

**GUIDANCE ON PRE – APPLICATION DISCUSSIONS FOR STRATEGIC PROJECTS AND MAJOR HOUSING, COMMERCIAL, INDUSTRIAL AND PUBLIC SECTOR PROPOSALS**

**1. INTRODUCTION**

Planning Service wants to encourage applicants to engage with it in pre-application discussions (PADs) on the more significant development proposals to help improve both the quality of applications and the subsequent development. A mutual commitment to PADs will speed up the process of determining planning applications.

**2. AIMS**

Our aim is to identify obvious problems at an early stage in the process and encourage high quality applications which will maximise the prospects of getting through the statutory process quickly.

**3. PURPOSE**

The purpose of this leaflet is to provide you with information on what you need to do as an applicant and what we, for our part, commit to as part of PADs.

The primary purpose of the PAD is to allow Planning Service to provide general advice and identify key issues that need to be considered as part of the application submission.

An indicative programme with expected timescales for the processing of the planning application will also be provided. Key dates such as the submission of the application with the required documentation and key milestones during its processing will be agreed.

**4. BENEFITS**

The benefits of a PAD have been recognised by a number of developers in the processing of recent applications. Positive comments have included the following:

**“During the PAD process we found Planning Service and consultees to be very helpful in terms of guidance and clarity, ensuring we the applicants were in a position to submit a high quality comprehensive planning application which was progressed quickly.”**

More generally, there are a number of key benefits from transparent PADs between a potential applicant and Planning Service.

They help to:

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- identify potential policy constraints and other material issues which need to be addressed by the developer at an early stage;
- facilitate discussion with key consultees at an early stage, especially where an environmental statement is likely to be required;
- identify related technical issues and allow for discussion;
- ensure that you as the applicant engage with the appropriate stakeholders at an early stage in the planning process;
- improve the content and quality of planning applications;
- enhance the quality of a development scheme;
- speed up the statutory decision-making process; and
- ensure active case management.

**5. AVAILABILITY**

Pre-application discussions are available for:

- strategically important applications including those with significant economic implications;
- major commercial, industrial and other public sector proposals;

- major Quality Initiative housing schemes, including all Housing Association applications;
- major infrastructure projects (for example in relation to waste disposal, waste water treatment and energy).

In general terms, strategically important applications must have significant economic and/or social benefits for the region, or a significant part of the region. However, they may relate to some smaller scale proposals, for example in the health and education sectors, which fall within the scope of the wider Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland infrastructure programme.

## **6. REQUESTS**

To request a PAD you should contact **the relevant Divisional Planning Manager**. In order to help us help you, you must include as a minimum requirement sufficient information to explain the proposal, including existing plans or photographs and proposed sketch layouts. This information will help us decide whether a proposal is of sufficient scale or complexity to benefit from a PAD and allow for a more focused consideration of the issues. We would also encourage you to visit our website which provides details of planning policies and the application process before you contact us.

If we think a PAD would be helpful we will as necessary invite our key consultees (for example Roads Service and EHS) to join us for the discussions. It is important that you provide as much relevant information about your proposal as possible, particularly when consultees will be involved. The discussions will focus on key planning policies, relevant constraints and other material issues, including the need for an environmental assessment (ES), transport assessment (TA) and retail impact assessment (RIA).

All the relevant information received, including our written response, will be placed on a file and given a reference number. This number will be used in all future correspondence prior to the formal submission of an application. It will be linked with the formal application when it is received to assist with its processing and will be available for inspection by the public on request.

**It is important to understand that if the advice given is not followed the result will almost certainly be that your application will not be progressed quickly or it will be refused.**

## **7. ADVANTAGES**

**The PAD process can only be effective if both you as the applicant and we in the Planning Service comply with the basic ground rules.**

For our part we undertake to provide advice on:

- the relevant development plan and the Regional Development Strategy (RDS), where appropriate;
- other relevant policies and guidance;
- the range and details of the information which will be required with an application when it is submitted;
- other approvals which may be required, for example demolition or listed building consent.

We will also provide:

- written confirmation of the issues agreed as part of the PAD;
- confirmation of the line manager and case officer who will be handling your application;

- an indicative timescale for determining your application.

For your part we will look to you to submit, on a timely basis, all the information we mutually agreed at the PAD, for example:

- properly completed application forms;
- accurate plans and drawings;
- environmental statement;
- transport assessment;
- retail impact assessment;
- concept statements.

We will also look to you to ensure, with advice from your advisors, that the proposed development complies with the policy framework that we have outlined for you; that significant environmental effects have been properly considered and mitigating measures identified; and that the concerns of neighbours and the wider community have been fully considered, discussed and addressed beforehand. This latter consideration should include discussion, as appropriate, with the local Council and elected representatives, relevant third party interest groups, neighbouring land and/or property owners and any tenants on the site that is proposed for development.

## **8. TIMETABLE**

Once you have requested a PAD and submitted all the necessary information, the following timetable of events can normally be expected:

- We will decide within 15 working days, of receiving your request whether a PAD is appropriate. As already noted, this timescale is dependent on all the necessary information being available when the request for a PAD is made.

- If we agree to a PAD it will take place no later than 30 working days after your request, although in most cases sooner.
- Once a PAD is concluded we will issue a written response to you within 15 working days confirming the agreed position.
- If we decide that a PAD would not be helpful we will write to you explaining why within 15 working days of your request. If appropriate, we will also identify any information which might be helpful to you in further pursuing your application.

## **9. AND FINALLY**

A PAD is a separate and distinct advisory process. It does not bind us in making our formal decision at the regulatory stage, following public consultation with all interested parties and formal consultation with the local Council. It is important to stress therefore that all our PAD advice is given without prejudice to the formal consideration of your planning application. This is because other information may arise from consultations, third party representations or policy changes during the regulatory determination process. However, it is expected that any variations from the general advice offered at the PAD would be unusual.

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