

PORTLAND TOWN COUNCIL

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18th May 2016

Dear Councillor

You are hereby summoned to attend a **MEETING** of the **PLANNING & HIGHWAYS ADVISORY COMMITTEE**, to be held in **EASTON METHODIST CHURCH HALL, EASTON** on **WEDNESDAY, 25TH MAY 2016** commencing at **7.00 pm**, when the business set out below will be transacted.

It is the Council's intention that all meetings of the Council and its Committees be recorded aurally.

Yours faithfully

Ian Looker
Town Clerk

AGENDA

- 1. Apologies for Absence**
- 2. Declarations of Interest** – to receive any declarations from Councillors or Officers of pecuniary or non-pecuniary interests regarding matters to be considered at this meeting, together with a statement on the nature of those interests
- 3. Minutes of the Meeting held on 27th April 2016** (attached)
- 4. Planning Officer's Report and Other Matters Arising**
- 5. Neighbourhood Plan** – to receive an update on progress
- 6. Consultation on Planning Applications notified by Weymouth & Portland Borough Council**
Standard List of Planning Applications (attached)
- 7. Planning Contravention Issues**
- 8. Consultation on Planning Applications etc. notified by Dorset County Council**
- 9. Changes to District Planning Procedures** – to consider a response to the intended changes (see attached)
- 10. Date of Next Meeting**
The Committee's next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, 22nd June 2016, at Easton Methodist Church Hall, Easton, commencing at 7.00 pm.

PTC Applications

For applications registered between 19/4/2016 and 16/5/2016

Date Valid	App. No	Location & Proposal	Agent & Applicant's Name
5/5/2016	15/862/LBC	70 Weston Road Replacement timber windows	Mrs Jessica Trent Redferns

PTC Recommendation.....

3/5/2016	16/142/FUL	The Windmills housing site, Park Road Erect 12 dwellings (in lieu of previously approved care home)	Betterment Properties Ltd
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PTC Recommendation.....

20/4/2016	16/156/LBC	167 Wakeham Convert existing rear single storey extension from study / breakfast room to be bathroom / wc	Mr Hardisty
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PTC Recommendation.....

8/3/2016	16/168/FUL	Public Conveniences, Castletown Resubmission of proposed scheme to form dive shop, teaching Steven Jones Plan Design area and toilets.	Nemesis Properties
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PTC Recommendation.....

23/3/2016	16/176/FUL	Perryfield Works Complex, Pennsylvania Road	Lomand Homes Ltd
		Amendments to Plots 63, 64, 65 and 66 previously approved under planning reference 08/00513/FUL to change dormer windows on the front elevation with french doors and juliet balustrade (Retrospective)	Mr Chris Coleman

PTC Recommendation.....

15/4/2016	16/212/FUL	107 Fortuneswell	Mr C Ross
		Conversion of vacant former mixed retail and residential unit on ground floor into one self-contained flat, upgrading of existing flats on other floors and creation of balcony on existing flat roof at rear of first floor flat	Richard Burgess Associates Ltd

PTC Recommendation.....

11/4/2016	16/216/FUL	Land at New Ground	Mr Saunders
		Erect tea room and visitor centre	Brian Twigg Planning

PTC Recommendation.....

24/3/2016	16/222/FUL	82 Chiswell	Mr J Lively
		Conversion and extension of existing dwelling to form two separate dwellings	COA Architecture

PTC Recommendation.....

9/5/2016	16/230/FUL	Billy Winter's Bar Diner, Portland Beach Road	Ferrybridge Marine Ltd
		Retention and expansion of existing portacabin for continued use as beach diner	Fisher & Associates Ltd.

PTC Recommendation.....

1/4/2016	16/232/FUL	Hut 17, Field 765, access to Fields 737, 739, 760, 761 and 765 Portland Bill	Miss C Marshall
		Erect extension to beach hut	Mr R Burgess

PTC Recommendation.....

27/4/2016	16/246/FUL	154 Wakeham	Fortuneswell Developments Ltd
		Demolition of existing garages/stores and erection of extension to existing block of flats to create two additional flats	Richard Burgess Associates Ltd

PTC Recommendation.....

19/4/2016	16/274/FUL	18 Southwell	Mrs Kearns
		Extend existing dropped kerb	Steven Jones Plan Design

PTC Recommendation.....

13/5/2016

16/302/FUL

Hut 17, Field 737, access to Fields 737, 739, 760, 761 and 765 Mr A Scott
Portland Bill

Renewal of permission to site beach hut

PTC Recommendation.....

Changes to District Planning Procedures

Firstly it should be emphasised that to the best of our knowledge Portland Town Council is the only parish council within the area covered by the Tri-Council Partnership where a planning officer attends the local appraisal of planning applications. Of course he brings paper copies of the plans involved with him. On the infrequent occasions when an officer has not been able to attend the plans and other relevant information have been posted to the Clerk. It has then been left to the Chairman of the Planning Committee and the Clerk to guide members through the applications. This latter situation would appear to be the common practice at other parish and town councils.

The attached paper from the Borough lists the changes that are intended:-

- 1) No more paper copies of applications will be sent out.
- 2) E-mail communication to town and parish councils will be to .gov addresses only. (Portland has these.)
- 3) The "weekly list" of applications will cease from 1st July.
- 4) Responses to applications will only be accepted through the Borough's consultee portal.

A pilot group will be set up to assist parish clerks accommodate the changes.

It has to be said that the changes will be made with the primary intention of saving the Partnership money. No attempt has been made to assess the possible financial impact on the parishes.

There is also no reference we can find that refers to the procedures operated by the Borough in respect of Portland.

It seems that the burden of implementing the changes will fall on the parish clerks. The pilot scheme and training provided by the Partnership have been arranged to try to reduce the difficulties.

From limited past experience of having to conduct a planning committee meeting based entirely on computer technology here are a few observations:-

- 1) The expertise of the planning officer, to advise on the key points and detail of particular applications, on planning principles national and local, and act as an on-the-spot intermediary with the Planning Department, will be greatly missed. Planning expertise, such as it is, will be partial and have to repose with the clerk and more senior members. Even this will be lost when they vacate their positions.
- 2) The necessary technology required implies a cost. Eight or ten councillors huddled round one lap-top screen is not the best way of assessing a scheme.
- 3) It is assumed that everything in the system, computer, Internet connection, Borough planning program, associated technology, will all function satisfactorily when required.
- 4) Viewing plans on a screen, computer or purpose-display, limits one plan to be viewed at a time. We may be restricted to the pace of the "slowest" member for any given image. Paper plans can be shared out and viewed more simultaneously. Crucial detail visible on a large paper plan may occasionally be "hidden" on a computer screen.

So two issues seem to emerge. Firstly will the Borough continue to provide a planning officer to attend Planning Committee meetings and would the Council be willing to pay for the privilege if asked? Secondly what will be the effects of the change to electronic systems and how much will they cost the Town Council?

Changes to District Planning Procedures

Partnership Paper – Planning Applications and Town and Parish Councils: Moving to more cost effective, reliable and secure methods of consultation

Summary

As part of the transformation of services across the Tri-Council Partnership, a number of changes are taking place in how services are delivered. Some of these changes will affect how town and parish councils¹ and the local authorities within the partnership communicate with each other around planning applications.

Due to a need to meet the financial shortfall facing the partnership and as part of the current review of processes and procedures taking place within Development Management, the following four changes will be taking place.

Change 1:

The printing and posting of planning applications to town and parish councils in West Dorset will cease from 1st April 2017.

The Reasons:

- The current practice costs at least £10,000 a year to service parishes with paper copies of planning applications. Ceasing this practice will play its part in achieving the financial shortfall.
- It demands a considerable amount of officer time, which causes a negative impact on the department's ability to process customers' applications.
- The lack of engagement with digital processes causes knock-on inefficiencies in other areas of district-parish consultation.

Change 2:

Communication to town and parish councils will shift to official (.gov'or similar) email addresses only. Every town and parish council will be enabled to adopt the use of a .gov email address. The sending and receiving of any government-related correspondence to personal email addresses will cease from 1st April 2017.

The Reasons:

- A significant amount of staff time is taken up administering changes in the email addresses of clerks. A constant parish-based .gov contact email would remove this administrative burden.
- The sending of government information to personal email accounts carries a number of data protection issues and personal liability issues on the clerk.
- The use of personal email accounts prevents continuity of parish council business. All documentation and communication trails of parish business are lost should a clerk leave; the new clerk starts with no history of parish business. Likewise, should a clerk not be available due to illness or other reasons, parish business stored in a personal email account does not lend itself to being easily accessible by other parish members.
- The use of a .gov email addresses (or non-personal emails at council specific domains such as clerk@xyparishcouncil.co.uk), for parish and town council/government business provides a more professional image than a personal

¹For the purposes of this document, the phrase 'parish councils' includes parish meetings.

one. This can have a number of spin-off benefits in other areas of parish business as well as shifting the focus to the parish and away from an individual.

Change 3:

The 'weekly list'; an emailed list of planning applications and decisions sent to all town and parish councils will cease, from 1 July 2016.

The Reasons:

- Preparation of this list requires half a day a week of staff time to put together.
- The information is already on the portal.
- It does not appear to be well used by town or parish councils already dealing with applications electronically and most of the information is not relevant for each individual parish or town council.
- The information is on the same page as the login for submission of responses. There is an efficiency for clerks visiting the same page for both functions.

Change 4:

Only responses to planning applications submitted through the consultee portal will be acknowledged. Responses from consultees who have a log in to submit electronically but instead submit via email or on paper will not be acknowledged.

The Reasons:

- Every parish and town council has been provided with a login to submit responses to specific planning applications because submissions made through the portal can be linked automatically to the application they are referring to..
- Non-portal submissions require an inordinate amount of staff time to deal with. Responses submitted on paper or via personal emails cause significant delay to the processing of all planning applications through using up staff time on a manual process when an automated one already exists. This increases the risk of errors and causes a delay in the response being visible online due to the increased processing time. This in turn frequently generates phone calls from individuals enquiring why their comment is not yet online, which uses up more staff time to deal with this query. All of this can be avoided if submissions are made electronically when logged in to the portal, freeing up staff time to process planning applications for customers.

Following a launch event in early June, a pilot group will be set up to work with and support clerks to transition to considering planning applications in their area in a manner adapted to these changes. The focus of this pilot group will be on working with clerks to explore different solutions, to provide training and support as required and to feedback what changes the local authorities need to make to their systems to assist clerks with electronic communication around planning applications. The intention is that district/borough level authorities and town and parish councils can jointly refine processes and options around online consultation. Further detail on the intended plan for the pilot group are (sic) contained in the main document below.

Project Brief

Background

Parish and town councils are consulted on all planning applications within their area or within a buffer zone of varying size depending on the application type.

Within the tri-council partnership, the methods of communication with parish and town councils varies (sic) considerably. Consultation is predominantly electronic in North Dorset

and Weymouth and Portland and paper based in West Dorset. Most clerks submit responses using the relevant application portal, but not all do so. The use of .gov email addresses is generally low across the area. Weekly lists are produced in all three local authorities within the tri-partnership area.

In 2014, a scrutiny committee report on this subject confirmed that there was a need to move towards more cost and time efficient methods of communication and away from the costly printing off and posting of applications. It made a number of recommendations towards achieving this. Few of the recommendations made at that time were acted on.

The matter is now more urgent due to the current and near future financial environment and pressures on the tri-council partnership.

Financial Environment

West Dorset District Council has now joined with Weymouth and Portland Borough Council and North Dorset District Council in a Tri-Council Partnership. The Development Management services are being unified into a single service across the tri-partnership area.

Financially there is an imperative to realise significant reductions in net costs, derived from a mixture of improvements in efficiencies of processes, removal of unnecessary costs and increases in income generation where this is possible. In addition to existing necessary reductions in running costs, cuts in central government funding may require further and significant reductions in costs across the Tri-Council Partnership. It is likely that meeting these financial limitations will require significant adjustments to current practices.

The Cost of Printing out Planning Applications is almost £10,000 a year.

In 2014-15, 782 planning applications and their associated documentation needed to be printed off and posted to the associated parishes in West Dorset.

The costs incurred from dealing with the following types of applications in a non-digital (i.e. paper based) fashion last year were just under £10,000. The breakdown of cost is shown in the table 1 below:

	Plotter Paper & Toner	Printing	Postage	Staff Time	Total
Major	£756.64	£870	£72.5	£2078.60	
Minor	(not calculated per application type)	£200	£338.4	£3306.00	
Other		£81.90	£429.52	£1351,35	
TOTALS:	£756.64	£1,152.30	840.42	6,736.55	£9,485.92

Table 1: breakdown of the costs for paper-based consultation with parishes on planning applications in 2014/15.

Paper-based consultation for parishes therefore carries the following costs:

Printing and postage: £2749.36

Staff time: £6,736.55

This equates to £9485 a year at 2014 prices and over a day a week of staff time taken up just on this one activity.

The above figures do not take into account staff time spent on responses to planning applications made outside of the portal, updating email contact details or preparing the weekly list.

Email Communication

At the current time (January 2016), of the 138 town and parish councils in West Dorset, just 17 communicate with West Dorset District Council electronically on planning applications.

Of the remaining 121 parishes, 13 do not have any recorded email address for communication. Of the remaining 108, 70 use email addresses with non-official domains,(eg @gmail, @aol, @virgin, or other assorted domain names generally relating to their Internet provider and/or the current clerk's own name). Only 38 parishes use official @.gov domains, which include variations such as @datpc.gov, @dorset-parishes.gov and individual town council .gov domains.

In North Dorset, of the 60 towns and parishes, 2 do not have any recorded email address. 21 use non-personal emails (.gov or council specific domain). This leaves 37 parish/town councils using personal emails for government business.

Personal emails generate a significant degree of work as clerks change and contact emails become out of date. This ties up staff time updating email addresses and chasing up non-replies or emails stating that 'X is no longer the clerk for that parish and then re-sending information to new email addresses.

The use of personal email accounts, often tied to a home internet service provider, means that essential and historical information regarding parish business is tied up in personal, non 'official' email accounts which is lost to new clerks who will not have access to this historic information on applications and other business affecting their parish when they take up their post.

Should a clerk be ill or otherwise unavailable, use of a personal email account precludes other parties being able to access parish business communication and documents.

Though the use of a .gov email address will not be mandatory (though it is strongly recommended), from 1st April 2017, no correspondence regarding planning applications will be sent to a non .gov or personal email address and any correspondence received from a personal email address will not be acknowledged as an official town or parish consultation response to a planning application. Where a town or parish council has already set up a specific domain name such as clerk@xyxcouncil.co.uk this is an acceptable alternative as it avoids the problems associated with personal email accounts.

Weekly List and Non-Portal Responses to consultation

Both of these activities take up a significant degree of staff time.

The weekly list contains details of all applications and decisions received/made that week, across each local authority's area. It is sent to every town and parish clerk in that area. The only part of this information that is relevant to each recipient is that related to that clerk's parish, so most of this email is 'waste'. The same information can be seen on the dorsetforyou planning application search pages where it can be filtered to be precisely relevant for any parish and desired dates. From 1st July 2016, the weekly list will cease to be sent.

On the same page as the application search is the login for consultees to submit responses to planning applications within their area. Responses made this way are automatically linked to both the consultee and the application. It is an efficient, automated and accurate process.

Though most responses are made through the portal, responses made outside of this channel, via an emailed response or on paper, cause a significant delay to application processing, carry a high risk of error due to the amount of manual intervention required and use up an inordinate amount of staff time in managing this manual and work intensive workaround.

From 1st April 2017, only consultation responses received via the portal will be acknowledged.

During 2016 the following is planned:-

Following this briefing, the project will hold a launch event in early summer specifically for town and parish clerks, to present and explain the project. Information about this will be sent out shortly. The presentation will be an opportunity for clerks to ask questions and find out more information about this initiative.

An aim for the launch event is to form a pilot group of clerks who wish to begin exploring different ways of working, developing a range of solutions to suit different town and parish needs, confirming what training and support needs exist for clerks and how these can be met and opening a working dialogue with the local authorities on changes needed to make the consultation process more efficient for clerks when working electronically. This group will be supported by local authority ICT staff, DM staff and peers from towns and parishes already working electronically.

The pilot group is intended to run from July to December 2016. During this time, it may be rolled out to any other parishes who wish to make the switch sooner rather than later.

An interim report of options and recommendations will be issued in October, to allow town and parish councils to prepare for electronic notification from April 1st 2017 as part of their precept planning.

From January to March, the recommended methods from the pilot group will be made available to all town and parish councils across West Dorset. From April 2017 no plans will be printed out and all communication with parishes will be via official .gov email addresses only.

[Edited]