

**Economy and Planning Review Panel and
Planning Development Control Committee – 20 March 2002
Cabinet – 8 April 2002**

PUBLICITY FOR PLANNING APPLICATIONS – NEIGHBOUR NOTIFICATION

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Following consideration by the Advisory Cabinet and the Policy and Resources Committee, the Council agreed on 23 April 2001:
- (a) that a six month trial of reducing newspaper publicity to the statutory minimum with neighbour notification and site notes in all cases be introduced as soon as possible;
 - (b) that this trial be funded by virement within existing budgets, and
 - (c) that a report back on this trial be made at the earliest opportunity to include the reaction from Parish and Town Councils on how successfully the new arrangements have worked.
- 1.2 The trial started on 3 October 2001 and this report is based upon the first four months of its operation. All Town and Parish Councils have been asked for their views on how successful (or otherwise) the scheme has been (closing date for comments 1 March 2002).

2. THE SCHEME DESCRIBED

- 2.1 In the first four months of the trial period 900 applications have been subject to the new procedures. In each case the directly adjacent properties (and those opposite across a road) to an application site have received a letter advising them of the proposal, how they can view and make comments on it and some general guidance on what are relevant planning considerations. A plan describing the principles of this system is attached as Appendix 1.
- 2.2 The initial notification is carried out by administrative staff using the map based computer system. This is then checked on site by planning officers when they visit the site and in some cases additional neighbours are notified. The planning officer also posts a green site notice adjacent to all application sites which in the majority of cases is not required under the statutory procedures.
- 2.3 An average of 7 letters are sent out for each application which means that in a full year (assuming 2,800 planning applications) a total of about 20,000 extra letters will be issued by the planning service.
- 2.4 In addition to these procedures some applications also require newspaper publicity under statutory requirements which the Council must pay for. This relates mainly to major proposals and also those which contrary to the Development Plan, in Conservation Areas and relating to listed buildings. However, overall the amount of newspaper publicity the Council pays for has reduced considerably – see financial implications.

- 2.5 It is also likely that the number of representatives on planning applications has increased as a result of the new scheme. However, as these figures fluctuate depending on how controversial different applications are, it is not possible to confirm this with statistical accuracy.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 These have worked out in a very similar way to that predicted in the initial reports recommending the trial arrangements.
- 3.2 The cost of newspaper publicity has reduced by about 50%. In 2000 /01 the cost of publicising planning applications was £47,000. The budget for 2001 /02 was £36,000 but this figure would have been exceeded if the trial had not been undertaken. On the basis of the trial arrangements £20,000 can be saved from the publicity budget if the existing scheme is continued.
- 3.3 The trial scheme has resulted in extra spending from postage and stationery budgets. This is equivalent to £5,000 in a full year.
- 3.4 The trial scheme has put considerable pressure on staffing resources. This resulted in other elements of the planning service eg the registration of applications, failing to meet its targets and additional clerical resources were needed to sustain the trial. This has been funded out of staff vacancy savings to complete the trial but needs to be addressed as part of the staffing budget if the scheme is to be permanently maintained. The £15,000 balance of the savings from publicity would, if transferred to staffing budgets, enable part time clerical staff to be retained and some extra help for planning officers. Some extra IT equipment is also needed for these staff which can be met within existing resources. The clerical staff will continue to carry out the initial neighbour notification as well as giving additional support to planning officers who are spending more time on site checking the notifications are correct.
- 3.5 The result of these changes would be one extra FTE post being added to the development control establishment. This is by the replacement of one full time post with four part time (18 1/2 hours) posts. The benefit is that a substantially better way of publicising planning applications can be retained within the existing budget. This includes still posting a green site notice on every site, which is something, Parish and Town Councils were very keen to see maintained.

4. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 Notifying neighbours of planning applications results in greater environmental awareness and gives more people the opportunity to comment on planning proposals. This is considered to be an enhanced planning service which the Council can offer beyond the statutory publicity requirements laid down in the Town and Country Planning legislation. Members will remember that a Citizens panel survey in 1999 showed that 94% of participants thought the Council should write to them about planning applications in proximity to their property.

5. CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

5.1 None.

6. CONSULTATION

6.1 All Parish and Town Councils have been invited to comment on the trial arrangements. At the time of preparing this report, responses had been received from twelve Town and Parish Councils. Nine were either generally or strongly supportive of the continuation of the trial scheme, some with comments suggesting minor changes. One felt unable to comment whilst two considered that all applications should be advertised in a local newspaper as in the previous arrangements.

6.2 Additional comments received from Town and Parish Councils will be reported the meeting.

7. CONCLUSIONS

7.1 The trial arrangements are considered to have been successful, not only introducing neighbour notification, but also retaining green site notices. It is possible to operate the scheme within the existing budget but only if the savings in the publicity budget can be transferred to allow extra staffing as well as increased postage and stationery costs.

8. COMMENTS FROM SPECIAL JOINT MEETING OF ECONOMY AND PLANNING REVIEW PANEL AND PLANNING DEVELOPMENT CONTROL COMMITTEE

The Joint meeting of the Economy and Planning Review Panel and the Planning Development Control Committee at their joint meeting on 20 March, 2002 supported the proposals contained in this report.

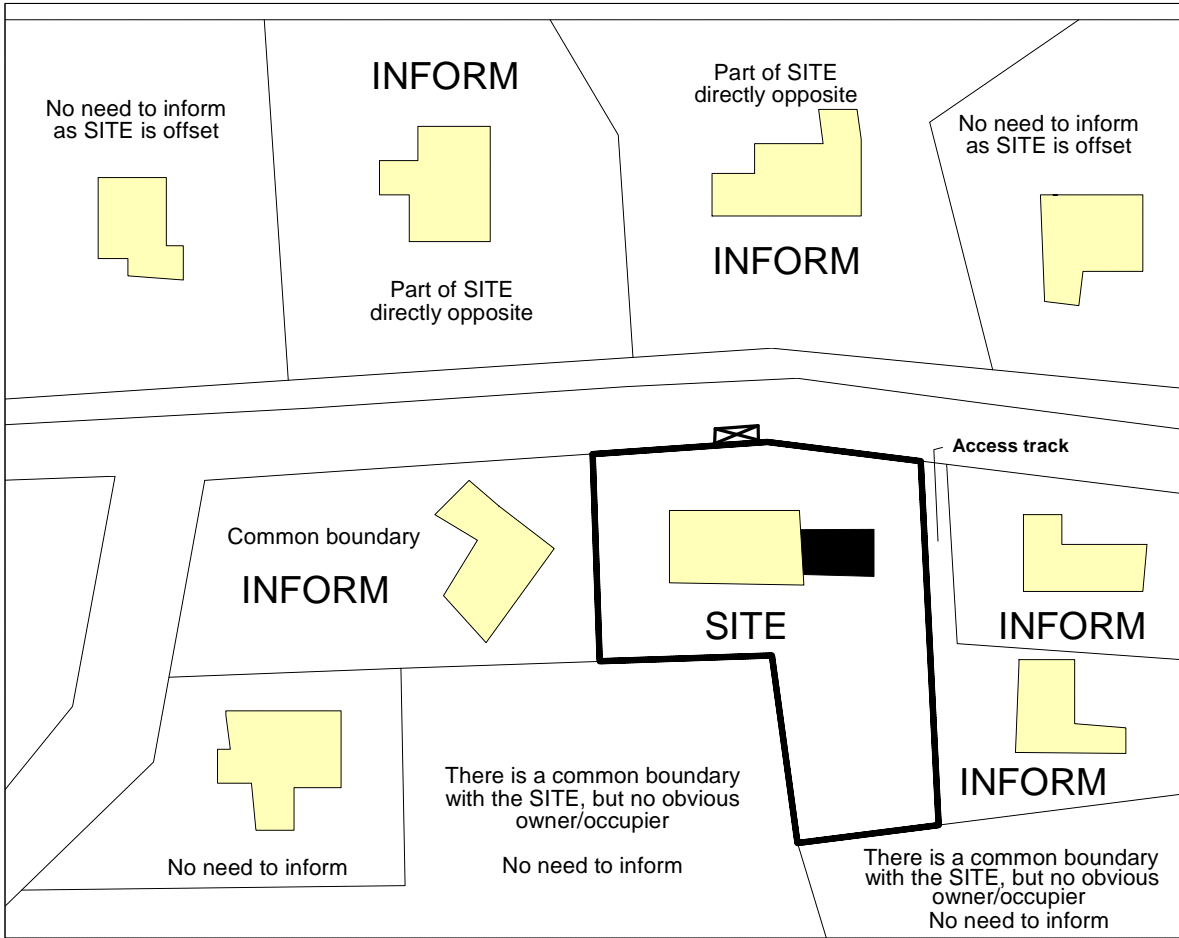
9. RECOMMENDATIONS

(1) That neighbour notifications be retained as a permanent part of the Councils publicity arrangements for planning applications. In addition a green site notice should continue to be posted on all sites by planning staff but newspaper publicity of applications (paid for by the Council) should only be undertaken in those cases where there is a statutory requirement.

(2) That £20,000 be vired from the applications publicity budget, of which (£15,000) be transferred to the staffing budget and the balance of £5,000 to postage and stationery budgets.

For further information contact :
Chris Elliott, Head of Development Control
023 8028 5310 or e-mail
dev.control@nfdc.gov.uk

Background Papers :
Consultation responses 'Neighbour
Notification' file held by Head of
Development Control.



New Forest District Council
 Environment Services
 Appletree Court
 Lyndhurst
 SO43 7PA

Tel: (023) 80285000

NEIGHBOUR NOTIFICATION

- Proposed development
- Site notice erected by LPA

Not to scale

This material has been reproduced from
 Ordnance Survey digital map data with
 the permission of the Controller of
 Her Majesty's Stationary Office.
 © Crown copyright.
 Licence No: LA078719