
REPORT TO:	Development Control Committee	AGENDA ITEM:
DATE OF MEETING:	22 nd September 2009	CATEGORY: RECOMMENDED
REPORT FROM:	Director of Community Services	OPEN
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SUBJECT:	Publicity for Planning Applications	REF:
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	All	TERMS OF REFERENCE: DC01

1.0 Recommendations

- 1.1 This Committee recommends to Environmental & Development Services Committee that the Council support the proposed changes to the requirements relating to publicising planning applications as contained in the consultation document from Communities & Local Government.

2.0 Purpose of Report

- 2.1 To consider the implications of proposed changes to the requirements for publicising planning applications and agree a response to the consultation from Communities & Local Government.

3.0 Detail

- 3.1 Provision currently exists for three types of mandatory publicity for notices of planning applications: by local advertisement (for prescribed types of development), site display (where appropriate) and the serving of a notice on neighbours.
- 3.2 Local planning authorities must also publish an up to date register of every application for planning permission in their area, which is usually held in the office and on the Council's website. There is also a duty to involve and to this end a Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) must be published. Our SCI was adopted in March 2006.
- 3.3 The Government is currently seeking views on three possible changes which are:

- (i) Making web publication mandatory for a period of 21 days for planning notices where there is currently a mandatory requirement to advertise in a newspaper

(ii) Making the statutory period 21 days for displaying site notices for listed building and conservation area consent and for development affecting the setting of a listed building or the character of a conservation area.

(iii) Removing statutory requirements to publicise certain applications in newspapers

- 3.4 With regard to point (i) this authority already has a good reputation regarding its web planning pages with a third of the total hits on the Council's website being to those pages. Subject to a protocol for loading the notices their addition to the Council's website should not be a problem.
- 3.5 With regard to point (ii) irrespective of the current statutory shorter time for displaying notices related to listed buildings and conservation areas, this authority has always advertised all notices for 21 days for consistency and to avoid confusion. This suggested change would therefore have no impact.
- 3.6 With regard to point (iii) we currently have no local information regarding how many people find out about a planning application by reading a notice in the newspaper. However, in 2004 a pilot project to improve access to the planning system through removing statutory requirements to advertise certain types of applications in newspapers and consideration of alternative methods of engagement was run with Parliament's approval in the London Borough of Camden. Via a survey Camden found that in its area a limited number of residents (2.1% in 2003 & 1.4% in 2006) found out about planning applications via a press notice. However that Council has recently reintroduced newspaper advertising for 'major' developments of which they have approximately 40 per year.
- 3.7 Consideration needs to be given as to whether any sections of the local community will be less informed as a result of notices no longer being placed in the local newspapers. Those residential occupiers most likely to be directly affected by a development proposal will still be made aware of the planning application as they will still receive an individual letter in accordance with our procedure set out in the SCI. Larger proposals will still be drawn to the attention of those living further away by a site notice. Anyone with a computer irrespective of how close or far away they live would be able to view the notices if posted on the Council's website.

4.0 Financial Implications

- 4.1 The Planning Service spends approximately £20,000 per year on publishing planning notices in the Burton Mail and Derby Evening Telegraph. Clearly if this money was to be saved it would help balance the Council's budgetary deficit.
- 4.2 There would be an impact on the advertising revenue of the two newspapers.

5.0 Corporate Implications

- 5.1 Corporate Plan Theme 4 Value for Money would be achieved by the saving of money spent on newspaper advertisements however this must be balanced against meeting community needs to ensure that vulnerable sections of the community remain informed.

6.0 Community Implications

- 6.1 Advertising planning applications by appropriate means is in the community interest. The consultation document refers to the belief of The Newspaper Society that exposing something to the public via a newspaper advertisement is to some extent culturally ingrained and there is concern from some groups nationally that removing the requirement to advertise in such a way may allow Council's to post notices for controversial developments in an obscure way thus hiding the emergence of some schemes.
- 6.2 There is no suggestion that the only way to advertise planning applications should be the internet, and it is accepted that access to the internet is not universal and some sections of society prefer to use more traditional forms of communication including newspapers. The document suggests that the older age groups, the unemployed, or those in lower income brackets are likely to be most affected and evidence from the Camden study suggests that other forms of engagement may be more affective for those of a non-white background.
- 6.3 In certain areas of the District it is more difficult to obtain satisfactory access to broadband, which could restrict the opportunity for rural communities to obtain information about planning applications. However, Parish Councils still receive hard copies of applications in their Parish hence those without access to the internet could attend Parish Council meetings to view the plans and find out what is proposed for their area.

7.0 Conclusions

- 7.1 The Camden pilot project gave the authority freedom to improve access to the planning system by diverting resources used for advertising applications in newspapers to measures that were considered to better meet the needs of its community and the authority's specific circumstances. Such alternative measures included the appointment of a community engagement officer.
- 7.2 South Derbyshire has a communications team that could be utilised to provide press releases for large or controversial applications for which an editorial might be provided by the newspaper if the storyline were interesting enough.
- 7.3 The Planning Service is continually improving its web pages relating to planning applications and it may be that some of the money saved by not publishing a notice in a newspaper could be used to investigate new technology to enable automatic alerts to individuals via text, email or other method.
- 7.4 A response to the consultation must be submitted by 23rd October 2009 and if the changes are approved they will take effect from April 2010.
- 7.5 Removal of the mandatory requirement to place a notice in the newspaper would not prevent the Local Authority from placing a notice voluntarily if it was considered in the best interests of the local community.

8.0 Background Papers

- 8.1 Publicity for planning applications – Consultation July 2009 from Department of Communities and Local Government.