

APPENDIX B

Fast Track Planning Applications Proposal

Summary

Horsham District Council is committed to supporting economic growth and ensuring the district is a place where communities can work, live and prosper. The planning process plays a major role in both supporting appropriate development and it is essential that the council has a dynamic and proactive approach to planning which serves our residents and businesses

We are a busy planning authority with a high volume of applications and are working hard to make continuous improvements to the quality and efficiency of our service.

This report outlines a proposal for a new initiative in the Development Management Service to fast-track certain key planning applications from initial enquiry to planning decision by providing a seamless service and cutting through unnecessary delays.

The proposal seeks to raise additional income but will also assist the construction industry in being able to deliver projects quicker and with more certainty by delivering an efficient and fact-tracked process for the determination of certain planning applications.

The evidence base and business case to support the project is set out in this report. The proposal seeks flexibility to roll out a fast track service; starting with a trial of the most minor types of application.

A Fast Track Upgrade Option

There are several reasons why applicants might require a quicker decision, for example, it could be the applicant has a builder on standby or engaged in a construction timetable and therefore wants a development to be completed by a certain date.

It is clear councils are working hard to raise additional income through the provision of enhanced discretionary services and research of other council's undertaking a fast track service are summarised in **Appendix A**.

In June 2020 consultation was undertaken in the Development Management Department seeking views 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.
- A charge of double the application fee
- A service level of determination within 28 days

It is important to note that the fast-track proposals will maintain the statutory consultation periods for stakeholders including neighbours and Parish/Neighbourhood councils.

The proposals will affect the Scheme of Delegation, i.e. the timescales for applications to be referred to the Planning Committee. In order to provide a fast track service for minor and householder schemes this would need to be reduced from 35 days to 21 days. However, the proposal would still enable a longer timescale of 35 for larger schemes.

An alternative option is to offer a fast track service decision within 35 - 40 days to enable the 35 day member call-in to remain but this would only provide a 2 week reduction on the existing 8 week timeframe and would not be so favourable for this seeking a fast-track option.

It is not considered that any consultation is required with stakeholders given the statutory consultation period would remain and all parties would still have an opportunity to participate in the process. Feedback though should be sought from members with regard to the proposal to amend the call-in time for minor and householder schemes. Furthermore feedback received from customers during a trial period will be considered in deciding whether to continue the service or alter it at the end of the trial period.

Resource Implications

Providing a priority or fast track service for applicants will require efficient processes and effective time and project management as well as monitoring. It is anticipated that this will be covered within the current staffing levels of the department by focussing a proportion of the Development Management teams time on managing fast track applications. Certainly to start with this would be largely focused on the planning technician roles who manage a case load of minor schemes. Given the minor nature of the proposals it is much easier to operate a fast-track service.

In the long term if demand increases significantly together with income there may be additional staff required to meet the demand, however this can be considered at a later date.

It is not anticipated that any other additional resources will be required to set the service up other than the set up of a form and change to the existing system to flag fast tracked applications. The tracking and monitoring of fast-track applications will be a key component to the projects success and will rely on Team Leaders and the Head of Development to manage this effectively.

Proposed Service Offer

Householder and proposed certificates of lawfulness lend themselves to a fast tracking service since the development tends to be of a simpler nature and rarely requires the involvement of statutory consultees. For certificates of lawfulness no consultation is required as the outcome is a technically determined one, so a decision could be made quicker than 28 days if that becomes feasible. Furthermore, it is not possible to call a certificate of lawfulness application to committee so this will not require a change to the scheme of delegation.

In addition, validation is straightforward so the administration of the proposal can be accelerated. Once any statutory consultation with neighbours has been carried out the majority of householder and certificates of lawfulness can be determined within a 4-week period.

It is therefore proposed to offer applicants the **opportunity to fast track householder applications where they would be determined within 28 days of receipt of a valid application and for certificates of lawfulness to be determined within 28 days of the receipt of a valid application.**

It is suggested that the **fee should be £103 + VAT for certificates of lawfulness and £206 + VAT for householder application types** which would be payable upon receipt of an application. This would be in addition to the statutory application fee which is £103 for a certificate and £206 for a householder application.

In the event of not being able to meet the target and in the event of a small extension of time being agreed (where required due to information needed from the applicant) the fast track element of the fee will not be refunded.

The below table outlines the time by task to deliver a fast track application:

	Registration	Site Visit	Review & Recommendation	Decision
Traditional Service	Up to 4 Days	Up to 4 Weeks	Up to 8 Weeks	Up to 8 Weeks
Fast Track Service (Householder)	1 Day	5 Days	22 - 26 Days	28 days
Fast Track Service LDCs	1 Day	5 Days if necessary	10 - 21 Days	28 Days

Review & Monitoring

The numbers of fast track requests will be subject to ongoing review and monitoring identifying trends and areas for improvement of the service on an ongoing basis. In addition, as well as providing more options for the customer the implementation of a fast track service will provide necessary additional income for the department in order to meet income targets.

During the pilot it will be important to collate data on the numbers of applications, the time taken, and the fee income received. In addition, customer feedback should be taken into consideration and amendments to the processes actioned where and when necessary. Roll out of the services will also be depending on capacity and resource, and the service will be reviewed if it cannot be delivered.

Income generated

On average the Council currently receive around 1000 householder applications a year and 160 householder related certificates for proposed use. At this stage it is difficult to gauge what share of the market a fast track service would attract, but if 20% of the existing identified applications were to use a fast track service this would generate an income of over £44,000. Income generated would depend on the marketing of the service, the quality and timeliness of the service offered and the resources in the department to be able to delivery the service.

Conclusion

The proposals in this report are based on research and emerging services offered by other Local Planning Authorities. There are limited other options.

Having said this, there is the 'do nothing' option but this would not provide a service that is forward thinking, nor would it provide an additional stream of income. Therefore, this is not considered a suitable alternative to creating an innovative and responsive planning service.

Appendix A – LPA’s Offering a Fast Track Service

Authority	Type	Cost	Decision within	Additional information
LB of Barnet	Householder	£460.80 inc VAT	35 days	
LB of Barnet	Certificates & Conditions	£131.40 inc VAT	15 days*	*Decision is not issued email is sent confirming support / refusal of scheme
LB of Barnet	Certificates & Conditions	£333.60 inc VAT	10 Days*	As above
LB of Barnet	Certificates & Conditions	£395.40 inc VAT	5 Days*	As above
LB of Barnet	Certificates & Conditions	£525 inc VAT	2 days*	As above
LB of Barnet	Certificates & Conditions	£790.80	1 Day*	As above
Cheltenham BC	Householder	£250-£315	28 Days	Service provided on the basis pre-app advice has been received
LB of Barking and Dagenham	Certificates	£240 inc VAT	10 Days	
Wycombe	Householder	£240	25 Days	
Wycombe	Conditions (Householder)	£100	10 Days	
Wycombe	Conditions (Minor)	£300	10 Days	
Wycombe	NMA’s Minor	£250	10 Days	
Wycombe	NMA’s Major	£500	10 Days	
Wrexham	Householders	£50	28 Days	
Redbridge	Prior Approval Householder	£75	26 Days	Service to be expanded in future (£150 Householders and £75 Certificates)
Blackburn	Householder / Minor	£360 inc VAT	28 Days	‘Platinum Service’
Blackburn	Certificates	£360	5 Days	‘Platinum Service’