

Pre-application planning advice

Introduction

Pre-application advice is an essential part of providing an efficient and effective planning service as it enables schemes to be considered and, if necessary, amended prior to the formal submission of a planning application. We encourage the early discussion of schemes. Under the provisions of the Local Government Act 2003 we charge a fee for this service. The intention is to recover the cost of providing the service and not to deter applicants and their agents from engaging in pre-application discussions.

We want to encourage pre-application discussions by offering helpful professional advice within an agreed timeframe. The purpose is to give you a clear steer about whether it is likely your proposal will be granted planning permission. If we consider it unlikely that planning permission will be granted we will give you reasons for our opinion. It needs to be understood that the advice given by officers cannot be binding on the council as the final decision on formal planning applications lies with the planning committee or the head of planning and will be made following consideration of all representations received as part of the planning application process.

The process

Your enquiry will be allocated to a planning officer who will co-ordinate any comments from other parties such as Oxfordshire County Highways or the Environment Agency if appropriate, arrange a meeting if requested and provide you with a written response within an agreed timeframe. To ensure you receive a timely response it is essential that you submit accurate and complete information to enable officers fully to understand your proposal.

Disclosure of information

Under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 or the Environmental Information Regulations 2004, we may be asked to provide copies of any correspondence, notes or drawings regarding pre-application enquiries to any other interested person. The legislation establishes a presumption in favour of disclosure, and we can only withhold this information if its disclosure could prejudice commercial interests, inhibit the provision of advice or exchange of views during the planning application process, or could prejudice the effective conduct of public affairs. If you wish your pre-application advice to remain confidential, you need to explain why in a covering letter. However, it will be for us to decide in each case whether any information can be exempt from disclosure, and our decisions will be based on whether the public interest lies in withholding or disclosing the information. Generally, all information relating to pre-application discussions will not be treated as confidential following the

submission of a planning application. Generally, personal data is exempt from disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act and the Environmental Information Regulations. Where personal data is involved, we will comply with the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998.

Charging arrangements

The charges for pre-application advice are shown in the following table:

Category of development	Charge for letter only (including VAT at 20%)	Charge for office meeting followed by letter (including VAT at 20%)	Charge for site meeting followed by letter (including VAT at 20%)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applications required directly due to disability • Applications required which are necessary only by virtue of an article 4 direction or restrictive condition 	No charge	No charge	No charge
House extensions and alterations and ancillary garden buildings	£45	£96	£120
Listed building (advice on listed building issues only). Conservation Area advice (including demolitions & works to trees)	£60	£96	£120
Extensions to listed buildings	£90	£144	£168
Residential development (including changes of use):			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 – 4 dwellings 	£180	£276	£396
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 – 9 dwellings 	£240	£336	£456

Category of development	Charge for letter only (including VAT at 20%)	Charge for office meeting followed by letter (including VAT at 20%)	Charge for site meeting followed by letter (including VAT at 20%)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10 – 25 dwellings • 26 dwellings and above 	<p>£600*</p> <p>£840*</p>	<p>£792*</p> <p>£1,080*</p>	<p>£912*</p> <p>£1,200*</p>
Commercial development (including changes of use), leisure, agricultural, advertisements, telecommunications: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 0 – 999 sq m gross floor area • 1,000 – 9,999 sq m gross floor area • 10,000 sq m gross floor area and above 	<p>£180</p> <p>£600*</p> <p>£840*</p>	<p>£276</p> <p>£792*</p> <p>£1,080*</p>	<p>£396</p> <p>£912*</p> <p>£1,200*</p>

*** An initial flat fee is payable. Any subsequent discussions, correspondence and meetings will be charged at an hourly rate of £60 including**

There is no charge for advice regarding proposals to extend or alter a house, provided no meeting is involved and the advice is simply an exchange of a letter or email. Similarly, there is no charge for proposals that require only listed building consent or conservation area consent. However, if your proposal requires planning permission in addition to either listed building consent or conservation area consent and is larger-scale than householder development, the appropriate fee will be payable.

Larger-scale proposals which come within the categories of Major or Minor applications (see definitions at the end of this information page) may require a series of meetings and ongoing discussions before a planning application is submitted. In such cases, an initial flat fee is payable (see table above) plus further fee(s) based on an hourly rate of £50 plus VAT.

For mixed use proposals, the fee will be calculated for each element of the overall proposal and the highest separate fee will be payable.

Revised pre-application proposals will incur further fees.

We will review the scale of fees on 1 April each year.

Online or telephone credit or debit card payments can be made (please note that a credit card transaction fee applies). Alternatively, cheques are to be made payable to Vale of White Horse District Council.

What happens to my enquiry?

We will acknowledge a pre-application enquiry by email or letter within two working days of its receipt. We will also let you know if you need to provide any further information and if the fee you have paid is incorrect. Your enquiry will not be progressed until we have all the necessary information and the correct fee. If a cheque payment is not honoured, officer work on the enquiry will stop until proper payment has been received. A planning officer of an appropriate seniority relative to the nature and complexity of the proposed development will then be allocated your enquiry. He/she will be your primary point of contact and will co-ordinate any necessary consultations with other parties such as Oxfordshire County Highways before arranging a meeting, if requested, and providing you with a written response.

The council is committed to deciding submitted planning applications within the government's target timescales. This remains our priority. Nevertheless, our target is to provide a written response to pre-application enquiries in accordance with the following timescales:

- Other proposals – 15 working days
- Minor proposals – 20 working days
- Smaller-scale Major proposals – 25 working days
- Larger-scale Major proposals – 30 working days

(Definitions of Other, Minor and Major applications are given at the end of this information page)

It needs to be recognised that there will be occasions when the above timescales cannot be met – for example, when responses are awaited from consultees such as Oxfordshire County Highways, the Environment Agency or English Heritage, or at times of very heavy workloads. In these circumstances, we will keep you advised of progress and the reasons for any delays and ensure you receive a written response at the earliest opportunity.

What information do I need to provide?

For proposals to extend or alter a house, sketch drawings and photographs will usually be sufficient. For all other types of proposal, a checklist is given below of the minimum information you need to submit to enable us to give proper consideration to your proposal. The amount of information submitted should be proportionate to the scale of development you are proposing. All information submitted needs to be accurate, complete and clear. The quality of the advice we can give depends on the quality of the information you submit.

As a minimum for all types of proposal other than extending or altering a house, we will require the following:

- An up-to-date and accurate site location plan (preferably Ordnance Survey) at a scale of 1:1250 or 1:2500 showing at least 2 named main roads, surrounding buildings, and the direction north, with the site clearly edged with a red line and including the means of access to a public highway
- An up-to-date and accurate block plan at a scale of 1:500 or 1:200 showing the site and adjacent road(s), any existing and proposed buildings, extensions and hardstandings on the site, the location of existing buildings on adjoining sites, access arrangements, the type and height of the site's boundary treatments, the location and spread of all trees on or overhanging the site, and the direction north
- Existing and proposed building elevations and floor plans at a scale of 1:50 or 1:100
- A full description of the proposal
- Photographs which show the site in the context of existing surrounding development
- Details of any advice you have already received from statutory consultees such as Oxfordshire County Highways, the Environment Agency or English Heritage
- Details of any responses if you have already consulted any neighbours or the parish/town council/meeting

What we will provide

We will consider your proposal and discuss it with you at a meeting if requested. We will also carry out any preliminary consultations with other parties such as Oxfordshire County Highways or the Environment Agency if considered necessary. Our written response will express an opinion on the likelihood of planning permission being granted for your proposal. In doing so, we will highlight any relevant issues, which may include the following (although this list is not exhaustive):

- Whether your proposal is likely to be acceptable in terms of national and local planning policies (including the requirement for affordable housing provision, if applicable)
- Any site specific designations or constraints (for example, green belt or conservation area)
- Any adverse impact on neighbours
- The design of the proposal, including appearance, massing, height and density
- Impact on highway safety, particularly access and parking issues
- Whether a planning obligation will need to be completed and the matters it will need to cover
- The type of information you will need to include with your planning application to enable us to validate the application when it is submitted

The intention is to ensure you are in as strong a position as possible to address all of the relevant planning issues prior to the submission of your application, and that you are aware of the information required to accompany your application so that it can be validated on receipt.

Disclaimer

The final decision on formal planning applications is made by the planning committee or the head of planning and is made in accordance with planning policy and following detailed consideration of all representations received as part of the planning application process. Therefore, whilst pre-application advice is given in good faith by officers and in a professional manner, there can be no guarantee that a planning application will be determined in accordance with any pre-application advice given.

Definitions

Major proposals – Developments of 10 or more dwellings or 1,000 sq m or more gross non-residential floor area (including changes of use of existing buildings)

Minor proposals – Developments up to 9 dwellings or up to 999 sq m gross non-residential floor area (including changes of use of existing buildings), changes of use of open land, telecommunications

Other proposals – extending or altering a house, ancillary buildings in the garden of a house, advertisements, listed building consent, conservation area consent