FENLAND DISTRICT COUNCIL
PRESS RELEASE

April 28, 2020

Fenland District Council to hold virtual public meetings

Fenland District Council will begin holding virtual public meetings next week to help ensure the efficient running of the district throughout the coronavirus pandemic.

Local authorities are usually required to hold public meetings in person, but the Government has granted new powers to allow them to be held remotely using video conferencing.

Internal meetings between Fenland’s officers and councillors are already being held remotely in light of social distancing requirements, but now virtual public meetings that are compliant with national legislation will begin next week.

The Planning Committee will be the first council committee to meet virtually, using the video conferencing app Zoom – which will also allow members of the public to make representations where necessary.

The meeting will be at 1pm on Wednesday, May 6, and will also be cast to the viewing public via the Council’s YouTube channel (www.youtube.com/user/FenlandCouncil).

Anyone wishing to speak on a planning application must register by emailing memberservices@fenland.gov.uk by 12noon the day before the meeting. However, speakers are encouraged to register as soon as possible so the Council can test their ability to access the meeting in advance.

To keep the length of virtual Planning Committee meetings manageable, meetings will contain a reduced number of agenda items and the Council will be holding three additional virtual Planning Committee meetings in quick succession – at 1pm on May 7, 13 and 20. There will also be a virtual Cabinet meeting at 2pm on Tuesday, May 12.

Leader of Fenland District Council, Cllr Chris Boden, said: “The ongoing coronavirus crisis has led to a great deal of change for all of us in the way we live and work. As a Council we have been keen to resume public meetings to ensure we, as elected members, can continue to represent our residents as best we can.

“Embracing digital technology will help us to maintain local democracy and allow key decisions to be made while remaining open, transparent and accessible to the public.”

Cllr Dee Laws, the Council’s Portfolio Holder for Planning, added: “The Council has still been receiving a number of planning applications in recent weeks. In order to process these as effectively and efficiently as possible, we needed to ensure that the online meeting platform we used could be accessed by the public, show presentations and planning documents, enable councillors to declare interests and record votes and meets the national legal requirements for public meetings. It has been a challenge but we’re ready for the first in series of virtual Planning Committee meetings to begin next week.”
The Council plans to run further virtual meetings over the coming weeks. Further information on these will be published in due course online at www.fenland.gov.uk/localgov

ENDS

For more information contact Fenland District Council press office on 01354 622226