



**Article for Perspective the journal of the RSUA
July/Aug 2005 issue**

Your next Planning Application Get it Right or Get it Back!

Those who have submitted planning applications to the Belfast Planning Office in recent weeks may be aware of the more stringent requirements to ensure that the application goes straight into the system. I am sure there are a few who regard this as an administrative nightmare but it is no different from making an application for a driving licence or a passport. There are a few main areas which seem to cause regular problems and I would like to take the opportunity to highlight these and hopefully get our customers successfully off the starting blocks.

The planning application form contains a checklist of the information which needs to be included. Despite this the most common reasons for returning an application are :-

1. Incorrect fee
2. Incomplete form
3. Insufficient plans

The fee - always has the potential to prove a difficulty where it has to be measured but straightforward details such as filling in the cheque correctly can prevent delays.. Many types of application or consent require a standard fee, others require measurement. Where the site has to be measured, such as for an Outline application, the site outlined in red must include the land needed for access, visibility splays and septic tank (if required). Fees are charged in complete segments of £200 per 0.1 hectares and if the site measurement crosses the threshold at all, then the higher fee must be charged - local staff don't make the rules, it is set out in legislation! When measuring the floor area of a building, it is the external dimensions which will be checked.

Take the time to check out the new set of Fees Regulation in place from the 18th May. Notes for applicants are available on the Planning Service website -

www.planningni.gov.uk under "Recent Publications" .

Remember, if you are claiming an exemption on the basis that the work is required to assist a disabled person, then a letter of support will be needed from the Occupational Therapist

The forms - firstly make sure you have the correct form. There are different forms for householder applications and other Consents such as for Listed Buildings or

Advertisements. There is advice and checklists with the forms so make sure that all the details requested are entered. In particular, ensure that:-

- The required number of copies submitted.
- All the relevant sections of the form have been completed as necessary. It may not be necessary to complete some of the sections but if a question or section on the form does not apply to the application, please say so rather than leaving it blank as this can cause confusion and delay, for example if there are no access alterations then put "not applicable" or similar. Take advice or refer to Guidance Notes as necessary.
- You take care to describe the proposal fully and accurately. If the description used does not match the plans submitted then a delay will occur while the anomaly is investigated.
- You attach any other relevant information which will add detail to the assessment which has to be made. For housing applications, a concept plan will be needed.

The plans

A common problem is not submitting the right number of plans. It may seem a unnecessary burden on the applicant but all the copies *are* used as there are always a number of people who must be consulted about every application.

Other common issues which can arise are:-

- All applications and consents require site location maps to identify the site. (make sure you have outlined it in red ink)
- Differences between plans. Do the elevations match the layout? It is not surprising if that final change in the floor plan is not reflected in the elevations when things are rushed but it is important and will cause a delay if the plans do not correspond with each other.
- Show clearly the distinction between existing and proposed work. If the proposal means that a floor plan or elevation is changing then we should have details of both the existing and proposed.

We do recognise that making a planning application can be a complicated process and we do provide notes and guidance. However, making the decision can be just as difficult, and if you have information which will add to the process of making that decision, include it with the application. The more information that is available when the application is submitted the more likely that the application will progress smoothly through the system without delay.

Neil Dunlop
Project Manager
Modernising Planning Unit
02/08/05