

Project: Microfiche Scanning**Service:** Planning**Officer Responsible for Project:** Val Jacobi**Identification of Need:**

There is a legislative requirement to retain, for public inspection, certain documents within a planning application. Records for retention date back to July 1948.

Building Control data has a requirement to be retained for 20 years.

Waverley has this data in 2 formats; Microfiche from 1948 to 1995 and electronic (scanned) data from 1996 onwards.

Additionally, for planning applications, the critical documents are available via our website from 2003/4 onward.

The information contained within these records is in frequent use by members of the public and officers.

Examination of the records are typically needed by the public/solicitors/planning agents/builders when;-

- Land or property is to be let or sold
- Planning applications are being prepared
- Building works are being considered or queried
- Permitted development rights are being investigated

By Officers the records are accessed

- To aid determination of applications
- For giving pre application advice
- For enforcement enquiries
- To provide copies of document for the public
- Historical research by other Services, such as Environmental Health and Council Tax

The microfiche exists as 2 sets, one are "master sheets" Slides with pockets which hold individual microfiche pictures of each sheet of paper. These are currently stored at the Farnham Depository in reasonable conditions, but have not always been kept well

The second set are those in day to day use, these are a contact print of the master sheets. This set is kept in the Planning Service for use by Officers on specialist viewer/printers; they are also available for the public to use on microfiche viewers in the reception area.

Over the years the second set has become scratched and hazy. They should have been handled with cotton gloves, as the natural acid produced by the skin etches the surface of the microfiche and fades the image. There are frequent problems with viewing data on these microfiche as a result.

It is time intensive for staff to demonstrate to the public how to use the microfiche readers in the public area.

Prints of certain documents are needed by the public and officers. The machines that do this have an annual cost for maintenance and repair. It is costly in staff time trying to get a clear image to print from the Office set. These machines are getting elderly and expensive to repair, replacement machines would probably need to be ordered within the next financial year.

The loss in clarity of the images has reached a level where some action needs to be taken. It is therefore appropriate to consider improving the access to these records as part of that process.

Maintaining these records as microfiche prevent ready access by the public and officer remote working. The transfer of these documents into an electronic format would allow for their display via the website. This would in turn, reduce the footfall into the offices, reduce letter, e-mail requests and telephone enquiries for copy documents and allow staff time to deal with more complex enquiries. There would also be a floor space release at a result of removal of the microfiche readers and storage units.

Previously estimates for the scanning of the microfiche records have been in the £100,000 range. This new quote was sought following quotes for replacement machinery. It has therefore unexpectedly reached a level where serious consideration could be given. The work was not included within budget estimates for 2014/15 for this reason.

There are several possible solutions to the image derogation issue some of which include improvements to access of these records.

Option 1

Swop the set in day to day use for the master sheets

Advantages;-

Cheapest and most straightforward solution.

Disadvantages;-

The individual microfiche images can fall out of the sleeves and may never be correctly indexed again

If a master copy is lost or damaged there would be no copy left.

(Both of these would leave Waverley unable to fulfil its legal responsibility)

The problems with the microfiche readers and printers would remain regarding cost of replacement and staff time.

The master set is not in any order having been disturbed in the transfer to Farnham.

Option 2 a

Bring the master sheets over from Farnham to scan. Replace the current microfiche reader/printer with a model capable of scanning the images as well as printing them and gradually build up an electronic record of the applications.

Advantages

The quality of the image can be enhanced with software to make it clearer. It can be indexed into the Planning document management system against the individual application reference and become an electronic image permanently available. Both copies of the microfiche can then be destroyed.

It could be done in house with both sets of microfiche continuing to be available.

Disadvantages

There are over 165,000 separate applications on microfiche consisting of 1,000,000 images. One person archiving the images full time would take several years, plus the machine would be in use part of the time for normal access.

The master copies would need to be stored near the planning service which will be moving to Office Max later this year.

The machine costs £5,000 and the cost of a member of staff over 4 years would exceed £71,440. (This is based on the salary scale for a scanning assistant, salary 14,795 but with National Insurance and Pension contributions would be £17,860 per annum X 4 years.)

2b

The master set could be used on a scanner machine in a separate location, with the other set still being used by the Planning Service and the public. This would still leave the problems of image degradation and replacement of old machines unresolved.

Option 3

Have all the master microfiche scanned by an external company and returned as electronic files ready for import into the Planning document management system. Follow up with a mop up operation of microfiche missing from the master copies with the set kept in Planning.

Advantages

The work would be done on precision scanners which can capture the best possible image of each sheet. The work could be done in a very short space of time with minimum disruption to access.

Disadvantages

The cost would be in the region of £48,000. An estimate has already been received stating this figure.

Option 3a

Only have the Development Control Planning microfiche scanned and then dispose of the remaining Building Control Microfiche as they reach the 20 year retention date.

Advantages

Would reduce the costs by £4,230

Disadvantages

This would still leave the problems of image degradation and replacement of old machines unresolved for the Building Regulations for a further 3-4 years..

Demonstrate how this scheme would help achieve the Corporate Strategy objectives:

Option 3 is the recommend

Value Understanding Environment

The scheme would over time be the best cost effective option.

Having the past planning history of a site available for easy access would assist our residents and businesses and aid remote working.

The move away from printing out copies to electronic access will assist the environment.

Cross Reference to Service Plan:

The provision of the entire planning history of a site available electronically via the Waverley website will assist in public access to documentation. The website would serve as first point of contact

There would be a small loss in income generated by providing copies. About £5,000 per year is currently generated of which about £3,000 would be lost. It should also be noted that this figure does not cover the cost of providing the service.

The ability to access past Building Control records electronically would aid in the effective performance of the Building Control officers and increase their productivity.

Progress to date (including position regarding planning permission):

A full recording has been made of the range and numbers of each type of referencing system used by Waverley and it's predecessors since 1948. The number of microfiche and images has been quantified. Pricing and capabilities of in-office scanners has been looked at. Specialist companies have been asked for an estimated figure to complete the scanning and provide electronic files in a format that is compatible to the document management system used.

The IT service is establishing what work would need to be undertaken to have all the applications available to view internally and via the website.

Will the Corporate Project Management Toolkit be used? No

If no, how will the project be managed?

Working group formed with Planning and IT Services staff and overseen by Head of Service.

Key Project target dates and milestones:

Project approval of the scheme

Submission to Executive

Submission to Council

Clarification of procurement procedure

Placing the order

Scanning the records

Importing the images and index matching

Cross referencing the set of microfiche in planning against the images to identify any missing items

Scan from the second set any missing fiche

Confirm image quality

Destruction of microfiche sets

Capital cost (across years):

	Year 1 £	Year 2 £	Year 3 £	Total £
Land				
Contract Costs				
Fees				
Vehicles, Plant and Equipment				
Contingency				
Other (specify) -	48,000			
Total Capital Cost	48,000			

How capital cost will be funded:

	Year 1 £	Year 2 £	Year 3 £	Total £
WBC Capital Urgent projects	27,000	0	0	27,000
Planning Delivery Grant	21,000	0	0	21,000
External Funding (specify) -				
	48,000	0	0	48,000
Total Funding				

Ongoing Revenue Cost and/or savings (Invest to Save):

	Year 1 £	Year 2 £	Year 3 £	Total £
Staffing				
Other costs (specify) – Machine maintenance/repair savings	1,000	1,000	1,000	3,000
Consumables	3,000	3,000	3,000	9,000
postage	1,500	1,500	1,500	4,500
Total Revenue Costs saved	5,500	5,500	5,500	16,500
Less				
Revenue income lost	(3,000)	(3,000)	(3,000)	(9,000)
Estimated annual revenue saving	£2,500	£2,500	£2,500	£7,500

Return on Capital and Payback (if appropriate):

	£		
Forecast Returns		Return on Capital	%
Capital Cost	27,000		
Forecast Savings	12,500	Payback	11 Years

Identify any efficiency gains resulting from the project:

Approximately 15% of the 2 Planning Reception staff time is taken up with providing copies and assisting the public access the microfiche and the data it contains. The income generated by the sale of these copies does not meet the cost of staff time, paper/toner and contribution towards the maintenance of the equipment.

Officer time is wasted in competing for access, locating and refiling the microfiche and printing part of the records for reference when there is instant access to the electronic records and therefore no need to print

Misfiling of microfiche over the years causes delays.

The release of the floor space used to store the records and the machines could be incorporated into useable floor space.

No further consumable costs and service costs for the machines would be needed.

Home working and the future of mobile working within the Planning Service would be assisted by having the information available remotely.

Identify any risks which may effect the project:

The master set would leave Waverley control to be scanned. A reference check on the company concerned would be undertaken before the contract was issued.

Environmental Impact, including Carbon Implications:

The need to print paper copies both by Officers and the public would be reduced as the images are instantly available. This would save on electricity/paper/ink and wear and tear. The public being able to view these images from home would decrease the number of trips into the Planning offices. Once a mobile working solution is available for planning staff on site visits, the full planning history would be available to hand.

Equality impact assessment carried out? Yes / No / N/A

N/A

How will the project be procured?

A check will be made to ensure that the quotations already received are in accordance with procurement rules and if not a procurement exercise will be undertaken. There are 5 or 6 market leaders in this field.

Is there scope for sharing/joint work? Yes / No

Yes. A request for any other Service that has microfiche records has been made. There are economies of scale.

Once these images are available they can be used by other services which need access to Planning records such as Environmental Health.

Completed by: Val Jacobi

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