consideration if the whole service is to be improved: pre-application advice and legal support. Currently, pre-application advice is provided by all officers and fitted in around processing actual applications. Dealing with submitted applications often has to take priority with the result that the pre-application service takes too long a time and does not meet customers' needs. In order to improve the situation, a proposal for a more dedicated pre-application service on a self-funding model has been developed and is set out in Appendix 2.
- 2.6 With regard to legal support, the issues are principally twofold. Firstly, there is a need to provide timely and experienced support and leadership to the preparation of legal agreements that are necessary to make an application acceptable and enable a decision to be issued. A lack of capacity in this area risks slowing the whole process and undermining any improvements that have been achieved elsewhere. Secondly, particularly where larger and more complex regeneration proposals are concerned it is increasingly the case that Council has a role to play in the delivery of the development proposals. This can arise for example, because a site is either wholly or partially owned by the Council or because the Council has some other function to perform e.g. the delivery of social housing or community infrastructure. The involvement of the Council in this way clearly gives rise to the need for legal support in the conveyancing or procurement processes.
- 2.7 Experience within the legal team to accommodate an increase in the workload of this complexity is extremely limited owing to a reduction in the number of staff capable of undertaking it. This has arisen largely because the size of the legal team was reduced in 2013 in the light of the continuing economic downturn and budget

reductions. This was appropriate at the time but an earlier and sharper rise in levels of activity in the district makes it necessary to reconsider the level of resource in this area.

- 2.8 In formulating proposals for the Legal Team regard has been had not only to immediate needs but also, to the short term future. The age profile of the Team is such that three key postholders, (two of whom are almost exclusively involved in regeneration work), have indicated an intention to retire within the next eighteen to twenty months. In order to prepare for this, recruitment will need to be commenced as soon as possible if a service is to be maintained.
- 2.9 It is, therefore, considered that additional planning staff resource is needed to deal with all categories of application but with an emphasis on the larger-scale developments, along with a further resource in the Council's legal team at a total estimated cost of around £100k. This cost was not included in the 2014/15 budget as the Development Management and Legal sections had been trying to manage within their existing resources and there was uncertainty over whether the changes in planning application caseload and staff levels were a short-term phenomenon or a more sustained situation. It has, however, become clear that the latter is the case and given the anticipated continuing workload and staff pressures the situation requires an alternative solution. It is proposed that the costs will initially be met from 2013/14 carried forward planning income and then from either in-year planning income, or if necessary, General Fund balances. Approval is required for use of the carried forward income as the MTFP does not permit use of carried forward budget to fund on-going resource commitments. The use of General Fund balances will be necessary if the 2014/15 planning fee income does not increase over the budgeted value to cover the additional expenditure.
- 2.10 It worth noting that the Council's ability for its planning function to keep pace with regeneration and development initiatives and to make timely decisions on planning applications that enable development to proceed, has significant financial knock-on effects for the Council as a whole. Apart from planning application fee income, the Government is operating the New Homes Bonus scheme which is likely to produce an income of just under £3m over the 2011 to 2015 period. In addition, there is the potential for the Council to retain a proportion of business rates from growth in commercial floorspace. While the possible financial gain from development proposals is not a factor to be taken in account in determining individual planning applications, the wider point is that the outcome of such decisions can increase Government funding streams and that speed of decision making is important in this respect, as well as for providing a good service to the applicant.

3. Identification of Options

- 3.1 The Council could decide that staff resources to support the development management function should not be increased at this time
- 3.2 The general case for increased resources could be accepted but the report's recommendations varied, for example, the budget increased but not to the level proposed, or the recommendation regarding fees and charges and pre-application advice not accepted
- 3.3 The recommendations could be agreed without alteration

4. Evaluation of Options

- 4.1 If the first option was taken, the Department would continue to make system improvements, deploy staff as flexibly as possible, and use contractors as far as existing budgets permit, but the Council would need to accept that it is very unlikely that national targets on the speed of decision making on planning applications will be met. The worst performing authorities risk falling into the Government's special measures regime. More importantly, the Council would risk a pronounced disjoint between its inward investment, regeneration and growth ambitions and its ability to handle resultant planning applications. This would be likely to reduce investor confidence in the Council and the District. The service for applicants for smaller-scale development would be likely to remain variable.
- 4.2 The impacts of the second option would depend upon exactly what was proposed but are essentially a compromise position. Generally, this option would increase the possibility that the extra cost could be covered by fee income but decreases the likelihood of significant gains in performance and investor confidence/interest.
- 4.3 The third (recommended) option represents the most upward pressure on budgets of all the options but offers the highest prospect for overall improvement in performance and maintenance/increase in investor confidence and interest. The decision turns on how much weight is to be placed on regeneration factors as opposed to budgetary restraint. It is considered that this option strikes the best balance. Opportunities for inward investment and regeneration need to be captured as they arise and the District is experiencing an unheralded level of interest. If such interest is translated into applications it increases the prospect for fees to offset the increase in budget. Should, however, the application workload decrease in future years any opportunities to reduce staff levels through natural turnover would need to be taken.
- 4.4 The resourcing of the Planning function will inevitably require a flexible approach and the department will continue to use consultants and contractors in addition to its own staffing. This is not necessarily the most cost effective option but sometimes unavoidable in order to obtain particular expertise or to meet short term demand.
- 4.5 The national shortage of Planners also means that recruiting permanent staff will not be easy and we have struggled to do so in the past. The two factors set out above together with the age profile of the staff in the Department mean that should it be necessary to manage down the resourcing level in the future because activity/income was not sustained, it should be possible to do so relatively easily.

5. Resource Implications

<i>Revenue Implications</i>	<i>2014/15 £000</i>	<i>2015/16 £000</i>	<i>2016/17 £000</i>	<i>On- Going £000</i>
Expenditure Increases:				
Planning salaries - permanent posts*	150	160	170	180
Planning salaries - temporary support	80	35	0	0
Legal salaries – permanent support	100	100	100	100
Total Expenditure	330	295	270	280
Income and Reserve Use:				
Pre-application increased income	0	(10)	(20)	(20)
Use of 2013/14 carried forward	(277)	0	0	0

<i>Revenue Implications</i>	<i>2014/15 £000</i>	<i>2015/16 £000</i>	<i>2016/17 £000</i>	<i>On- Going £000</i>
planning income				
Total Funding	(277)	(10)	(20)	(20)
Net Revenue Implications	53	285	250	260
Increase/(decrease) in budget requirement	53	285	250	260

*Assumes annual increments and 2% pay award each year

6. Corporate Implications

6.1 Comment from the Section 151 Officer:

6.2 This report seeks approval for additional expenditure for the Planning and Legal teams, in 2014/15, of £330k, with on-going additional expenditure of circa £270k.

6.3 The latest General Fund budget projections indicate that, if this report is approved, the Council will need to make savings / generate additional income of circa £1.2m in 2015/16 with further savings required in subsequent years, and therefore any additional expenditure, or reduced income, adds to this challenge.

6.4 However, the additional costs arising from this report can be partially or wholly mitigated.

6.5 First, significant increases in planning activity that the Council has experienced in the last year, reflecting the economic recovery in general, and specific regeneration in the Dover District, have been reflected in increased planning fee income.

6.6 For 2013/14 the original budget for planning fee income was £470k, however the outturn is now expected to be around £900k. As a result, after allowing for the additional costs of managing the increased activity, £277k of the additional income will be carried forward to 2014/15 to finance the bulk of the proposed additional planning and legal budgets for the first year.

6.7 Second, the planning fee income budget for 2014/15 is currently £515k. If the additional planning activity is sustained, then the increased level of fee income is also likely to continue, offsetting some, or all, of the additional commitment.

6.8 Third, if the additional activity and income are not sustained, then the Council will pro-actively manage the staff and other planning and legal budgets, and also curtail the use of temporary resources (currently at £80k per annum) to reflect the reduced planning workload.

6.9 Finally, the projections of future savings assume that Council Tax and Business rates income continue broadly as they are. However, in 2013/14 the Council has seen significant additional income from Business Rates / Enterprise Zone relief grant. The system has not yet stabilised, and is still being adjusted by the Department for Communities and Local Government, and so it is not possible to advise whether this additional income will be sustained, but if it is, then it will contribute towards the Council's future savings target (MD).

7. Comment from the Solicitor to the Council:

7.1 The Solicitor to the Council has been consulted in the preparation of this report and has no further comments to make.

8. Comment from the Equalities Officer:

8.1 This report does not specifically highlight any equalities implications however, in discharging their responsibilities members are required to comply with the public sector equality duty as set out in section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15>

Other Officers (as appropriate): None

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Development Management Statistics

Appendix 2 – Review of Pre-Application Advice

Background Papers

None

Contact Officer: Mike Ebbs, Head of Regeneration and Development

This page is intentionally left blank

APPENDIX 1

Development Management Statistics

Table 1: Speed of Decision Making on Planning Applications 2011 to 2013 *

* Measured against the Government's targets to determine:

60% of major applications within 13 weeks, or 16 weeks if Environmental Assessment is required

65% of minor applications within 8 weeks

80% of other applications within 8 weeks

Year	2011				2012				2013			
Quarter	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Major Applications (% decided within target time)	43	88	57	62	43	67	55	50	50	43	56	71
Minor Applications (% decided within target time)	65	70	69	77	64	58	64	56	58	73	66	63
Other Applications (% decided within target time)	62	68	69	66	76	66	60	45	50	67	71	72

Commentary:

Over the three year period the Government's targets have only been met on individual occasions and not often. The target for Other applications has not been reached at all. In any quarter an improvement in one category of application has often been accompanied by a decline in another.

Table 2: Planning Application Caseload 2011 to 2013

Application Type	2011		2012		2013	
	Received	Decisions	Received	Decisions	Received	Decisions
Major Development	39	28	41	32	55	48
Minor Development	267	238	231	219	277	209
Other Development	759	697	687	591	659	588
Total	1065	963	959	842	991	845

Commentary:

Total number of applications received and decisions made reduced by around 100 in 2012 but showed signs of upturn in 2013. The decline has occurred in the Other Development category, which relates to the smallest scale developments such as householder, shopfronts, signs and listed building consent. Most significantly, there has been a large increase in the number major applications which are the most complex and time-consuming to deal with. They can only be dealt with by Principal and experienced Senior Planning Officers.

Table 3: Development Management Staff Resources (Effective FTE)*

Year	2011	2012	2013 (and current)
Principal Level	3.4	2.4	2.8
Senior Level	2.6	2.75	2.6
Planning Officer	1.4	1.4	0.8
Total	7.8	6.55	6.2

* The Table does not include officers who are on maternity leave as they are not available to process applications

Commentary:

There has been a decrease in the number of available staff over the three year period. This is essentially a result of not replacing, or fully replacing, staff who have resigned, retired or gone on maternity leave, due to the pressure on the Council at the time to reduce its budget for the service.

This page is intentionally left blank

APPENDIX 2

Review of Pre-Application Advice

1. Introduction

The current system of a charged-for pre-application advice service was introduced a number of years ago. The aim was to provide a professional opinion on a specific planning proposal, confirm whether it was likely to be supported or not and provide advice and guidance on the application process itself.

The service was introduced as an 'add-on' to the existing work of planning staff, but has suffered from resource shortages and low prioritisation against the statutory functions of the Department. There is dissatisfaction with the service, especially around performance when measured against a 20 working day target.

Pre-application advice is encouraged by the NPPF as it benefits everyone and can go a long way to ensuring the smooth progress of subsequent applications. Resolving issues at pre-application stage results in fewer problems during the application stage and helps in achieving statutory targets.

The purpose of this report is to review the existing scheme and consider options for its future.

The areas of review are:

- a) Customer satisfaction/Value for money of the existing service
- b) The link between the pre-application and subsequent full application.
- c) Options for improving performance and customer service
- d) Options for expanding the service to increase income
- e) Exploring whether the service can be self-financing – as part of a self-sustaining Council.

2. Background Information

2.1 Statistics

In the calendar year 2012 the Council received 128 pre-applications and this increased to 163 for 2013.

A snapshot of the first 50 pre-applications for 2013 identified:-

- a) 41 of the pre-applications were completed, with the remaining 9 either invalid (requiring further information) or withdrawn
- b) Of the 41 dealt with, 19 were followed up by full planning applications and of those, 18 were either approved or are still ongoing. Only 1 planning application was withdrawn.
- c) The total received for these 50 cases was £10,771.(For the financial year 2013/14 the total income was £24,777)
- d) The average time to assess a pre-application was 65 days.

2.2 Customer Feedback

As part of this review, a sample of users of the service were contacted and asked to provide feedback.

The key points raised are below together with my comments:-

a) The provision of policy advice is only replicating what is already on the website.

This is both a positive and a negative. Some applicants do not need this information as they have already accessed all our available policy information through the website. However, for others less experienced, an interpretation of policy and how it impacts on a proposed development can be very useful.

b) The advice is too general and does not help applicants overcome policy or other constraints

It is questionable whether we should be providing a 'how to get around our policies' advice, but there is scope to provide applicants with guidance on how to address policy constraints should they wish to go ahead with a scheme that is not supported. However the planning department cannot bring the service into disrepute and must act as an impartial arbiter.

c) There is sometimes a requirement for general advice in advance of formal plans/proposals

Applicants will be advised that the more information they provide at the application stage, the more focussed the response. However, there will be occasions where an applicant wants no more than a general discussion and may seek ongoing short-term support and advice through the application process. The existing service does not provide that level of flexibility

d) Difficulty in arranging site visits/contacting Officers

This has been due to the lack of resources and the lower priority given to pre-applications

e) A competitive cost encourages the use of pre-app advice

As more Local Authorities review their pre-application service, the message that is coming from industry commentators and politicians is that costs need to remain competitive and offer value for money.

f) Advice is needed on possible developer contributions

This is offered within the current service, but mostly focused on major applications. For all other applications, potential S106/CIL obligations can be relayed to the applicant if identified.

g) Officers have a lack of commercial awareness.

It is not expected that Officers will take on the role of Planning Agents, nor provide commercial advice that could leave the Council vulnerable. It is reasonable to expect that pre-application advice takes into account commercial realities and does not seek to recommend actions that will make a scheme unviable if there are options open to the applicant to deliver a good scheme that remains commercially favourable

Conclusion

The increasing number of pre-applications is indicative of a service that is still very much needed, but feedback suggests that the service is not sufficiently resourced, nor sufficiently flexible to meet the needs of the customer.

3. Future Options

Assuming that the existing pre-application service needs to change, the report considers 3 options:

- a) Withdraw the pre-application advice service altogether
- b) Increase general planning resources to support pre-application advice requests
- c) Create a pre-application advice “trading arm”

The options in detail

4. Withdraw the pre-application service

This is not a recommended approach. The NPPF encourages pre-application advice and removing the opportunity to charge for that will put the same pressure on resources, with no option to offset some of the costs. It is also likely to lead to reduced performance as some applications will take longer to process with a likely increase in the number of appeals.

5. Increase general planning resources to support pre-applications

The service has already recognised that it needs to use its resources flexibly, to be able to meet the peaks and troughs of the workload. Recruiting, for example, one extra Senior Planning Officer will lead to a general improvement in performance, but would be unlikely to have a significant impact on pre-app performance given that general planning performance has to remain a priority.

There is the option of recruiting a Senior Planning Officer who only deals with Pre-application advice requests, but there is a real risk that the pressure of other work would eventually lead to pre-application requests taking a lower priority and the current situation would return.

6. Create a pre-application service

This is the recommended option

- 6.1 The Council’s latest SIMALTO exercise has recently concluded that the Council should consider trading to offset its costs and increase income.
- 6.2 Pre-application advice is non-statutory and the Council is not under any planning obligations regarding the scope of the service or fees charged. Further expansion of services could be considered if a new service was successful.
- 6.3 A standalone service will introduce flexibility of provision and remove the rigid requirements of the current system. Applicants will be able to buy the amount of advice that meets their requirements and that their budget allows. Additional advice is easily chargeable as proposals develop. The current system requires, in most cases, to start the pre-application process again if major changes are proposed.

- 6.4 The service can charge on a time basis to be agreed with the applicant at the outset. This introduces a clearer 'contract' between applicant and Officer and necessitates a closer working relationship between the two. Initially, this charging mechanism will be based on the salary of the Officer recruited. However, further reviews could introduce a varying price structure depending on the staff used.
- 6.5 Although it is possible for the pre-application request and resultant planning application to be dealt with by different Officers, experience has shown that it is preferable for both to be undertaken by the same Officer. The pre-application service can deal with the subsequent planning application and receive the planning fee (or a reasonable percentage of it).
- 6.6 The two charging elements together will need to meet the cost of the service.
- 6.7 The commercial nature of this new service will need a suitably qualified and experienced Officer, with the additional skills required to explore and develop business opportunities. The service will need sufficient time to establish itself and become self-sufficient.
- 6.8 Consultation with the Planning team has confirmed that it is preferable for the pre-application advice service to focus on smaller scale applications.. This is because the larger schemes often require the input of other staff and external bodies across various specialisms. It is also important that the anticipated workload handled by the service (involving pre-application enquiries and subsequent applications, appeals etc) doesn't overwhelm the initial resource allocated to it.

The service will have the scope, income allowing, to utilise other resourcing options, such as the Planning Contractor Panel to ensure it meets its targets.

There is also the option to consider reviewing the pre-application fees for larger schemes to more adequately reflect the cost and introduce some flexibility during the pre-application and planning application stages.

7. The proposals in detail

7.1 Trial Period

It is proposed that the Pre-application service works in a similar commercial environment to Building Control in that it has a 3 year accounting period and be cost-neutral over this time period

7.2 Staffing

Initially the service will be staffed by 1 FTE Senior Planner at a cost (including on-costs) of c£55k pa

7.3 Fees

The pre-application service will be chargeable on an hourly basis at £60.00 ph. This enables an applicant to have control over the initial costs of advice and supplement this with further advice as their budget allows.

25 chargeable hours per week over a 45 week year would realise £67,500 per annum

60 planning applications at £120 (retaining some of the fee for departmental overheads) would realise £7,200

Total income £72,700

These figures represent a reasonable breakdown of time and concludes that the service is sustainable. Applicants will compare the new system with the old and there needs to be a recognition that this represents value-for-money and not just an exercise in raising fees

7.4 Expansion

Although there is no direct evidence, it is expected that as service performance improves, it will be used by more applicants. This provides the service with opportunities for expansion both in staff numbers and levels of services provided.

7.5 Relationship with the planning team

The Officer undertaking this new role would be a member of the planning team for training, development, management and quality control purposes. It is important, however, that the service maintains its own identity – to test the service model and ensure it meets its financial and performance targets.

7.6 Risks

7.6.1 Currently the service receives the income for the pre-application advice before any work is undertaken. Whether upfront payment is still required is to be decided, but there will inevitably be some charges made after work has been completed. There is a risk of disputes, non-payment etc and there will be additional invoicing and recovery work to be undertaken.

7.6.2 Pre-application advice numbers cannot be accurately predicted and they are not necessarily spread evenly across a year. There is a risk of workload peaks and troughs with the need to have some resilience measures in place. This could be dealt with through the contractor's panel or by the purchase of spare capacity within the planning team – although the latter is less likely to be an option.

7.7 Publicity

7.7.1 It is important to publicise the service and make it easy to understand.

Appendix A is a proposed revision to the Council's website.

8. Fee comparison with other East Kent Councils

Authority	Householder/Change of use	Minor
Canterbury	£60 – Written £240 – with meeting	£180 – Written £420 – with meeting
Thanet	£60 – Written £100 – with meeting	£150 – Written £250 – with meeting
Ashford	£80 – Written £425 (P/hour) with meeting	£160 – Written £425 (p/hour) with meeting
Shepway	Free	Free
Dover	£60 (p/hour)	£60 (p/hour)

Why Seek Advice?

Whether you are a developer of a large scheme or a householder wishing to improve your home, it is advisable to seek advice before submitting your planning application. We can let you know whether your proposals are supported by planning policy and whether there are any issues that may prevent you from obtaining planning permission.

Basic administrative advice on the planning process is available by visiting a local office or over the telephone and our website contains a wealth of information on planning matters. All of this is available free of charge.

If you would prefer a specific review of your proposals and detailed guidance on the application process, we would recommend you obtain formal pre-application advice. This is a charged-for service and is available to meet any scheme and any budget.

We are happy to provide this advice at any time, whether it is just a discussion on some initial ideas or a review of more detailed plans. You can use the service just once or obtain advice throughout the progress of your scheme.

There are considerable benefits in seeking our advice such as

- It gives you an opportunity to understand how our policies will be applied to your development
- It can identify at an early stage where there is a need for specialist input, for example about listed buildings, trees, landscape, noise, transport, contaminated land, ecology or archaeology
- It will assist you in preparing proposals for formal submission which, providing you have taken our advice fully into account, will be handled more quickly
- It may lead to a reduction in time spent by your professional advisors in working up proposals
- If a proposal is unlikely to be acceptable we can advise you in advance to enable you to suggest amendments or consider alternative proposals

Our charges

Small scale developments of up to 5 dwellings, general advice on land-use and small commercial developments of up to 500sq metres of commercial space

Pre-application advice is chargeable at £60.00 per hour with a minimum charge of 1 hour and then at £30 per 30 minutes or part thereof. This includes travel time to site visits if required.

The Planning Officer will advise you at the outset of the estimated cost and will not exceed this without your agreement.

You can minimise costs by providing as much information about your scheme as possible in advance, but there is no requirement to do this.

All other applications

Fee

- £500 or 1.5% of the appropriate fee under the Application Fees Regulations, whichever is the greater, for up to an hour long meeting and written response
- If the Planning Officer recommends further time is spent on your proposal we will provide you with an estimate and obtain your agreement.

You will also need to provide the following information

- Written details of the address and proposal
- Description of the nature and scale of the development proposed and the uses to which land and buildings are to be put
- Site location plan with the site clearly marked (to a recognised scale, north point etc)
- Sketch drawings providing details of the proposal (to a recognised scale)
- Photographs of the site and surrounding area, with particular regard to any nearby houses or other development which might be affected by your proposal
- Contact details including phone number and email address
- An initial design and access statement
- Access and parking arrangements
- This may also need to be accompanied by ecological, landscape, contamination, flood and transport assessments depending upon the location, nature and complexity of the development.

What the costs cover

These fees cover administration costs and the time spent in research, assessment, a meeting as necessary, and in making a written response.

How to Apply

Please email planningadvice@dover.gov.uk or ring

Pre-application advice cannot guarantee the final formal decision that will be made on your application(s). However, any pre-application advice that has been provided will be carefully considered in reaching a decision.

This page is intentionally left blank