

## **PRE-APPLICATION PLANNING ADVICE - A GUIDANCE NOTE TO APPLICANTS AND AGENTS ON THE TYPE AND SCOPE OF PRE-APPLICATION ADVICE OFFERED BY PLANNING SERVICES**

### Introduction

Advice to applicants and agents before they submit a planning application can be very beneficial to all parties. It can result in higher quality applications being submitted, quicker decisions and a better standard of development. It may also mean that proposals that would have little or no chance of success are not submitted, saving all parties time and resources. The Council is committed to providing pre-application advice and this document sets out guidance on the type and scope of advice offered.

### What advice is available and what does it cost?

At pre-application stage, Officers will offer free advice on matters such as the principle of the development, design, the impact on adjoining occupiers and the need for any legal agreement or contributions towards local infrastructure or community facilities. Applications are normally determined in accordance with policies in the *Local Plan* and other regional and national planning guidance. When Officers are approached for their views on a set of proposals, they will refer to these documents and provide guidance on interpreting the policies. Officers will normally indicate at this stage whether they would support any application. However, the Officer may need to visit the site to assess the proposals. We will also be able to give you informal free advice on whether planning permission is required for your proposals (see question three).

### Is the advice binding?

A full assessment of a proposal is made once a planning application is submitted and following a detailed site visit, appraisal of the issues and public consultation. Ultimately, the decision on whether to grant or refuse an application is made by the Local Planning Authority as a whole rather than by any individual. Any advice an Officer gives at pre-application stage is therefore without prejudice to any subsequent recommendation or decision by the Planning Authority.

### How do I get pre-application advice?

The Council offers various levels of pre-application advice according to the complexity of the proposal. Whilst we encourage pre-application enquiries, please note that we have to give priority to assessing current planning applications. The following types of advice for different proposals are provided:

### Is Planning Permission Required?

We have a "*Do I need Planning Permission?*" form for you to fill in if you want to know whether you need planning permission for your proposal. If you fill in this form we will give you an informal opinion as to whether permission is required. There is no charge for this service. If you need further advice or clarification, you may arrange an appointment, details are provided on how to contact us at the bottom of the page and there is also a *Residential Planning* section on the website. If you wish to formally establish whether planning permission is required for your proposals you may submit an application called a Certificate of Lawfulness for a proposed use, for which a fee is payable.

### Single dwellings, changes of use and extensions

You can either write into the Development Control department or come into the Council Offices to discuss your proposals. You do not need to make an appointment, but it is recommended if you would like to see someone straightaway or a specific Officer. If the Officer feels that the proposal raises issues that need further examination, they may advise you to provide us with additional details of your proposals so that we can properly consider the matter.

### Small housing development, barn conversions, new commercial development and large scale development

You are advised to write to us, providing details of your proposals. We will provide you with written advice or may suggest a meeting, depending on the complexity of issues raised and the size of the proposed development. A meeting could be either on-site or in the office.

### Validation of Applications

It is also advisable to contact an Officer who will be able to advise you on the information and correct fee that will need to be provided for a formal Planning Application. This could prevent any further requests for information and save any delay once an application is submitted.

### How long does it take?

We will aim to acknowledge your enquiry within 3 days, and provide an initial reply to your pre-application enquiry letter within 8 weeks, and 4 weeks for *Do I need Planning Permission*. However, we do have to give priority to assessing current planning applications and appeals. More complex proposals may take a little longer.

### How much information should I supply?

Whether meeting a Planning Officer or writing in to us, you should supply a map identifying the site, a plan to show the proposed building or other works, and sketches of your proposals. Photographs will also often help. If you write to us, please include a covering letter stating what your proposals involve, and whether you have already contacted a Planning Officer. Make sure you provide your contact details, including telephone number and email address if you have one. Highly speculative enquiries with inadequate information will not be considered.

### Is anyone else consulted?

As part of the formal application process we will consult bodies such as the Parish Council, County Highways and the Environment Agency. The Council will not normally undertake these consultations at pre-application stage. However, you may contact any of these bodies yourself if your proposals are likely to raise issues that may be of concern to them. During the formal application process, we will also consult your neighbours. You may find that any small changes you make at pre-application stage to accommodate their concerns, will help the progress of your application. We sometimes consult other colleagues within the Council such as the Environmental Health Team, the Conservation Officer (particularly for proposals involving Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas), and the Landscape Officer. You may also seek the views of these Officers at pre-application stage.

### Will other forms of approval be required?

You should consider whether your proposals require approval under the Building Regulations. Whilst we will liaise with our colleagues in Building Control for many types of proposal, you should seek advice yourself on whether approval under the Building Regulations is required, and whether your proposals would comply. It is your responsibility to ensure that any other legislation is complied with. This may include issues such as party walls and protected species.

### Can I contact my Councillors?

District Councillors are an important source of local knowledge and advice and may be contacted and lobbied. However, it is important to bear in mind that they operate under a formal code of conduct, which means that they will not be able to express an opinion on a proposal that they may need to consider formally at a later stage.

### Planning Enquiries

Telephone: (01902) 669404

Fax:(01902) 696403

Email: [dcapps@sstaffs.gov.uk](mailto:dcapps@sstaffs.gov.uk)

Website: [www.sstaffs.gov.uk](http://www.sstaffs.gov.uk)

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