



GREATER CAMBRIDGE
SHARED PLANNING

SENT BY EMAIL

To All Parish Councils

23 09 2020

Service Area: : Planning

Contact: Stephen Kelly

Email:

Stephen.Kelly@greatercambridgeplanning.org

Mobile: 07711 918993

Dear Clerk,

PLANNING COMMITTEE NOTIFICATIONS

You may be aware that from a recent planning committee meeting, there is an issue with our software which means that notifying Parish Councils individually, of specific items on planning committee meetings in SCDC results in the online planning pages being updated to suggest, incorrectly, that the consultation period for that application remains “open.” Having investigated the reasons why this process changes the website dates and considered options for resolving this issue, I am therefore writing to you to advise of our need to have to change the mechanism for notifying Parish Councils of forthcoming Committee items.

Earlier this year, as you may know, SCDC moved from its former software provider to a new “Idox enterprise” solution. Idox are the largest provider to Councils of planning solutions in the Country and had already been providing the City Council planning service with its ICT solution for a number of years. The Idox software that we have introduced has a range of new capabilities, some of which you may have been able to see in the training sessions with Parish Councils earlier this year. These include a user configurable search capability that can provide updates on progress with applications, as well as the ability to hold searches and send out emails to the user when circumstances change within those search parameters.

The issues that emerged from the recent committee relate however to the way in which the system treats Parish Councils as “consultees.” This requires a manual “overwrite” to be performed for each letter to remove the “default” response date from the system when it generates the notification to you. Otherwise, the system views what was a notification of committee meeting as a consultation letter – which it is not. We have explored whether this process can be re-designed within the current system capabilities and have been advised that this is not possible. As a result, and in the interests of avoiding a repeat of the recent need to defer items, the service must now implement a new process.

Therefore, from next month, instead of a specific notification letter for each application, each Parish Council will receive an emailed list of all applications appearing on the agenda for the Committee meeting, alongside details of how to register your interests to speak. The notification will be generated automatically upon conclusion of the publication of the agenda. The report will be sent to all Parish Councils automatically. In due course, I hope to be able to review the report generation process to see whether we can manage to focus reports to be sent solely to the specific Parish wherein the application lies. The change in the notification process, will not affect the ability of the Parish to “appear at the Planning Committee meeting where requested, to comment upon an application being heard.

Alongside the move to automated emails of committee items, the service will also be introducing a Parish Specific report, that can be sent on a weekly basis identifying new applications submitted and material changes to the status of “live” applications. The report will also detail all decisions issued the previous week, with a link to view the application and documents on our online system Public Access. In providing this information in this format we will be stopping the case by case emailing of Decision Notices. The new report format will, we hope, assist Parish Clerks in sharing with Parish Councillors, the latest position on applications in their area and we hope, will be easier for Parish Councils and clerks in the task of keeping up to date with live proposals and applications.

Finally, as we seek to support the ongoing aspiration for more information and following feedback from Parishes on the use of the “public access” facilities in IDOX, alongside work to capture some of your feedback so far, we intend to re-run training sessions for Parish’s (and put more material online) to assist you in using the online capabilities now available. Cat Quy and her colleagues will therefore be sending out invitations to further online training events targeted at helping Clerks to register with and fully utilise the capabilities of the public access suite.

We do recognise that, at this time particularly, making changes to patterns of working can be more disruptive. The changes that we propose to make to the Parish Council Committee notification process more assured, nevertheless seek to address a recognised weakness in the current system that has created uncertainty for Parish Councils and applicants alike. We are basing these changes on the SCDC Parish Contact List held at <https://www.scams.gov.uk/your-council-and-democracy/parish-councils/parish-council-guidance-and-information/> for Parishes so please also let us know if this database is out of date.

I hope that these new measures for notification, alongside the new weekly “notifications” report and further support for use of the public access software will nevertheless help you to conveniently access our information on planning matters. Please however let me and my team know if you have any other suggestions as to how we can assist you and your Councillors further – or if you have any comments on the communications that we will begin sending to you from 28th September.

Yours Sincerely

Stephen Kelly



Joint Director of Planning and Economic Development