

Appendix 3

Planning Guidance Note The Pre-Application Process

Policy Overview

Government policy within the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states that Local Planning Authorities (LPA) should approach decision-making in a positive way, they should look for solutions and not problems and that they should encourage applicants to engage with them through voluntary pre-application discussions. This obligation also extends to statutory planning consultees.

What are the Benefits of an Effective Pre-Application Process?

Paragraph 188 of the NPPF states that:-

“Early engagement has significant potential to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the planning application system for all parties. Good quality pre-application discussion enables better coordination between public and private resources and improved outcomes for the community.”

For the applicant / developer pre-application advice should enable the following:

1. To obtain as much information as possible about likely LPA requests such as technical requirements or Section 106 expectations and community issues. This is especially helpful in revealing potential costs and local concerns
2. To obtain an indication re whether a proposal is likely to be favourably received or not or whether there are extremely significant challenges to overcome. This is useful in aiding a developer to decide whether or not to continue to incur further costs on more supporting work and agent/ specialist fees. However the purpose of the Pre app process is not to (and cannot) pre judge an application
3. To establish a positive working relationship with the Local Planning Authority.
4. To help smaller builders/ developers avoid and resolve issues without the need for access to specialist professional expertise.

For the LPA it has the following benefits:

1. It identifies issues early on in the process which the developer can then address to enable the formal application process to be a more positive and a simpler / quicker process.
2. It can help avoid conflict further down the line with applications which really should not have been pursued or could have been presented in a more acceptable form.
3. It can provide the LPA with an indication of the scale and type of developer interest in a particular site.

Key Tasks

In order to ensure that the pre-application process works as effectively as possible, applicants and the Local Planning Authority should adopt the following principles:-

Key Tasks for the Local Planning Authority

1. The planning application process should adopt a strong customer focus, where the client can expect a quality service. It should be welcoming – with an ‘open for business’ approach.
2. The pre-application procedure should form an essential and integral part of the ‘end to end’ planning application ‘pipeline’ designed to save time and cut red tape.
3. Larger and more complex applications should have access to an Application Panel comprising consultees and specialist staff where the progress towards submitting an application is steered by the case officer. This could either be a bespoke session for a specific project or a monthly ‘speed dating’ (surgery type) session where developers are able to meet the panel, by appointment, to discuss their schemes.
4. LPA’s should encourage the use of Design Review Panels for sensitive schemes which can improve the output of planning applications, raise standards and add value.
5. Planning Officers should be clear about the positive approach to pre-application engagement and be fully aware of the protocol for achieving a customer focus, with terms of reference to explain the purpose of a pre-application advice and what to expect.
6. LPA’s should provide a simple ‘information service’ on-line to provide easily accessible help on procedures; and contact points for key consultees, local authority departments and Planning Aid.

Key Tasks for the Applicant

1. Applicants should make use of the pre-application process if they wish to expedite the decision making process, particularly for more complex planning applications.
2. Applicants should ensure that the maximum amount of information is submitted at the pre-application stage in order to ensure that the LPA can offer well informed advice.
3. Applicants should ensure that all advice given at the pre-application stage is reflected in the resultant planning application and all necessary information is submitted to ensure that it can be validated and determined without the need for further information.

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