



Planning and Economic Development Overview and Scrutiny Panel

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REPORT

DEVELOPMENT SERVICES UPDATE REPORT

1. Report Summary

To report back on the request of this panel under Minute 96 of the meeting held on the 8 December 2004.

2. Background

The Development Services Unit has undergone a period of great change during the past year and for the future continuous improvement is a key component of ensuring that the balance of speed, quality and cost is maintained. The panel at its meeting in December supported the need to improve service provision/communication and maintain performance. In progressing these points the HDS has produced, with the support of the team, a Development Services Integrated Improvement Plan, (DSIIP) that is held electronically, which has been received positively by the Government Office of the South West. It identifies 21 work streams that focus upon speeding up a quality service. A copy of the DSIIP is attached as an annex to this report.

The Development Services Management Board, (Comprising Portfolio Holder, and Deputy, Chair of WAC, Chair and Vice Chair of this Scrutiny Panel, Policy Director and HDS) was formed in September last year. The objectives of the board are to oversee the DSIIP, monitor the progress of the plan, to identify further initiatives and suggest remedies as required. It also monitors sustainability against government targets.

At the December meeting the panel also requested that the Head of Development Services investigate suggestions made in connection with the update report tabled.

The suggestions were:

- 1. The case officer to notify the parish council clerk by 'phone or email - when their recommendation and the PCs don't match. This to be done at the point of decision by way of explanation & in the interests of good communication and dialogue between planning officers and parish councils.*

Response by HDS

This suggestion has its roots in a meeting attended by the HDS and the Portfolio Holder when they attended a Parish Council meeting at Whiteparish. It was considered by the Parish Council that where representations differed to the recommendation of the case officer it would help if the Planning Office explained the reasoning behind their decision. HDS has also held discussions with officers to explore the possibility of including reasons within the planning report. In addition the Parish Council/Town Council receive copies of all decision notices

(a) Action by HDS

As of the 1st January 2005, in these circumstances, the Parish/Town Clerk will first be telephoned to explain the reasoning behind the decision and if not successful an e-mail will be sent. A procedure note has been prepared

and distributed to Planning Officers. As of the 1st March differences to third party representations will be included in a separate section within the planning report.

2. *Ward members to have 5-day notification of **all** refusals - so they are also aware of FASTRACK refusals.*

Response by HDS

The five-day referral period for ward members relates to all applications excluding FASTRACK, (which are usually three walled extensions to existing properties), where the recommendation of officers is for refusal. At Full Council on the 29th March 2004 Full Delegation was given to the HDS to determine FASTRACK applications, and therefore no call in procedure is available to members. The HDS has informally offered all Ward Members, that if a FASTRACK application is causing concern to the Public or Parish, then to contact him direct so that a dialogue can take place as to whether the HDS, on a material planning consideration, should not exercise delegated powers. This system has operated successfully since May 2004. The principle of the FASTRACK process is that they are straightforward applications and should have the minimum of delay. It is acknowledged that where a FASTRACK application is refused under delegated powers then the ward member should be informed.

(a) Recommendation

That Ward members are informed when FASTRACK decisions have been refused under delegated powers.

3. *Reasons for refusal (in brief) to be put on orange list so members are informed.*

Response by HDS

The delegated list of decisions is sent out on a weekly basis and is a ready reference for members. To include reasons for refusal would expand the document and include information not always required by members.

Copies of all decision notices are sent to Parish/Town Councils, this includes refusal notices. All decisions are available on the SDC Web. If a member has difficulty and requires a paper copy, this can be provided on request in paper or electronic format. Requests should be made via the Office and Development Control Support manager.

(a) Recommendation

Paper or electronic copies of the decision notice to be made available to members upon request.

4. *Variations - PCs to be copied in on letters to applicants, which authorise variations so they are aware of them.*

Response by HDS

Variations are amendments to a planning application after the decision has been issued and in simple terms represent changes to the authorisation where this authority would not be prepared to initiate enforcement action. It does not change the original permission, which could still be implemented.

During last year the HDS considered the options and instructed officers to request a fresh application, (with the opportunity again of full public and parish participation) if re-notification or consultation on the variation is required. This has reduced the number of variations. It is therefore now considered possible to notify parish councils of agreed variations. This will require some internal alteration to procedures.

Recommendation

As from the 1st March 2005, variation letters to applicants authorising a change that is not materially different to the original permission, will be copied to the relevant parish council.

Background Papers

Development Control Procedures Manual

Implications

- Financial – None
- Legal – None
- Councils Core values – Excellent Service
- Wards Affected – All
- Consultations Undertaken - None