

Folkestone & Hythe District Council Job Description

JOB DETAILS	
Job Title	Senior Planning Officer
Service Area / Team	Planning / Development Management
Reports to	Development Management Lead Specialist
Post Number	PG016
Grade & Annual Salary	£30,843 - £41,645 (Grade F-G) depending on skills and experience
Politically Restricted Post	No
DBS Requirement	N/A

JOB PURPOSE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To take responsibility for a wide variety of applications, including major projects and pre application enquiries and to be a vital team player proactively suggesting and implementing continuous improvements by using detailed planning law knowledge to help to provide an efficient and effective and user friendly Development Management service. To mentor junior members of staff and deputise for the Development Management Team Leader.

MAIN DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES	Frequency (daily/weekly/monthly/annually etc)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have in depth knowledge of Town and Country Planning Act, Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) Order 2015 and General Permitted Development Order 2015 & to assist junior planners in knowledge in this area 	Ongoing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To case manage all types of applications dealt with in planning including planning permission (particularly major planning applications), Listed building consent, Demolition notices, Lawful Development Certificates (proposed and existing), prior notifications etc including making a recommendation to approve or refuse to line manager or Development Management Planning Committee and drafting professional delegated and committee reports. Also to have delegated responsibility for signing off householder approvals and other minor applications. 	Daily

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare draft decision notices and ensure there are no errors (legal documents). 	Daily
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undertake site visits and provide advice in respect of pre-application enquiries in accordance with local and national planning policy and planning law. 	Daily
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manage own workload to ensure application decisions and pre-application enquiries are dealt with within statutory time limits with particular emphasis on ensuring major targets are met. 	Daily
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responsible for ensuring consultations required by law and by internal procedure are carried out. 	Daily
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep abreast of changes to planning law and case law as determined by courts and recent appeal decisions and ensure these changes are implemented. 	Ongoing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undertake duty officer enquiries – providing verbal and written advice to the public and agents, including advising whether planning permission is required in accordance with the General Permitted Development Order. 	2-3 shifts weekly
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify policy constraints to development both on proposals maps and any additional on site. 	Daily
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be confident in undertaking detailed and complex negotiations with applicants and agents to improve quality of development 	Regularly
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use a document management system to case manage including measuring distances and site areas and to upload site photos and new documents received during application process. Use Uniform to input decisions and prepare and draft reports. Use mapping system to identify constraints. 	Daily
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To provide advice and guidance verbally and in writing to a variety of stakeholders using appropriate language and communication methods depending on the audience including to Councillors, Parish Councils, Agents, Applicants, Internal Staff, Statutory Consultees inc Environment Agency, Natural England etc 	Daily
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To investigate enforcement matters arising from their case load and carry out any necessary enforcement work as a result 	As required
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To prepare professional appeal statements and act as the Council's lead witness in Informal Hearings and Public Inquiries 	As required
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Present complex cases to Planning Committee and be confident in responding to questions raised under pressure 	Monthly
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To actively suggest and take part in implementation of ongoing continuous improvements within the department particularly in respect of new Government procedures. 	As required

CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITIES

- Adhere to the council's safeguarding policies and procedures and undertake relevant training in order to help protect children and vulnerable adults within the district.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To comply with legislation, council policies and procedures including the Data Protection Act, Freedom of Information Act, Information Security Policy, the Code of Conduct for Officers and to participate in any Emergency Planning activities as required.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To actively demonstrate the values and behaviours of the council.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To ensure our customers are valued by taking into account their views and needs in all that we do.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To contribute to the development and achievement of relevant corporate and service objectives by suggesting ideas for service improvements.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To communicate openly and honestly with colleagues, members and customers.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To undergo any training necessary to be able to fulfil the requirements of the job.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To carry out other duties commensurate with the grade, skills, experience and qualifications of the post holder as directed and as may be required from time to time.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION	
Responsibility for Staff (direct reports)	n/a
Responsibility for Staff (indirect reports)	n/a
Financial / Budgetary Accountability <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Overall Accountability/control (£ value) Directly Managed (£ value) Income Generation (£ value) 	n/a n/a Jointly responsible for generating income from planning fees and pre-application enquiries. If time limit targets are not met fees have to be returned. Responsible for ensuring this does not happen. This is particularly important when dealing with major planning applications as the fees can be quite significant.
Responsibility for Physical Resources <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Vehicles / Equipment / Tools Information Systems Buildings / External Locations Maintenance Stocks / Supplies / Procurement 	Responsible for laptop and mobile phone. Responsible for accurately updating Uniform and Civica.
Responsibility for Service Contracts	Procuring consultants to undertake work as required. This occurs more

	regularly with larger schemes that are dealt with by Senior Planning Officers.
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The key decision making areas in the role
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Senior Planning Officers need to make informed recommendations and decisions (on smaller scale cases and pre application enquiries) based on planning law, case law and local and national planning policy taking into consideration all material planning considerations in order to put forward a recommendation within a report to senior officers or Planning Committee.

The numerical measures in the role	
Financial	Non-financial (As a department)
N/A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Numbers of planning applications – approx 1900 per year
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Section 106 agreements/unilateral agreements number approximately 15-20 per year
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Major applications approx 34 per year

NATURE OF CONTACTS	
Internal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Colleagues within planning inc other planning officers and support staff Colleagues within other departments Managers Corporate Management Team Members
External	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Residents/ General Public/ Applicants Parish Councils Other local authorities Highly professional agents who have expert knowledge in their field Other agents Planning professionals/ other professionals eg Surveyors, Architects Government agencies such as The Planning Inspectorate and Department for Communities & Local Government and Highways England Environment Agency, Natural England, Historic England, NHS England

WORKING ENVIRONMENT

- **Describe how and by whom the post is managed**

The post is line managed by the Development Management Team Leader with minimal day to day supervision but constant access to line management should queries arise and fortnightly 1 to 1's to discuss caseload.

- **Describe the level of initiative and/or independence expected**

On a day to day basis the post holder is expected to use their own initiative to manage their workload and priorities and to make recommendations/ decisions based upon existing policies, procedures and legislation. Only non householder and non minor cases are discussed with their line manager prior to recommendation/ decision. The post holder is expected to respond to pre-application enquiries with minimal assistance unless they very complicated cases.

Whilst many documents or tasks are created from existing templates or within existing procedures, the post holder is required to populate the template with complex conditions/ reasons for refusal that have to meet the tests of being 'reasonable' and 'required' and decisions taking into account legislation, case law and planning law. They are also required to undertake site visits and meetings independently and provide accurate advice. When acting as duty officer they have sole responsibility for researching and answering queries as they arise.

- **Location - Flexible**

The post is based at the Civic Centre, Folkestone but designated as a flexible worker to enable mobile working as appropriate according to the service area requirements. However the balance between working from home and at the Civic Centre must take into account the fact that they junior members of staff benefit from working with and being trained by Senior Planners in the office and that constant client contact is an important requirement of the role.

- **Describe the level of IT competence and skill required for the post holder**

The post holder will need to be competent at using standard Microsoft Office packages, as well as the ability to learn other IT software such as Uniform or other database system, Civica or other document management system as brought in by the Council/ department.

- **Describe the working conditions**

The post holder is required to undertake site visits and meetings regularly (at least once per week) all year round and in all weather conditions. Each visit/ meeting will vary in time, however, usually last for a morning or an afternoon (combined visits). Site visits have to be carried out in a timely manner to ensure that statutory consultation deadlines are met.

The post holder is also subjected to some emotional and verbal abuse from both customers and external stakeholders who can be very distressed by the potential implications of a planning decision (either as a nearby resident or as the applicant). This can be particularly the case when dealing with large major applications such as for a wind farm or a large housing development where the impacts on a neighbouring resident can be significant.

- **Describe any emotional demands on the post holder**

The post holder has to deal with situations where residents feel that they have been personally disadvantaged by decisions that have been or may be made. Such as the impact of a new road near their house or the impact of having planning permission refused for something that is important to potentially improve their way of life – eg an extension for a disabled person. Officers are often treated as ‘scapegoats’ when people cannot do what they want to or feel they need to do. For example, in a case where an applicant wanted to extend and the extension would have an unacceptable impact on a neighbouring property, so was refused, the applicant was distraught because she ‘could not move house’ because this was the house where her husband had died. In another example, an applicant committed suicide when his appeal to allow him to retain his unlawful dwelling was dismissed.

- **Describe any physical demands placed on the post holder**

N/A

Describe any mental demands placed on the post holder

Writing detailed professional delegated and committee reports and appeal statements (vary from 1 hour to one week depending on complexity of application) These require significant attention to detail as all are public documents, open to scrutiny and are required to be compliant with policy and law. These tasks are rarely undertaken without significant interruption from colleagues within an open plan environment, customers calling regarding their caseload and the need to multi task as often have several cases due for decision on the same day. Deadlines are strict as legislation requires applications to be dealt with within statutory deadlines. If these are regularly missed the authority is put into special measures and fees have to be returned if applications are not determined within a timely manner. This is particularly important when dealing with large major applications that incur large fees.

The nature of the work means that the post holder is open to regular complaints due to the complex legal nature of the planning system making it very difficult for the public to understand and feel engaged and also most decisions made have an impact or a perceived impact either on the applicant (if permission is refused) or on a neighbouring residents or other stakeholder. As such, there are often disgruntled parties who raise complaints.

Due to the nature of the work, situations arise semi-regularly where Officers are subjected to repeat requests that they cannot legally/ morally/ procedurally deal with and as a result have to repeatedly disappoint the customer. For example a customer that needs planning permission approved ASAP because a house sale is dependent upon it and the statutory consultation deadlines have not been met.

The post holder is expected to present large complex multi-issued applications to planning committee in a confident and knowledgeable manner and Informal Hearings and Public Inquiries in relation to appeals.

The post holder is also expected to discuss and take appropriate action in respect of enforcement matters (which can be quite controversial) with both complainants and potential offenders.

In addition, the post holder is expected to provide ‘off the cuff’ advice on the telephone whilst ensuring it is both accurate and in plain English (despite often including difficult legal principles).

There is a requirement to plan ahead and be organised to ensure that work load is

achieved within statutory time periods whilst prioritising applications that will need to be heard at planning committee and looking ahead to ensure these are completed ahead of the target date.

Some planning decisions can impact on requirements of other services within the Council for example planning policies generally seek to resist Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) accommodation, yet there is a demand for such accommodation that the housing team require. Also applications for tourist and other economic uses in the countryside are often finely balanced planning cases yet they may provide benefits to the local economy and the Council if approved.

Relying upon other Officers (business support) of the Council to ensure they meet their deadlines otherwise statutory deadlines are missed impacting on the individual Planning Officers performance.

Progression in Role

Starting – the required related knowledge / skills / qualifications and experience required at selection

Essential

- Educated to degree level
- A professionally recognised planning qualification or planning related qualification which allows eligibility for corporate membership of the RTPI
- Have chartered membership of the RTPI or licentiate membership and be eligible for corporate membership within next 6 months
- Public or private sector experience of dealing with planning and related applications.
- Experience in dealing with a wide range of planning and related applications, including major applications.
- Experience of appearing at public inquiries and/or informal hearings.
- Experience of operating MS Office systems such as Microsoft Word, Excel and Outlook.
- In depth knowledge of planning law and case law

• Induction – what initial induction / training is required to become proficient in this role?

During the first few weeks of employment the post holder will be expected to follow the basic corporate induction framework, attend the next available formal corporate induction session and complete any departmental induction requirements.

In addition, the post holder will need to read and digest the local plan and Core Strategy and be aware of our local planning policies, learn how to be confident and proficient in using Atlas to identify planning constraints and gain a knowledge of the District (required to carry out site visits). The post holder will also need to learn how to use Civica and Uniform as these will be used daily. Be introduced to key members of staff within linked departments such as Economic Development, Council Tax and Business Support. Be brought up to speed with what the planning policy team are currently working on/towards and what major projects are in the pipeline.

- **Proficient – how would this be displayed in the role?**

- The post holder will be able to confidently make appropriate and accurate decisions and write subsequent reports with no assistance and fully manage cases alone on minor/ householder approvals.
- The post holder will be able to confidently make appropriate and accurate recommendations on complex matters and write subsequent reports with only the need to involve managers irregularly for guidance.
- Be proficient in using all of the systems required to use daily including Civica, Atlas and Uniform
- Have in depth knowledge and accurately apply relevant case law, planning law, appeal decisions and local and national planning policy.
- Be able to simply yet accurately convey complex information to the public and amend this appropriately when advising professionals
- Confident in public speaking/ presentation skills
- Confidently advise junior members
- Regularly suggest and get involved in continuous improvement in the department

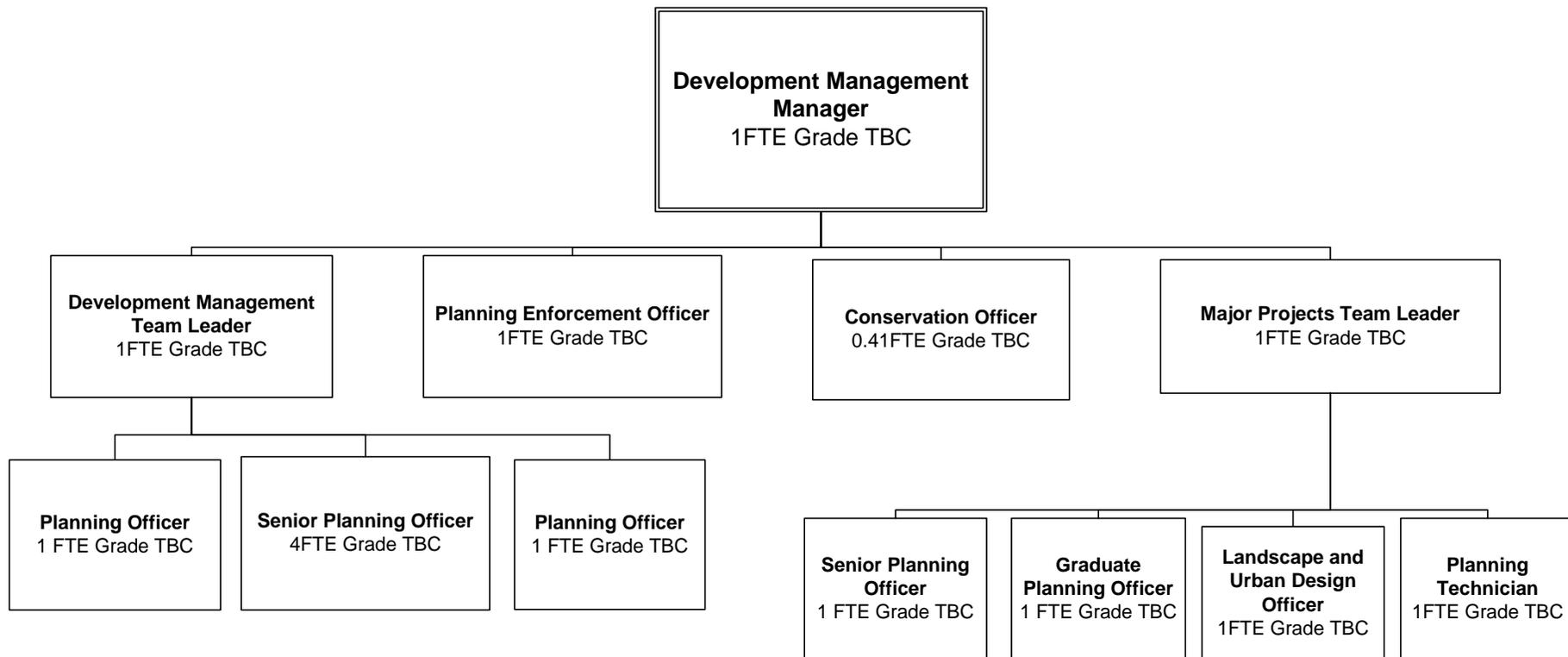
- **Advanced – what additional characteristics will be displayed?**

- Offer to attend more complex meetings to assist junior planners
- Act as a mentor to a junior member to help them to attain corporate membership of the RTPi
- Requesting to take on more responsibility/ take on tasks currently carried out by managers

Organisation Chart

Development Management

January 2017



Folkestone & Hythe District Council Person Specification

Post Title: Senior Planning Officer

Important Information for Applicants:

The criteria listed in this person specification are the requirements for the post. Where the method of assessment is stated to be the application form, your application needs to demonstrate clearly and concisely how you meet each of the criteria, even if other methods of assessment are also shown. **If you do not address these criteria fully, you may not be shortlisted. Please give specific examples wherever possible.**

Factors	Criteria	Means of Assessment		
		Application	Interview	Test
Qualifications	Essential <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Educated to degree level ▪ A professionally recognised planning qualification or planning related qualification which allows eligibility for corporate membership of the RTPI ▪ Have chartered membership of the RTPI or licentiate membership and be eligible for corporate membership within next 6 months 	 ✓ ✓ ✓		
	Desirable <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Qualification in urban design or other planning related field 	✓		
Experience and Knowledge	Essential <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Public or private sector experience of dealing with planning and related applications. ▪ Experience in dealing with a wide range of planning and related applications, including major applications. ▪ Experience of appearing at public inquiries and/or informal hearings. ▪ Experience of operating MS Office systems such as Microsoft Word, Excel and Outlook. ▪ In depth knowledge of planning law and case law 	 ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓	 ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓	 ✓ ✓

	• Full driving license	✓		
	Desirable			

JOB DESCRIPTION / PERSON SPECIFICATION SIGN-OFF		
Completed by	Claire Dethier (Development Management Team Leader)	Date: 13 th December 2016
Reviewed/Agreed by		Date :