

NFNPA 522/17

NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

AUTHORITY MEETING – 23 MARCH 2017

EVALUATION AND REVIEW OF CHARGING FOR PRE-APPLICATION ADVICE

Report by: Steve Avery, Executive Director

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Members will recall that the corporate work programme for 2016/17 included an action to “introduce charging for pre-application advice for certain types of development whilst maintaining an open and accessible planning service”. A new charging regime for providing formal pre-application advice was agreed at the Authority meeting on 22 September 2016 and introduced on 1 October 2016.
- 1.2 It was further agreed that the new charging regime should be evaluated and reviewed after six months, which is the purpose of this report. The schedule of pre-application fees agreed last September is attached as Annex A.

2. Evaluation and review of pre-application advice since 1 October 2016

- 2.1 The table below compares the number of formal written pre-application enquiries received between 1 October to 28 February with the corresponding period for the preceding year as well as the six months period prior to the new fees being introduced (1 April – 30 September 2016).

	Number of planning applications received	Number of pre-apps received	Pre-apps as % of all applications received	Amount of pre-app fees paid	Number of planning applications refused
1/10/16 – 28/2/17	337	147	44%	£9,062	26 (9%)
1/4/16 – 30/9/16	455	381	84%	n/a	50 (12%)
1/10/15 – 28/2/16	324	261	81%	n/a	46 (15%)

- 2.2 The table shows that the number of formal written pre-application enquires received has declined markedly since the introduction of the new charges. We would be concerned if this drop in pre-application enquiries had resulted in a higher refusal rate, but this has not been the case, with a smaller percentage of applications refused during the same period.

- 2.3 The planning officers have though reported noticeably busier 'duty officer' mornings with more prospective applicants seeking 'informal' advice over the telephone (visitors to reception appear to have remained about the same).
- 2.4 The more formal nature of the new pre-application arrangements has had an impact on the administration team with the additional work associated with recording and processing payments. The applicant's expectation on planning officers to provide more considered and detailed responses has also risen, for example, a number of applicants have requested a meeting on site as part of the pre-application process (this is only offered in relation to more significant proposals and/or at the planning officer's discretion depending on the nature of the proposal). This has resulted in the planning officers spending more time in preparing written responses to formal pre-application enquires, albeit the number of formal enquiries received is less than before.
- 2.5 In total, £9,062 additional income has been generated in the first five months of operating the new charging regime, which if extrapolated over one year on current levels would generate an additional £21,748 per annum.
- 2.6 It is felt that further guidance for applicants explaining our pre-application procedures would be helpful and this is being prepared at the moment and will be published on our website.
- 2.7 The impact of the new charging regime for pre-application advice will be kept under review but on the whole, it has worked well and generated some additional income that can be re-invested in delivering a high quality and accessible planning service for the National Park.

3. Recommendation

That Members note the report.

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Papers: **NFNPA 509/16**
NFNPA 522/17 Annex A