

Improving the quality of development

Pre-Application Advice and Planning Performance Agreements

Development Management
August 2024

Summary

The purpose of this guidance is to set out how you as an applicant or an agent can engage with us, the Council, prior to the submission of a planning application. Together with our Negotiation Protocol this is designed to improve the overall customer experience, ensure timely decision making and improve the quality of applications that are submitted for planning permission by adding value. The submission of quality planning applications will result in higher quality developments in the Borough, that can be considered and determined in a timely manner.

The Government guidance is clear that pre-application discussions have significant potential to improve both the efficiency and effectiveness of the planning application system, improve the quality of planning applications, and increase their likelihood of success.

This guidance note explains how you can request pre-application advice, the likely cost and timescale, and what you can expect to receive in return. It also sets out our expectations for the amount and quality of information we require to provide high quality and useful advice.

We aim to provide a comprehensive pre-planning application service where we will guide applicants through the planning requirements prior to the submission of a planning application.

We also provide a joined-up service between the planning applications and building regulations processes so that, if you wish to use our Building Control Service, then we can guide you through the requirements of both.

Introduction

Local Planning Authorities should approach decisions on proposed development in a positive and creative way. They should . . . work proactively with applicants to secure developments that will improve the economic, social, and environmental conditions of the area. Decision-makers at every level should seek to approve applications for sustainable development where possible.

The Value of Pre-application Advice

[Government guidance](#) is clear about the importance of pre-application discussions. It states that “pre-application engagement by prospective applicants offers significant potential to improve both the efficiency and effectiveness of the planning application system and improve the quality of planning applications and their likely success”. Furthermore, although pre-application discussions can be used to establish whether the principle of development is likely to be supported, they also have an important role to play in delivering the Government’s objective of securing high quality design. The guidance goes on to state that “being able to inform and influence design at (the pre-application stage) is more efficient than trying to implement suggested revisions at a later stage”

How to Request Pre-application Advice

Requests for pre-application advice can be made online via Bolton Council’s [planning pages](#)

Whilst online applications and payments are encouraged, requests can be made in paper form via the One Stop Shop, in the interests of accessibility. Please provide a covering letter containing your name and contact details, together with the relevant plans.

What We Need From You

There is only a limited validation process for pre-application advice, except the requirement to complete the online form and provide the correct payment. However, the quality and certainty of the advice that we are able to provide is dependent on the quality and accuracy of the information you submit and we will base our advice on the information that you provide us with. We therefore suggest that you include the following:

- 1:1250 site location plan (all applications)
- Draft floor plans and elevation drawings of proposal (all applications)
- A covering letter / statement, setting out any analysis of or justification for the proposal that you have already carried out. If there are particular issues that would like the response to focus on, please make this clear in the covering letter (all applications)
- Photographs of potentially affected neighbouring dwellings showing window locations, where these are not publicly visible (house extensions)
- As much detail on the proposed use as possible (changes of use)

How Much Will It Cost?

Application Type	Fee, including VAT
House extensions alterations, extensions, outbuildings and other works within the domestic curtilage	£84 - written response, review of draft plans £200 - if a site visit or site meeting is required
Minor Development 1 to 9 dwellings, or less than 1,000 square metres floorspace	£515 - written response, review of draft plans £589 - if an online or office-based meeting is required £664 - if a site meeting or visit is required
Major Development 10 to 24 dwellings, or between 1,000 and 2,499 square metres floorspace	£1190 - written response, review of draft plans £1340 - if an online or office-based meeting is required £1414 - if a site meeting or visit is required £180 – Bespoke Scoping Meeting We also offer a more bespoke service via a Planning Performance Agreement. A Scoping Meeting can be arranged for £180, at which the method of providing pre-application advice can be agreed, together with the cost of providing this
Large Major Development More than 25 dwellings or more than 2,500 square metres floorspace	A bespoke service is recommended, via a Planning Performance Agreement. A Scoping Meeting can be arranged for £180, at which the method of providing pre-application advice can be agreed, together with the cost of providing this
Signs and Advertisements	£50 - premises signs £174 - digital screen and billboards
Certificates of Lawfulness	£64 - house extension £114 - other development
Discharge of Condition	£60 - one condition If advice on the discharge of more than one condition is required, a bespoke service is recommended, via a Planning Performance Agreement. A Scoping Meeting can be arranged for £180, at which the method of providing pre-application advice can be agreed, together with the cost of providing this

What You Will Receive

The scale and nature of development proposals can vary significantly and there is no one size fits all approach to pre-application advice, however we will aim to provide you with a written response covering:

- The planning history of the site and adjoining sites, together some analysis of this, where relevant
- Details of any statutory designations applying to the site, such as conservation areas, listed buildings, protected trees and sites of special scientific interest.
- The text of relevant planning policies applying to the site, together with other planning and technical requirements such as space standards or relevant sections of any Supplementary Planning Documents.
- Advice on the plans and supporting information necessary to provide a valid planning application
- Advice on the procedure, consultation arrangements and estimated timescale for processing the application
- Informal and without prejudice advice on whether or not the submitted proposal is likely to satisfy the Council's planning policies, after taking any material considerations into account
- If the proposal cannot be supported in its current form, some advice will be provided as to how it could be made acceptable, where possible
- Advice on any likely planning obligation (S106) and non-standard conditions, together with advice on minimising conditions

Consultees

Advice from technical consultees within Bolton Council (such as Highways and Pollution Control) will be sought if appropriate and is included in the fee. Advice from external statutory consultees will not ordinarily be sought for minor proposals – unless there are circumstances where the technical issue to be covered would be likely to directly impact on the likely recommendation. For major applications, pre-app consultees will be agreed via the PPA.

Many of the external bodies either operate their own advisory services or have information available on their website which can be readily accessed. Links to the websites of statutory and other external consultees are provided at the end of this document – applicants engaging with those organisations at pre-application stage will expedite the formal planning permission process.

Additional Guidance Relevant to Specific Application Types

House Extensions

The basic level of advice on proposals for house extensions should be considered as a “review of draft plans” and will typically not involve an Officer visiting the site, though use will be made of publicly available information such as Google Earth. For this reason, photographs should be provided of affected neighbouring properties, in cases where the potentially affected windows are not easily visible. If this is not possible, the advice that we are able to give will reflect this absence of information.

Discharge of Condition Applications

The Government expects such applications to be determined within 8 weeks and for the fee to be refunded after 12 weeks, irrespective of whether an extension of time has been agreed. With this in mind, together with the relatively low fee for these applications, such applications will be determined on their merits as submitted with no negotiation or amendments permitted. If applicants and their agents are concerned about the likely outcome of their discharge of condition applications, they should consider the benefits of seeking pre-application advice (or a [Planning Performance Agreement](#), if the discharge of more than one condition is to be sought).

Major Applications

We believe that the appropriate mechanism for ensuring the approvability of an application for major development is a [Planning Performance Agreement](#) – with the agreement being proportionate to the scale and complexity of the proposal. That said, a set fee is listed in the charging schedule above for major developments up to 25 dwellings or 2,500 square metres. Beyond this, we believe that the project management approach of a Planning Performance Agreement is the appropriate method of frontloading negotiations and advice.

For all major development proposals, we offer the opportunity of a “scoping meeting” for a flat fee of £180, at which the contents, timescales and deliverables of a Planning Performance Agreement can be discussed. However, this initial meeting will be purely to discuss the appropriate route for reviewing a development and will not involve any assessment at that stage.

Additional guidance on our approach to Planning Performance Agreements is being developed.

Major applications that are submitted without due regard for their approvability and that raise issues that could reasonably have been addressed prior to submission are likely to be refused.

Minor and Other Developments

For Minor and other application types (i.e. those where the statutory determination period is 8 weeks, including listed building consent, advertisement consent and prior approvals), extensions of time are only likely to be appropriate when the applicant and their agent have a clear strategy for what needs to happen to achieve a positive outcome and there is agreement on the timescale within which this can be achieved. If, in the view of the case officer, the applicant and their agent do not have a clear strategy for addressing the issues preventing approval or if the timescale is

not clear, the likely outcome is that the application will be determined on its planning merits as submitted.

Whilst entirely optional, if an applicant and their agent consider their proposal to be “borderline” in terms of its approvability, they may wish to consider providing a short justification for their proposal, based on the wording of the policies listed above. As planning legislation requires applications to be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise, justifications that refer to other similar forms of development are unlikely to be given the same amount of weight as justifications that engage with the wording of the relevant policies.

All Developments

The table below summarises our advice on the appropriate option for most application types:

Type	Description	Notes
Large Major Development	25 dwellings or more, or more than 2,500 square meters of floorspace, including changes of use	A Planning Performance Agreement is recommended.
Major Development	10 Dwellings or more, or more than 1,000 square metres of floorspace, including changes of use	A Planning Performance Agreement is recommended, though a set fee has also been provided in the charging schedule for development up to 25 residential units or 2,500 square metres
Minor Development	Fewer than 10 dwelling or below 1,000 square metres of floor space, including changes of use	Recommend pre-application advice is sought to consider the principle of the development, the issues raised by the proposal and the requirements for submission.
House Extensions	Development within the curtilage of a dwellinghouse	Recommend pre-application advice is sought to consider the principle of the development, the issues raised by the proposal and the requirements for submission.
Discharge of Conditions	Applications related to a condition imposed on a previous consent	One Condition: Recommend pre-application advice is sought to establish

		<p>the requirements for submission.</p> <p>More than one condition:</p> <p>A Planning Performance Agreement is recommended.</p>
Non-material Amendment / Minor Material Amendment	Applications to vary an existing consent	Recommend pre-application advice is sought to establish the appropriate method of agreeing the amendment, or whether a new application will be needed.
Prior Approvals / Larger Home Extensions	Prior Approvals required under Permitted Development rights	<p>As these are generally time-limited applications, after which consent is granted by default, such applications will be determined on their planning merits as submitted.</p> <p>If greater certainty is required prior to submission, pre-application advice should be sought.</p>
Certificates of Lawful Development	Applications to confirm whether an existing or proposed use or development is lawful in planning terms	Recommend pre-application advice is sought to establish the evidence needed to support the application.
Advertisement Consent	Applications for consent to display a sign or advertisement	Recommend pre-application advice is sought to establish the impact on the amenity of the area and on highway safety.
Listed Building Consent / Development within Conservation Areas	Applications for works to a Listed Building or for development within a Conservation Area	<p>Recommend that an applicant seeks appropriate specialist advice from a consultant with heritage experience in the first instance.</p> <p>Pre-application advice should then be sought, after the</p>

		consultant's advice has been considered.
Telecommunications Development	Application to erect telecommunications equipment, typically mobile phone masts and antennae	Recommend pre-application advice is sought. This will be charged at the rate of Minor Development.

Useful Links

- Bolton Council's Website, Planning Section - [Planning – Bolton Council](#)
- Places for Everyone (Greater Manchester Development Plan) - [Places For Everyone - Greater Manchester Combined Authority \(greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk\)](#)
- Bolton Council's Core Strategy - [Core strategy – Bolton Council](#)
- Bolton Council's Supplementary Planning Documents - [Supplementary planning documents – Bolton Council](#)
- National Planning Policy Framework - [National Planning Policy Framework - Guidance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)
- National Planning Practice Guidance - [Planning practice guidance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)
- The Planning Portal - [Planning Portal](#)

Statutory and Other Consultees

Some of our external consultees provide pre-application advice themselves or have useful information online.

[Active Travel England](#)

[Campaign For Real Ale](#)

[Canal & River Trust](#)

[Coal Authority](#)

[Environment Agency](#)

[Forestry Commission](#)

[Gardens Trust](#)

[Greater Manchester Police, Design For Security](#)

[Highways Agency](#)

[Historic England](#)

[Lancashire Wildlife Trust](#)

[National Grid](#)

[Natural England](#)

[Network Rail, Asset Protection & Optimisation](#)

[Sport England](#)

[Transport for Greater Manchester](#)

[United Utilities](#)

END
