

**REPORT TO THE MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE 14 MARCH 2012**

**PORTFOLIO: PLANNING AND TRANSPORTATION**

**REPORT FROM HEAD OF PLANNING AND TRANSPORTATION**

**SUBJECT: PRE-APPLICATION PLANNING ADVICE – PROPOSED SCHEDULE OF CHARGES**

**1 DECISION BEING RECOMMENDED**

- 1.1 That the schedule of pre-application planning advice charges set out in the appendix to this report be agreed and implemented from 1 April 2012.

**2 REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION**

- 2.1 At Extraordinary Council on 31 January 2012 the Medium Term Financial Strategy was approved and Members agreed to introduce a charge for the delivery of pre-application planning advice (Minute 18/2012).

**3 SALIENT INFORMATION**

- 3.1 The proposed schedule of pre-application planning advice is appended and Members will note that no charges are proposed to be levied on initial advice provided to householders wishing to alter or extend their homes. There is a charge proposed for follow-up advice, but it is expected that the majority of householder proposals will be dealt with by one contact.
- 3.2 An advice note is currently in preparation to accompany the charging schedule. The advice note will set out the benefits of seeking advice before making an application and the information that should be provided with any submission.
- 3.3 For advice in writing the applicant will receive a written report setting out the history, key planning issues and conclusions about the likelihood of the proposal being found to be acceptable by the local planning authority. On this latter point, the note will include a disclaimer to make very clear that any advice given will not constitute a formal decision of the authority. Responses to written requests will be provided within 20 working days.
- 3.4 If advice is provided at a meeting (this could be an officer meeting or a meeting involving Members as per the protocol set out in the Constitution), a detailed note of the meeting will be issued within 10 days, unless an alternative timescale is agreed at the meeting.

**4 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

- 4.1 Alternative options for the charging schedule would include making a charge to householders. The small projects contemplated by most homeowners for

alterations and extensions are generally simple and straight forward and it is considered reasonable to continue to offer such advice free of charge through the duty officer system.

- 4.2 The changes set out in the Appendix have been developed following a comparative analysis of the charges applied in other Essex authorities and are considered to be reasonable and proportionate to the work required for the different application types.
- 4.3 In the current economic climate it is recognised that small businesses are struggling to remain profitable and, in situations where planning consent is required to enable modernising works to be carried out, there may be a case for providing a dispensation for initial pre-application advice. This is an option Members might like to consider, though the charges to businesses for advice on small proposals as set out in the proposed charging schedule are modest.

## **5 RISK IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 There is a risk that pre-application charges will make an applicant think about whether to seek advice before submitting an application. However, experience from other authorities suggests most applicants welcome a more formal, structured process.
- 5.2 The exclusion of householders from initial charges will ensure that a service continues to be provided for simpler, more straightforward minor applications.
- 5.3 The Council has insurance in place for the provision of professional advice.

## **6 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 There will be a need for adjustments to be made to the way officers work given the new targets that will be applied to the issue of pre-application advice; this will need to be set against the timescales for processing planning applications.
- 6.2 Otherwise it is not envisaged there will be a requirement for any additional resources to bring the new system into operation from 1 April 2012.

I confirm that the above recommendation does not depart from Council policy and that appropriate consideration has been given to any budgetary and legal implications.

SMT Lead Officer Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

**Head of Planning and Transportation**

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**Background Papers:-**

None.

For further information please contact Shaun Scrutton (Head of Planning and Transportation) on:-

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If you would like this report in large print, Braille or another language please contact 01702 318111.

**Pre-Application Advice – Charging Schedule**

	Written generic only without officer viewing the site	Meeting with written advice	Follow-up
Small	£100	£250	£150
Minor	£100	£350 <sup>A</sup>	£200
Major	£250	£700 <sup>B</sup>	£500
Strategic	N/A	£1000 <sup>C</sup>	£750
Householder	No charge	No charge	£100
Listed Building	£100	£200	£150

All prices exclude VAT

Note A – 1 meeting of up to 2 hours

Note B – 1 meeting of up to 3 hours

Note C – 1 meeting of up to 3 hours or alternatively £1500 for 2 meetings or £3500 for a package of up to 6 meetings

Small – 1 dwelling or up to 999 square metres commercial floor area, including small changes to plant or other alterations to commercial premises

Minor – 2-9 dwellings or 1000-1,999 square metres

Major – 10-99 dwellings or 2,000-4,999 square metres

Strategic – +100 dwellings or + 5,000 square metres

Householder – extensions, alterations, outbuildings, etc.

Where a proposal does not fall into one of the published categories, the charge for pre-application advice will be agreed by negotiation.