

## ADHS DECISION – 13

### Title: APAS Back Office Planning System Fee 2025-26

#### Executive summary

This decision seeks approval to expenditure of £17,363.10 for support and maintenance of the existing back-office planning system 'APAS' in the financial year 2025-26 to facilitate delivery of the Development Management service's statutory functions.

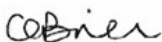
#### Decision

That the Head of Planning – Development Management approves:

- i. Expenditure of £17,363.10 for Agile Applications Planning SaaS (Software-as-a-Service) Annual Support and Maintenance fee 2025-26.

#### Head of Service

I do not have any disclosable interest in the proposed Decision. It is consistent with OPDC's priorities and has my approval.

Signature: 

Date: 21/07/2025

## PART 1: NON-CONFIDENTIAL FACTS AND ADVICE

### 1. Background and context

- 1.1 OPDC is the statutory local planning authority for its administrative area and is responsible for validating, publicising, consulting on, assessing and determining planning applications in accordance with the requirements of relevant legislation, principally the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, and the procedures set out in the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015. These include specific requirements in relation to maintaining a public register of planning applications, publicising applications for planning permission and undertaking consultation.
- 1.2 All local planning authorities use specialist software to manage the process of receiving, validating, consulting, reporting and determining planning applications and other development management functions including requests for

preapplication advice, appeals, Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) screening and scoping requests and enforcement cases.

- 1.3 Since its inception in 2015, the OPDC has used 'APAS' software, initially supplied by Swift DataPro who were subsequently acquired by Agile Applications. There remains an ongoing business need for the software, which is required in order to fulfil OPDC's statutory functions as the local planning authority. A change in provider – which would involve a significant amount of officer time, require a substantial amount of documents and data to be migrated from the current system to the new one, and would likely incur substantial set-up costs – is not justified at the present time and would not be prudent from a value for money or business continuity perspective.

## **2. The proposal and how it will be delivered**

- 2.1 The proposal represents the continuation of the existing arrangement with Agile Applications to provide and maintain APAS Planning SaaS in 2025/26. This product supports all planning application-related functions of a local planning authority, including importing planning applications from the Planning Portal (via the 1APP connector), managing the process of receiving, validating, consulting, reporting and determining planning applications, and facilitating public web access to planning applications and the statutory register. The fee for 2025/26 includes the provision, support and maintenance of the system including access to the Agile Applications helpdesk.
- 2.2 Back-office planning systems are highly bespoke document management systems with a public-facing element that allows external stakeholders and members of the public to view and comment on planning applications. There are very few providers of this service and OPDC does not have the technical expertise to develop or host its own system.
- 2.3 The proposal will ensure that OPDC is able to continue to fulfil its statutory functions as a local planning authority insofar as they relate to the handling of planning applications.

## **3. Objectives and expected outcomes**

- 3.1 There are two key objectives:
  - i) To ensure continued access to APAS for managing the process of receiving, validating, consulting, reporting on and determining planning applications and other development management functions including requests for pre-application advice, appeals, EIA screening and scoping requests and enforcement cases; and
  - ii) To ensure continued access to the planning register by external stakeholders and members of the public.
- 3.2 The expected outcomes are:
  - i) To ensure efficient handling of planning applications and all related documentation in line with statutory requirements; and

- ii) To facilitate effective public engagement and participation in the planning process in accordance with OPDC's Statement of Community Involvement.

#### **4. Strategic fit**

- 4.1 This proposal supports OPDC's values by enabling Collaboration through the provision of public access to planning information through the planning register and creating opportunities for partners, stakeholders and communities to engage in the planning process.
- 4.2 The proposal links to OPDC's pillars by creating a platform for the Community to comment on planning applications and influence the future of the area, contributing to the creation of a place that reflects local needs and aspirations.
- 4.3 This decision also supports access to information, inclusion and transparency, by enabling members of the public to engage in the planning process and gain access to planning documents and decisions.

#### **5. Project governance and assurance**

- 5.1 The project represents the continuation of an existing arrangement for the provision of the back-office planning system. OPDC Head of Planning – Development Management is the Senior Responsible Officer with responsibility for managing the relationship with the supplier and ensuring provision of the services. The Planning Support Officer is the Project Lead with responsibility for maintaining regular contact with the supplier and escalating any issues to the Head of Planning – Development Management.

#### **6. Risk, Issues and Opportunities**

- 6.1 There is limited risk attached to the project, as OPDC is already using the APAS software successfully. The software is essential to OPDC's ability to fulfil its statutory function as the local planning authority and without it there is a risk of:
  - i) reputational damage for the Mayor and the OPDC, both at Government level, among key stakeholders and the wider public;
  - ii) practical difficulties for members of the public and interested parties accessing information; and
  - iii) challenges against planning decisions, with associated costs.
- 6.2 The extent to which the APAS software continues to meet the Planning service's needs will be kept under review. In the event that service standards are not maintained by the supplier, or the Planning service's needs are no longer being met by the software, alternative providers would be considered.

#### **7. Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Comments**

- 7.1 OPDC must have 'due regard' to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation as well as to the need to advance equality of

opportunity and foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.<sup>1</sup>

- 7.2 Providing public access to planning applications creates opportunities for members of the public, including those with protected characteristics, to engage in the planning process and comment on issues affecting them. The proposal therefore supports OPDC's vision to create an inclusive, accessible and diverse district by creating a platform for individuals to influence the future of the area, regardless of background, race, age, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation or ability.

## **8. Social Value and Environment**

- 8.1 **Sustainability** – the proposal will support the efficient running of the Development Management team including the monitoring and discharge of conditions relating to the sustainability aspects of new development.
- 8.2 **Inclusive Growth** – the proposal will support the monitoring and discharge of Section 106 obligations relating to Local Labour, Skills and Employment strategies and management plans.
- 8.3 **Community Engagement** – the proposal will contribute to the ability of local communities to participate in the planning process.
- 8.4 **Design Quality** – the proposal will support the monitoring and discharge of conditions relating to the detailed design of new development, ensuring the highest standards of design and place-making.

## **9. Other considerations**

- 9.1 There are no other considerations that need to be considered in the taking of this decision.

## **10. Conflicts of interest**

- 10.1 No one involved in the preparation or clearance of this form, or its substantive proposal, has any conflict of interest.

## **11. Financial comments**

- 11.1 There is sufficient budget for this renewal under Planning DM WBS PA.0300.002. This is a continuation from 24/25 and it has been included in the Planning forecast.

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The protected characteristics and groups are: age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, gender, religion or belief, sexual orientation and marriage/ civil partnership status. Fulfilling this duty involves having due regard to: the need to remove or minimise any disadvantage suffered by those who share a protected characteristic or one that is connected to that characteristic; taking steps to meet the different needs of such people; and encouraging them to participate in public life or in any other activity where their participation is disproportionately low. Compliance with the Equality Act may involve treating people with a protected characteristic more favourably than those without the characteristic. The duty must be exercised with an open mind and at the time a Decision is taken in the exercise of the OPDC's functions.

## 12. Summary timeline

| Activity                                                         | Date                    |
|------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Continued support and maintenance of the APAS system for 2025-26 | 01/04/2025 – 31/03/2026 |

## Appendices

- Appendix 1: Renewal Quote - Agile Planning SaaS Annual Support and Maintenance

## Other supporting papers

- None

### PUBLIC ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Information in this Form (Part 1) is subject to the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FoIA). OPDC aims to publish the Form within three working day of approval.

If immediate publication risks compromising the implementation of the Decision (for example, impacting a procurement process), it can be deferred until a specific date (when it will be published). Deferral periods are kept to the shortest length strictly necessary.

#### Part 1 – Deferral

Publication of this Part 1 is to be deferred: **No**

The deferral is until: N/A

This is because: N/A

#### Part 2 – Confidential information

Only the facts or advice that would be exempt from disclosure under FoIA should be included in or attached to any separate Part 2 Form, together with the rationale for withholding the information at this time.

There is a separate and confidential Part 2 Form: **No**

### DECLARATIONS

**Drafting officer:** Claire O'Brien has drafted this Form in accordance with OPDC procedures, including for handling conflicts of interests, and confirm that: ☒

**Advice:** The Governance and Finance teams have commented on the proposal. ☒

## CONFIRMATIONS

**Section 106 funding:** N/A

**Review:** This Decision was circulated for **Senior Review** on 23/07/2025.

### **Head of Finance – Philip Hall**

Financial and legal implications have been appropriately considered in the preparation of this Form.

**Signature:** 

**Date:** 23/07/2025