



Development Management

REVIEW OF PRE- APPLICATION SERVICE AND FAST-TRACK SERVICE

January 2023



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Pre-application Service

Existing Service

The current service was introduced on 30 October 2022. This was a revised service that increased the fees and included optional extras for the first time. Below is a table that summarises the current fee structure:

TYPE OF PROPOSAL	STANDARD SERVICE	FEE (inclusive of VAT)	Optional Extras	Fee (inclusive of VAT)
Householder enquiries	Per written response	£100		
1-3 new dwellings (including replacement)	Per written response	£300		
4-9 dwellings	Per written response	£500	1 meeting	£500
10 - 25 dwellings	Per meeting + notes	£1,500	Written advice on 1 set of amended plans Planning Officer site visit	£250 £500
26 - 49 dwellings	Per meeting + notes	£2,500	Written advice on 1 set of amended plans Planning Officer Site visit Design Review Panel	£350 £500 Case by case
50+ dwellings	Site visit + 1 meeting + notes	£3,500	Written advice on 1 set of amended plans 1 follow up meeting + notes Design Review Panel (recommended)	£500 £1,000 Case by case
100+ dwellings	Site visit + 1 meeting + notes	£5,000	Written advice on 1 set of amended plans 1 follow up meeting + notes Design Review Panel (recommended) Planning Performance Agreement (advisable)	£500 £1,000 Case by case Case by case



Non-residential up to 999 m²	1 written response	£500		
Non-residential 1,000 m² - 1,999 m²	1 meeting + notes	£1,500	Written advice on 1 set of amended plans	£250
Non-residential 2,000 m² - 4,999 m²	Site visit + 1 meeting + notes	£3,000	Planning Officer site visit	£500
Non-residential 5,000 m² - 9,999 m²	Site visit + 1 meeting + notes	£4,000	Written advice on 1 set of amended plans	£350
Non-residential 10,000 m²+	Site visit + 1 meeting + notes	£5,000	Written advice on 1 set of amended plans	£500
			1 follow up meeting + notes Design Review Panel	£1,000 Case by case
			1 follow up meeting + notes Design Review Panel (recommended)	£1,000 Case by case
			Planning Performance Agreement (advisable)	Case by case

This existing service is operating well. The income for 2021-22 was £31,817 (against an annual profiled budget of £20,200 and excluding any additional PPA monies) and from 1 April 2022 to 31 December 2022 the income generation has been £50,963 (against an annual profiled budget of £20,200 and excluding any additional PPA monies).



Surrey Benchmarking

Key findings:

- The level of service offered by each authority varies significantly, including the fee thresholds and the type and extent of service offered.
- Above a certain size of development several authorities, including Elmbridge, Waverley and Woking, only offer bespoke fees. Waverley's threshold for bespoke fees is the lowest at only 10+ dwellings or 250+ m².
- Guildford and Waverley categorise their services by using bronze, silver, gold and platinum options. Like Surrey Heath, some authorities offer additional extras, for example, a follow up meeting.
- Some authorities offer Listed Building/CA advice or concept meetings.
- All authorities split the level of service between written advice and meetings. Generally, written advice only is offered for householders.
- Not all authorities offer site visits as part of their service.
- Mole Valley and Waverley's fee structure is undefined.
- With the exception of Epsom and Ewell, Planning Performance Agreements (PPAs) are always bespoke fees.

Given these findings it is difficult to make a direct comparison between authorities. However, whilst Surrey Heath isn't the cheapest service, our householder service is below the average fee. Additionally, our maximum charge for 100+ dwellings is generous and uncapped compared to some authorities, whose fee range or cap is much lower before bespoke fees apply.

The following table summarises how our service compares with others (all stated fees are inclusive of VAT):



LPA	Householder Fee	Fee range	Maximum Stated Fee	Service Offered
Elmbridge	£150	Up to 50 dwellings or 4,999 m ² (bespoke PPA fee above this).	£10,000	Written advice. Meetings not offered at all fee levels. Site visits at all fee levels.
Epsom & Ewell	£155 and £260	Up to 99 dwellings or 9,999 m ² PPA fees: 100-150 dwellings	£7,725 (+ optional extras) £18,025 (4 meetings)	Written advice. Meetings not offered at all fee levels. Cheapest householder is oral advice only. Concept meetings offered for minors/others.
Guildford	£80 - 180	Up to 50+ dwellings or 2,500 m ² (Gold service only, Platinum service is bespoke).	£5,000 (+ optional extras)	Written advice. Meetings only offered for Gold and Platinum services.
Mole Valley	£139.20 suspended service	No details.	No details.	No details.
Reigate & Banstead	£75 - 95	50+ dwellings or over 10,000 m ²	£1,500	Written advice. Meetings not offered at all fee levels.
Runnymede	£100	Up to 200 dwellings or 10,000 m ² (bespoke fees above this)	£6,000	Written advice. Meetings not offered at all fee levels. Site visit, as standard, for 20+ dwellings.
Spelthorne	£95	Up to 50+ dwellings or 2,000+ m ²	£3,650	Written advice. Meetings not offered at all fee levels.
Surrey Heath	£100	Up to 100+ dwellings or 10,000 m ²	£5,000 (+ optional extras)	Written advice. Meetings and site visits not offered at all fee levels.



Tandridge	£127 and £273	Up to 10+ dwellings or over 1,000 m ²	£3,500	Written advice. Meetings and site visits not offered at all fee levels. Site visits only if required.
Waverley	£100 - 247	Up to 9 dwellings or 250 m ² (above this all fees are bespoke)	Unknown (£1,500 up to stated limit)	
Woking	£125	Up to 19 dwellings or 1,999 m ² (above this all fees are bespoke)	Unknown (£2,000 up to stated limit)	Written advice. Meetings not offered at all fee levels.
<i>Rounded Average</i>	<i>£138</i>	<i>N/A</i>	<i>N/A</i>	<i>N/A</i>

Recommended Changes and Timescale

On the basis of the above findings, it is recommended that the following changes are made to the current pre-application service:

1. Increase the householder fee
2. Review all the fee categories that are currently too broad in scope and with the highest fee category uncapped
3. Include a high level concept meeting advice category, plus a specific heritage asset category.
4. Consider offering specialist tree and drainage advice, for a premium.
5. Encourage greater use of PPAs and bespoke fees.

The table below provides the draft fee charges. It is recommended that these charges apply from April 2023.



Type	Basic Fees	Level of response	Extra Optional Fees	Bespoke Fees	Rationale
Householder	£150	Written only	N/A	N/A	Based off Surrey wide fees
Heritage (CA/LBC)	£200	Written only	N/A	N/A	The higher fee reflects the necessity for specialist advice
Concept Advice for Majors (Policy Matters)	£350	Meeting	N/A	N/A	DM Team Leader fee, only on request
	£500	Meeting	N/A	N/A	Development Manager/Planning Policy Manager fee, only on request
	£750	Meeting	N/A	N/A	Head of Planning fee, only on request
	£1,000	Meeting	N/A	N/A	Director/CEO fee, only on request
1 Dwelling/ replacement	£500	Written only	N/A	N/A	
2 - 4 Dwellings	£1,000	Written only	Meeting £500 Follow up Written response £500 Specialist Drainage Advice £1,000 Specialist Tree Advice £1,000 Specialist Environmental Health Advice £65 per hour	N/A	
5- 9 Dwellings	£1,500	Written only	Meeting £500 Follow up Written response £750 Specialist Drainage Advice £1,000 Specialist Tree Advice £1,000 Specialist Environmental Health Advice £65 per hour	N/A	



10 - 20 Dwellings	£2,500	1 Meeting and Minutes	Site Visit £500 Follow up Meeting £1,250 Specialist Tree Advice £1,000 Specialist Environmental Health Advice £65 per hour	N/A	Specialist drainage advice not offered as for 10+ dwellings the Lead Local Flood Authority ought to be consulted.
21 - 40 Dwellings	£3,500	1 Meeting and Minutes	Site Visit £500 Follow up Meeting £1,750 Specialist Environmental Health Advice £65 per hour	Design Review and PPA on request. Other specialist advice on request.	
41 - 60 Dwellings	£5,000	1 Meeting and Minutes	Site Visit £750 Follow up Meeting £2,500 Specialist Environmental Health Advice £65 per hour	Design Review and PPA advisable. Other specialist advice on request.	
61 - 80 Dwellings	£7,000	1 Meeting, Site Visit and Minutes	Follow up Meeting £3,500 Specialist Environmental Health Advice £65 per hour	Design Review and PPA expected. Other specialist advice on request.	Fees are higher as a PPA is expected following the initial meeting.
81 - 99 Dwellings	£8,000	1 Meeting, Site Visit and Minutes	Follow up Meeting £4,000 Specialist Environmental Health Advice £65 per hour	Design Review and PPA expected. Other specialist advice on request.	Fees are higher as a PPA is expected instead following the initial meeting.
100+ Dwellings	£10,000	1 Meeting, Site Visit and Minutes	Follow up Meeting £5,000 Specialist Environmental Health Advice £65 per hour	Design Review and PPA expected. Other specialist advice on request.	Fees are higher as a PPA is expected instead following the initial meeting.



0- 999 sq m Commercial	£1,000	Written only	Follow up Written response £500 Specialist Environmental Health Advice £65 per hour	N/A	
1,000 – 4,999 sq m Commercial	£3,000	1 Meeting and Minutes	Site Visit £500 Follow up Meeting £1,500 Specialist Environmental Health Advice £65 per hour	N/A	
5,000 – 9,999 sq m	£5,000	1 Meeting and Minutes	Site Visit £750 Follow up Meeting £2,500 Specialist Environmental Health Advice £65 per hour	Design Review and PPA advisable. Other specialist advice on request.	Fees are higher as a PPA is expected instead following the initial meeting.
10,000 + Commercial	£8,000	1 Meeting, Site Visit and Minutes	Follow up Meeting £4,000 Specialist Environmental Health Advice £65 per hour	Design Review and PPA expected. Other specialist advice on request.	Fees are higher as a PPA is expected instead following the initial meeting.



The guidance/explanatory notes to support this revised pre-application charging schedule would need to be written, but these notes would include caveats. Without exception ALL pre-application responses currently include the following caveat and this caveat would remain with the revised service:

The advice given represents an Officer's informal opinion based on the information you have supplied and is not intended to bind the Local Planning Authority's decision making powers on any formally submitted application. All submitted applications will be the subject of publicity and consultation in accordance with statutory requirements and the Council's adopted procedures. These, and any other matters which may subsequently come to light, may result in additional issues being raised that are pertinent to the determination of the application. It should also be noted that subsequent alterations to local and national planning policies may affect the advice given.

Member engagement is also central to the existing service and the revised service would not change this. This includes the following involvement:

- Fortnightly list of pre-application cases sent to all councillors. Any councillor can contact the case officer to obtain an overview of any pre-application submission;
- Ward Member meetings set up by the case officer to introduce any major development pre-application proposal received;
- Invites to Ward Members and the Chair and Vice Chair of the Planning Applications Committee to attend Design Review Panels;
- Summary of pre-application responses provided on request and pre-application responses provided with a subsequent live planning application.



Fast-Track Service

Concept and Drivers

Discretionary fast-track services beyond the statutory service, has been a concept in planning for many years. In 2016 the government released a consultation on competition pilots and fast-track services, summarised below:

- Councils will compete to process planning applications and be able to offer fast track application services, like those available for getting a passport, in a shake-up of the planning process
- Ministers want the pilots to tackle the lack of incentive for councils to improve and speed up their planning service leading to drawn out applications and local frustration for both housebuilders and individual applicants.
- The proposals are expected to boost housebuilding and speed up the planning application process.
- The proposals will increase local choice by giving applicants the choice of whether to submit their plans to the local council, a competing council or a government approved organisation that would process applications up until the decision point.
- Councils will also be able to offer the fast track planning application service – either through competition pilots or potentially through devolution deals.

As part of the 2020 White Paper (Planning for the Future) the government introduced the concept of the creation of a fast-track system for 'beautiful buildings' and establishing local design guidance for developers to build and preserve beautiful communities.

Whilst the government's ideas have not become policy, there is no legislative reason why a local planning authority cannot already introduce fast-track services.

The main advantages with providing a fast-track service is that firstly it aligns itself with Surrey Heath's 5 Year Strategy by facilitating the priority to be an Effective and Responsive Council due to the high level of customer service that such a service would provide. It also supports the Economy and for residents, business and developers alike. A quicker decision provides greater



confidence and certainty for various reasons, for example, whether this is for funding purposes, contractual requirements, build project deadlines or conveyancing reasons. Additionally, fast-track services enables income generation that can be invested back into the planning department and wider Council. In November 2021, the planning department was reviewed by the Planning Advisory Service. One of the targets was to improve statutory performance and a fast-track service is a key way of not only doing this but also making Surrey Heath an exemplar – it would help the council stand out from the crowd and be a borough that developers want to do business with.

Very few councils offer a fast-track service including no councils within Surrey. The likely reasoning why more councils don't offer it is because of already stretched resources and the associated pitfalls. For example: it may be counter-productive and generate complaints if the service commitments cannot be met; or result in unforeseen delays with consultee responses, often outside of the control of the council.

Case Studies

From online research, a number of councils already offer fast-track services. The nature, cost and extent of these services vary significantly. By way of example, case studies are summarised below:

London Borough of Barnet

- Offers fast-track on validation of planning applications; advice on planning applications and advice requests; and, planning recommendations.
- Requests are considered on a case-by-case basis and they reserve the right to refuse requests.
- Currently, Barnet has very limited capacity to offer the service.
- When operational, the options are very extensive with 37 different services (of which there are sub-categories and a complicated fee structure) plus tailored services for majors. It include householder submissions; conditions and certificates of lawfulness; office to residential prior notifications; larger home extensions and prior notifications; small minor applications and variations to conditions; large minor applications and variations to conditions; major applications; pre-application advice; and, tree works.
- Fee categories include, for example: registration of a planning application within 1 working day; consultation of neighbouring properties within 1 working day; visit to site within 5



working days; and, provision of an officer's recommendation within 5 weeks of validation (caveated in case the application has to go to committee). For pre-application enquiries it includes an accelerated offer of a meeting and minutes.

- Wide range of fees dependent on the level of service.

See Appendix A for a copy of Barnet's Planning Pricing Brochure (pages 11-19).

London Borough of Haringey

- Fast-track service only provided for householder planning applications and applications for certificates of lawful development. Additionally, an express pre-application service for householders is provided.
- For householder planning applications the fee is £500 and the commitment is to make a decision within 6 weeks.
- For applications for certificates of lawful development the fee is £621 and the commitment is to make a decision within 5 working days.
- The express pre-application householder service is £298 and the commitment is to provide a written response within 5 working days.

Horsham District Council

- Unclear whether they have undertaken a pilot service but a paper is online that sets out a proposal and includes examples of services elsewhere.
- In June 2020 they undertook a consultation on a fast-track service focussing on which application types should be covered, how long should determination timescales be for such applications, how the service would be resourced and any other benefits such a service would bring. The consultation identified: Householder planning applications, certificates of lawfulness and applications for listed building consent where they are accompanying a householder could be offered as a fast track option. It identified a charge of double the application fee and a service level of determination within 28 days.
- Proposed 1 day registration for householder applications and applications for certificates of lawful development, with a site visit within 5 days and decision within 28 days.

See Appendix B for a copy of this paper.



London Borough of Redbridge

- Fast-track service only provided for householder planning applications, prior approval householder submissions and applications for certificates of lawful development.
- For householder planning applications and prior approval submissions the fee is £150 and £75, respectively, and this guarantees a decision within 5 working days of the end of the statutory 21 day consultation period.
- For applications for certificates of lawful development the fee is £75 and this guarantees a decision within a maximum of 10 working days on receipt of a valid application.
- Fast-track does not apply to a proposal within a conservation area and can only relate to one dwelling house.
- No amendments will be sought or accepted as part of the fast-track process.
- Where an application receives 3 or more objections the Council's scheme of delegation requires it be discussed with the Chair of Planning committee to determine whether a delegated decision or Planning Committee is appropriate (this is likely to impact on the determination target and officers will always advise the agent when this is the case). Where this is the only cause of delay the fast-track fee will not be refundable.

Rochford District Council

- Offers a fast-track validation service for householder applications, minors and others submissions. The service is not available for major developments.
- Commits to respond on the validity of an application within 2 days of receipt of the application.
- Charges a fee of £42 for householder and £96 for minor/other applications
- There is no refund of fee.

Wealdon District Council

- Limited to fast-track on pre-application enquiries only. Intended as a high level assessment and not intended as a substitute for the paid pre-application route.
- Free pilot service for businesses in the district and for small house builders (three to five dwellings on land in the district and can commit with evidence to early delivery) and implementation.
- No details are given on the response times.



Key Findings

- The majority of councils restrict fast-track services to householder and LDC submissions. A few councils also offer a service for minor proposals. However, it is rare for the service to be offered for major development proposals. Some councils also offer quicker pre-application responses for a premium.
- Typically the application service offered is an acceleration of review of validation within 1 working day, a site visit within 5 working days and an earlier decision. For householder applications the commitment is either immediately after the statutory consultation period/28 days from registration or within 6 weeks; and, 5 working days for LDC applications.
- Councils generally caveat that call-ins to committee mean that a decision may still be delayed and do not commit to refund the fast-track fee when such a scenario arises.
- Fees are always in addition to the statutory fee and vary considerably, with some councils offering the service for a very low price and others doubling the application fee or charging even higher.
- Fast-track means that there will be no negotiation or amendments accepted as part of the submission.
- Resourcing means that some councils have suspended the service or do not guarantee that they can offer it.



Recommended Pilot and Timescale

On the basis of this research, and to ensure that a fast-track service is deliverable within the resource constraints, below is a recommended pilot:

Fast-Track Service	Validation review option	Fee	Early site visit option	Fee	Early decision option	Fee	Fee if all options chosen
Householder Planning Application	1 working day	£100	5 working days from registration	£100	5 weeks from registration	£500	£600
Householder Proposed CLD	1 working day	£100	N/A	N/A	2 weeks from registration	£300	£400
Householder Existing CLD	1 working day	£100	N/A	N/A	3 weeks from registration	£300	£400
Other Proposed CLD	1 working day	£100	N/A	N/A	4 weeks from registration	£400	£500
Other Existing CLD	1 working day	£100	N/A	N/A	5 weeks from registration	£500	£600
Minor Planning Application ? (1 dwelling)	1 working day	£150	5 working days from registration	£150	6 weeks from registration	£600	£800
Minor Planning Application ? (2 -4 dwellings /commercial 0-499m²)	1 working day	£150	5 working days from registration	£150	6 weeks from registration	£700	£900
Minor Planning Application ? (5 -9 dwellings /commercial 500 -999 m²)	1 working day	£150	5 working day from registration	£150	6 weeks from registration	£800	£1,000



The early decision option would need to be caveated, concerning the risk of the matter being reported to planning applications committee. For householders, a decision within 5 weeks reflects the fact that a councillor can call-in any planning application 28 days after the publication of the weekly list. CLDs cannot be called-in and are not reported to committee, hence the earlier decision date. It is also advisable to caveat that the validation review does not guarantee registration and that as part of the fast-track service no amendments will be accepted.

Offering fast-track on minor planning applications has also been included above as a possibility. However, this option might be better to introduce once we know the success rate of householder and CLD applications. Inclusion of minor applications is more problematic because of the greater reliance on consultees where delays are out of our control; the greater likelihood of committee call-ins; the greater work time needed to process them; and, by association, our historical statutory performance on minors has not been as good and there is often a greater necessity for extensions of time.

It is proposed that prior to piloting this, a consultation exercise with planning agents is undertaken. This could be via an Agents Forum, next scheduled for February 2023. It is recommended that this pilot is for a 6 month period, commencing from April 2023 until December 2023.

Monitoring and Review

The department is currently fully staffed and could resource this premium service. However, dependent on demand for this, plus officer resource in 2023, a decision will need to be made as to whether this service is offered universally, on a case-by-case request basis or when a threshold of applications has been reached. As part of the pilot, the numbers of requests will therefore be subject to ongoing monitoring and review. This will identify trends and areas for improvement of the service on an ongoing basis. Data on the numbers of applications, the time taken, and the fee income received will be recorded.

Customer feedback will also be taken into consideration and amendments to the process actioned, if required. In the event that targets are not met then refunds will not be automatically given. Requests for refunds will be considered in writing and on their own merits and part, or all of the fee, refunded on a sliding scale i.e. dependent on the extent of the delay and the amount of work already undertaken. In the event of a small extension of time agreed by all parties (where required due to information needed from the applicant) the fast-track fee will not be refunded.

