
**PROCUREMENT OF ELECTRONIC DOCUMENT MANAGEMENT SYSTEM FOR
DEVELOPMENT SECTION**

Responsible Cabinet Member - Councillor John Williams, Economy Portfolio

Responsible Director - Richard Alty, Assistant Chief Executive (Regeneration)

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. The purpose of this report is to seek Cabinet approval to designate the procurement of an electronic document management and retrieval system for the Development Control Service as a non-strategic procurement under the Contract Procedure Rules.

Summary

2. A key requirement to improve the efficiency and customer experience of the Council's development Control service is the introduction of an electronic document management system (EDMS) which would include the following key features:-
 - (a) Scanning of incoming applications and related correspondence.
 - (b) Electronic workflow transactions between various officers.
 - (c) Enabling on-line access to information and information transactions.
3. Darlington is one of a small minority of authorities that does not yet have this technology in place in the planning service. The following clear advantages can be identified:
 - (a) The system promotes public engagement with the Council by allowing more flexible and convenient access to the development control service. It is possible for the public to view and measure plans over the Council's website and then to submit comments/objections on planning applications all online without having to leave home. The scanning of all application documents including plans, public letters and consultation responses means the public are able to gain maximum information about a planning application with the minimum difficulty and inconvenience. One of the findings of the recent review of the Council's development control service by consultants Trevor Roberts Associates was as follows:-

“Given the Council's commitment to customer care and community involvement it is surprising that the Council has failed to invest in IT to enable on-line viewing and monitoring of planning applications. The Council should urgently seek to address this situation with the corporate commitment and appropriate investment necessary or the authority will continue to fall behind other authorities.”

- (b) Online access to planning application information would reduce the demand from customers for officer time.
 - (c) Overcomes the need for costly backscanning of applications with scanning and indexing processes taking place as the application arrives.
 - (d) All documents, plans etc will be linked through to UNI-form, the main IT system used to record details of all planning applications, thereby providing a single, centralised storage point for all information and documents associated with all planning applications.
4. The procurement of this system, whilst costing more than £75,000 meets the definition of a non-strategic procurement under the Contract Procedures Rules. Funding is available from the Planning Delivery Grant.

Recommendation

5. It is recommended that Cabinet agree that the procurement of an Electronic Document Management System for the Development Control Service is a non-strategic procurement under the Contract Procedure Rules.

Reasons

6. The recommendation is supported by the following reasons :-
- (a) With a view to procuring an electronic document management system at the earliest possibility to improve the efficiency and customer experience of the development control service.
 - (b) To comply with the Contract Procedure Rules.

Richard Alty
Assistant Chief Executive – (Regeneration)

Background Papers

None relevant

Roy Merrett : Extension 2037 PB

S17 Crime and Disorder	No impact
Health and Well Being	Potential positive impact from improved accessibility of service
Sustainability	Potential positive impact as less travel to Town Hall required
Diversity	Potential positive impact
Wards Affected	All (indirectly)
Groups Affected	All (indirectly)
Budget and Policy Framework	Planning Delivery Grant – No implications for revenue budget
Key Decision	No
Urgent Decision	Not an urgent decision. However, Economy & Environment Scrutiny have already considered the need for this system as part of their consideration of Development Control.
One Darlington: Perfectly Placed	No direct impact

MAIN REPORT

Background

7. A recent review of the Council's Development Control Service has shown amongst other things that there are serious ICT issues to be addressed which impact directly on NI 157 (measuring the speed with which planning applications are processed).
8. Historically progress in resolving these issues have been restricted by resources, both in terms of staff time and budgetary provision. This has prevented Darlington from satisfying the 'Pendleton Criteria' for e-planning, the deadline for which was December 2005. The Pendleton e-planning criteria consists of 21 requirements. Whilst it is the norm for Local Planning Authorities to meet all of these various criteria, Darlington fails to meet two of the requirements in that it does not provide a facility to view planning applications and planning decision notices online. This, in turn, has reduced the level of Planning Delivery Grant awarded to the Council. Darlington is one of a small minority of Council's nationwide that is left in this position.
9. The review recommended that priority must now be assigned to putting a programme in place to meet the requirements of the outstanding Pendleton Criteria and to move beyond this to address the new agenda for e-planning set out in the guidance which has superseded Pendleton. This guidance is contained in the 'Better Planning Services Standards' published in July 2006.
10. The key requirement in moving forward is the introduction of an electronic document management system (EDMS) which would include the following key features:
 - (a) Scanning of incoming applications and related correspondence.
 - (b) Electronic workflow transactions between various officers.
 - (c) Enabling on-line access to information and information transactions.

Advantages of EDMS system

11. The following clear advantages can be identified:
 - (a) The system promotes public engagement with the Council by allowing more flexible and convenient access to the development control service. It is possible for the public to view and measure plans over the Council's website and then to submit comments / objections on planning applications all online without having to leave home. The scanning of all application documents including plans, public letters and consultation responses means the public are able to gain maximum information about a planning application with the minimum difficulty and inconvenience. One of the findings of the recent review of the Council's development control service by consultants Trevor Roberts Associates was as follows:-

“Given the Council's commitment to customer care and community involvement it is surprising that the Council has failed to invest in IT to enable on-line viewing and monitoring of planning applications. The Council should urgently seek to address this situation with the corporate commitment and appropriate investment necessary or the

authority will continue to fall behind other authorities.”

- (b) Online access to planning application information would reduce the demand from customers for officer time.
- (c) Overcomes the need for costly backscanning of applications with scanning and indexing processes taking place as the application arrives.
- (d) All documents, plans etc will be linked through to UNI-form, the main IT system used to record details of all planning applications, thereby providing a single, centralised storage point for all information and documents associated with all planning applications.

12. If no action is taken it would mean:

- (a) That access to the development control service is more restricted and less convenient for the customer.
- (b) Continued failure to meet Government target in terms of having EDMS and ensuring that a proportion of PDG grant money is spent on capital items.
- (c) Consultation responses are delayed and information retrieval slower resulting in less efficient service.
- (d) Backscanning services continue to be required therefore more cost to the Council.

Costs

13. The introduction of an EDMS would necessitate the purchase of certain items of hardware including a scanner to enable the capture of large scale plans up to A0 size in electronic format. Software enhancement is also required to enable online access and electronic workflow. Further costs such as an additional server and annual support and maintenance also need to be taken into account.

14. To date three companies have been approached with a view to procuring EDMS within the Development Section. The companies in question have demonstrated their systems. It is estimated that the overall costs of implementing this project in respect of planning development control would be circa £130,000. This cost assumes that the scanning and indexing function would be undertaken ‘in-house’ rather than outsourced. It should be noted however that indications have been given that there would be scope to negotiate costs down. A broad estimate of the breakdown of costs is given below for guidance purposes.

Basic Package : £60,000

Annual maintenance (5 year total) : - £30,000

Additional server(s) including licences and software £12,000

Hardware costs : £28,000

15. It is proposed that the cost of this project would be financed entirely through the Planning Delivery Grant budget without the need to call on revenue resources.

16. Other Council sections potentially considering an EDMS include Public Protection - Building Control, Environmental Health, Licensing and Trading Standards. Adoption of an EDMS would facilitate the requirement for Building Control and Licensing to provide online access to applications as well as allowing members of the public (and other consultees) to make comments on applications. It would also be an

essential step that would need to be taken to enable any change in working practices resulting from Public Protection's accommodation move because it would provide a single, centralised point of access for all business critical information through links to the UNIFORM system. This gives significant efficiencies to professional officers, whilst reducing the burden on administrative and support staff. Implementing an EDMS would also progress compliance with any Corporate Information Governance requirements and reduce the space and costs of document storage and retrieval.

17. The Council is considering the implementation of EDMS on a larger scale across a number of services but at this stage a business case has not been proven. The need for EDMS within the planning service is being justified on service improvement and external funding is available therefore it is felt appropriate to invest in a system specifically for Planning at this stage however the ability to utilise the system wider will be explored and a number of services have already expressed interest in the system namely Public Protection. The costs of developing EDMS within the Public Protection division would need to be met through budgets attributable to that division rather than Planning Delivery Grant.
18. Notwithstanding the above it is important to reiterate the urgent need identified by consultants to install EDMS to improve the Council's development control service.
19. With this in mind a specification for the system is currently under production which requests the supplier to provide a product for the development control service but which can be built on at a later date to meet the requirements of the Public Protection division without the need for a fresh tender. It is hoped that designing a system in this way will lead to cost savings in the long term.
20. At its meeting in July 2008, Cabinet determined the criteria for what constitutes a strategic and non-strategic procurement. The criteria include the value of the project, its impact on residents, risk in terms of finance, health and safety and requirements of any external funders and the form of contract. It is considered that the value and risk elements of this project are sufficiently low to make this a non-strategic procurement.

What is the equalities impact?

21. No formal Equalities Impact Assessment is required. However, it is considered that the equalities impact of installing EDMS will be very positive as it would considerably improve the level of accessibility of the development control service to a variety of users.

Other Relevant Considerations

22. The findings of the Trevor Robert Review were recently considered and reviewed by the Council's Environment and Economy Scrutiny Committee Review Group. It was one of the key conclusions of the Review Group that the need for an EDMS system within Development Control was now urgent and should be implemented as early as possible this year.

Outcome of Consultations

23. No consultations were required in the preparation of this report.