

NFNPA 509/16

NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

AUTHORITY MEETING – 22 SEPTEMBER 2016

CHARGING FOR PRE-APPLICATION ADVICE

Report by: Steve Avery, Executive Director

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This year's corporate work programme (2016/17) includes an action to *"introduce charging for pre-application advice for certain types of development whilst maintaining an open and accessible planning service"*. This reflects the growing trend in local government to recover and reinvest some of the costs incurred in providing a responsive planning service, especially at a time of fiscal constraint in the public sector.
- 1.2 Members will be aware that the Authority actively encourages pre-application advice and many local agents commend our open and helpful approach. It is in everybody's interests to provide and seek pre-application advice, as it leads to better informed applications, encourages good design and avoids unnecessary and potentially abortive work on both sides.
- 1.3 This report therefore sets out proposals for charging for pre-application advice in the National Park.

2. Pre-application advice

- 2.1 Pre-application advice can take many forms and includes:
 - standing advice and guidance notes to assist applicants (hosted on the Authority's website);
 - ad-hoc telephone calls and visits to reception (by both applicants and agents) which are managed through the planning 'duty officer' service;
 - enquiries from prospective purchasers looking to acquire a New Forest property;
 - written enquiries, which can include detailed plans, requiring a written response.
- 2.2 The planning pages on our website currently host a wide range of planning information and guidance which is freely available. We have no plans to discontinue or contract our 'duty officer' service which involves a planning officer being available each day at reception (8.45 am – 1.00 pm) to answer planning related queries on the telephone and/or to attend to enquiries in person in reception. This service is primarily aimed at the public but agents and architects also take advantage of the duty officer system to discuss proposals informally. This would remain a free service.
- 2.3 The pre-application charges we are looking to introduce would apply to all written enquiries. Responding to written enquiries often entails giving much more than just a general response; a site specific proposal will necessitate a check of the relevant planning history, the constraints and planning policies that apply and on occasions, a

site visit. Consultations with colleagues and external organisations may also be required.

3. Charging for pre-application advice

- 3.1 There is considerable variation in the procedures adopted by each local planning authority for dealing with pre-application advice enquiries. Many authorities require an applicant to complete a lengthy 'pre-application' form and to submit a range of plans to a required standard. Others set out exactly what an applicant can expect in return, for example, up to one hour of a planning officer's time, with some including a site visit and others charging an additional fee for a site visit.
- 3.2 We wish to keep any fee paying pre-application process as simple as possible. Applicants will be required to provide their contact details and the address of the application site. It will be a matter for the applicant to decide how much supporting information to provide at pre-application stage. The extent of the advice provided by the planning team will be dependent on the level of information received (as we do now) but as a minimum, the written response will include the planning history of the site, the constraints that apply and general conformity with the relevant planning policies and guidance. All fee paying enquiries would receive a written response within 21 days.
- 3.3 There is a wide discrepancy in the level of fees charged by each authority. Within Hampshire, some authorities exempt householder applications from a pre-application fee whilst fees for pre-application advice on a proposal for a single/replacement dwelling range from £77 - £250 (in other National Parks the comparative range is £0 - £240).
- 3.4 The majority of planning applications received in the National Park are for householder development (60%), which generate a relatively high number of related pre-application enquiries. These often involve detailed considerations relating to issues such as design, floor space calculations and habitat mitigation. In bringing forward pre-application charges, it is considered reasonable to apply a fee to formal householder enquiries. We are proposing a fee of £45 for responding to written householder enquiries (approximately 25% of the nationally prescribed planning application fee). A similar percentage has been used to help inform the schedule of fees for other types of enquiry as set out below.

Type of Enquiry	Fee
Householder	£45
Single or replacement dwelling	£95
2 - 5 dwellings	£175
6 -10 dwellings	£495
Non-residential or commercial (up to 500 sq. metres)	£175
Non-residential or commercial (500 – 1000 sq. metres)	£350
Changes of use	£95
Listed buildings and advertisements	£25
Major development Minerals and waste	25% of application fee
Other building operations	£45

3.5 A number of authorities choose to exempt certain types of development from pre-application fees and in the National Park, it is suggested that advice sought in the following categories should not incur a charge:

- Affordable housing
- Commoners dwellings
- Agricultural buildings (including field shelters) and new agricultural workers' dwellings
- Proposals made by, or on behalf of, a Parish or Town Council, Local Authority or County Council
- All other types of development which are exempt from paying an application fee

4. Other charges

4.1 Some authorities also charge for providing advice on whether a proposal requires planning permission. Applicants seeking a formal view on the need for planning permission for a specific proposal already have the option to apply for a Lawful Development Certificate (Proposed) which attracts a fee (50% of the normal application fee). This is the route that should be followed for formal permitted development enquiries. It will not prevent planning officers providing generalist (free) advice to homeowners on the need for planning permission.

4.2 The planning team also field a number of other formal enquires regarding trees and whether the terms of a legal agreement have been met. It is proposed that a flat fee of £45 be applied to these types of requests.

4.3 Approval and/or confirmation of details required by a planning condition already attract a fee of £97 (£28 for householder) which is set by the government.

5. Implementation

5.1 The charges would take effect for all qualifying enquiries received on or after 1 October 2016. Local agents in the area will be given advanced notice by email following this meeting and further guidance will be made available on the website and in reception. There will be an opportunity for agents to discuss the new charges at the annual agents' meeting to be held on 28 September 2016. An evaluation and review of the new charging regime will be reported back to the Authority meeting in March 2017.

6. Recommendation

That the Authority introduce charging for formal pre-application advice as set out above, to take effect on 1 October 2016.

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