

# Huntingdonshire District Council Tackles the LDF publishing process and moving towards a Perfect Pendleton Score

Huntingdonshire Council has reduced the time it takes to produce an LDF document to days, saved money in the process and is on track for 21/21 Pendleton Points... all with Limehouse Software.

When Malcolm Sharp joined Huntingdonshire Council as head of planning services in 1998, he made a strategic decision that the authority's Planning Services would be among the leaders in the e-government revolution sweeping through the halls of local authorities up and down the country. This wasn't simply a case of looking good to Whitehall – there were solid public service and business drivers behind it. Sharp recognised that this would provide higher levels of public service and that streamlining internal processes and systems would make it easier to hit new government targets.

After reviewing existing processes and systems with the assistance of the internal ICT section, Planning Development Control emerged as the first area of focus. Huntingdonshire processes approximately 3000 planning applications per year – a time-consuming process with many different stakeholders that offered lots of opportunity for resource efficiencies. Additionally, Huntingdonshire is the fourth biggest shire district in England and public consultation – getting feedback from the local populations – often meant citizens had to travel considerable distances in order to view planning applications.

Having concentrated on Planning Development Control, the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act (passed in 2004) then challenged Huntingdonshire to further improve their processes, propelling them to the forefront of e-government initiatives. The Act replaced the old local plans with the Local Development Framework (LDF) – a much more complex range of documents that required each local authority to set out in detail planning policies and proposals for their communities. These plans had to be monitored and reviewed annually – and the timing was such that Huntingdonshire's Core Strategy would be among the first of the new style documents to be submitted. Sharp was adamant that the LDF would be e-enabled as per the development control process and turned to Neil Coleman, the special projects officer, and Michael Bingham, the planning development plans manager, to scope out requirements for a software solution that would meet their needs.



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## OBJECTIVE

To be a leader in meeting e-government initiatives and streamline internal process related to document publishing and consultation.

## CHALLENGE

Produce a fully e-enabled Local Development Framework (LDF) while reducing resource inefficiencies pertaining to Huntingdonshire's planning application and publishing processes.

## SOLUTION

Limehouse Software's web-based publishing solution featuring document collaboration facilities, one-click publishing to multiple channels, and the ability to easily produce professional documents in-house.

## RESULTS

- In-house production eliminated need for design agencies saving time and money.
- Ability to publish the same document in hard copy and online, at the touch of a button.
- Minimal IT and user training required to get up and running.
- Dramatic time savings in the publishing process.
- Significant contribution of points towards the Pendleton scheme.



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Sharp’s desire to e-enable the process coincided with Coleman’s need to upgrade existing systems. Where previously only three or four documents were required to produce a Local Development Plan the new LDF’s would require ten or twelve. Also, comments received via the consultation process – normally handwritten and sometimes illegible – were manually tagged, commented upon and reported, with all this information stored in a proprietary database: however, the government’s heightened aspirations for public involvement made this process too unwieldy to be effective. As Coleman says, “The escalating complexity of government planning guidelines rendered our existing systems obsolete.”

There were two main requirements for the new system. The first was to automate the production of documents according the template driven formulas of the LDF. The second was to streamline the process of securing public comment on the proposals. Coleman and Bingham looked at a variety of solutions and whilst they found some packages that could fulfil one of these requirements, only Limehouse Software’s solution could handle them both. As Coleman says, “By drawing together these previously separate processes, Limehouse hit a lot of buttons for us. The Publisher module allows us to create good quality documents that can be published on the web and used as part of an online consultation

process. The Consultation module, comments are made online and in a format that allows them to be acted upon and stored. It’s a seamless process.”

Huntingdonshire signed a contract with Limehouse Software in May 2005. Because the solutions are hosted externally this required minimal IT resource and facilitated a rapid implementation.

By automating document creation, the Limehouse Publisher module minimises production time while in-house production eliminates the need for design agencies from the process, saving further time and cost. As Coleman explains, “Limehouse provides a template-driven publishing process that is well suited to the structure of the LDF. You create a template and a style for your portfolio of documents and they are formatted automatically. Although Limehouse Publisher module was implemented very quickly, it worked from the word go: we imported the pre-existing LDF copy and the document was ready to publish by the end of the month”.

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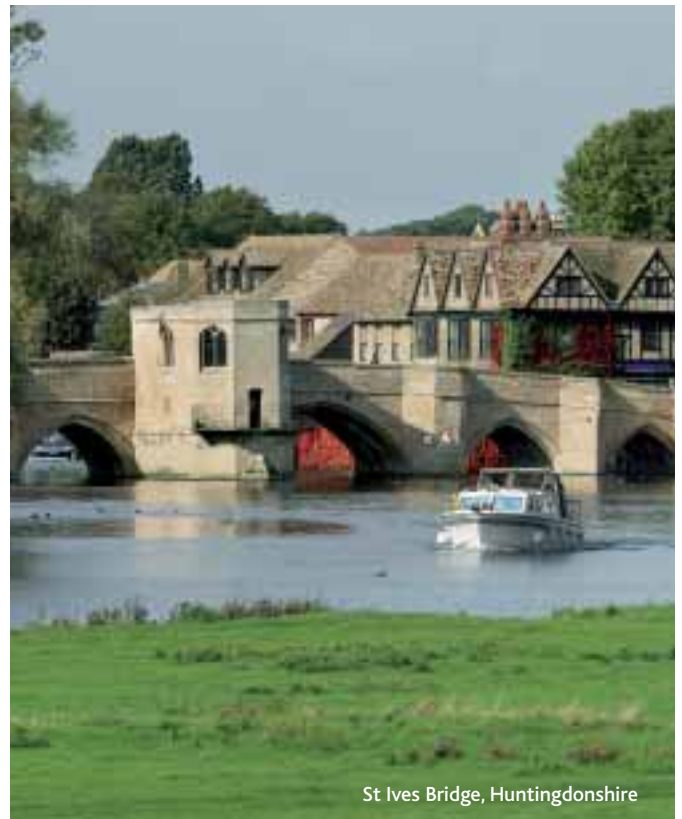
According to Coleman, ease-of-use is a further key benefit of Limehouse Publisher module. “Only about a day’s training was required for our staff to use the system – mostly done over the phone – although the tough deadlines meant we had the opportunity to put the training into practice almost immediately. The fact that we are using the same system for publishing and consultation also makes our life simpler.”

As Huntingdonshire was amongst the first authorities to produce an LDF document, they worked closely with Limehouse to make sure that the product was tightly coupled with their requirements. Coleman says, “The support we got from Limehouse Software has been fantastic. They were very responsive to requests for additional functionality, adding in the changes we asked for in a couple of weeks – not my usual experience of working with software companies, I have to say!”

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Sharp says, “The savings provided by the Limehouse solution were so self-evident that we haven’t actually taken the step of measuring them yet. We made huge savings on design costs by only having to produce the document once and by doing it in-house. The fact that it is web enabled also means we can publish in hard copy and on the Internet with a single document. We also couldn’t have delivered the customer benefits that we have achieved without the Limehouse solution.”

Of course, online publication of planning information is not merely a ‘nice-to-have’ anymore.



St Ives Bridge, Huntingdonshire

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Hinchingbrooke Country Park, Huntingdonshire

The government scores each authority's e-planning efforts using the Pendleton system which provides points against 21 different criteria that influence the level of grant support that it will be provided. Huntingdonshire currently has 20 points, only one off the maximum score and is among the top 10 in the country. The Council believes that Limehouse will directly and significantly contribute to sections 18, 19 and 21 of the Pendleton scheme and Sharp anticipates that, by helping them fulfil the requirements for the Interactive Proposals map, it will move us toward achieving that final point.

Sharp concludes, "Limehouse Software came along with exactly the right idea at exactly the right time. Through its software, we gained a solution that goes a long way toward helping meet our goal of Huntingdonshire being a leader in the implementation of e-government initiatives."

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#### About Limehouse Software

Limehouse Software is the only company to offer a single solution that enables document-centric collaboration for the development of policies and strategies and multi-channel publishing capabilities with an integrated end-to-end enterprise consultation system, as a hosted software solution. Through this unique offering, Limehouse customers have been able to unify information to produce and publish thousands of policy and strategy documents, multi-channel consultations, and information portals. Founded in 2002, Limehouse Software boasts over 250 customers, its software solutions are a key part of public and private sector communications across the UK and US. More information can be found on the web at [www.limehousesoftware.co.uk](http://www.limehousesoftware.co.uk)