



Pre-Application and Planning Application Procedure Note

Sheffield City Council
January 2025

Introduction

Chapter 4 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) places a duty on Local Planning Authorities to *“work proactively with applicants to secure developments that will improve the economic, social and environmental conditions of the area.”* It also recognises that *“early engagement has significant potential to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the planning application system for all parties”* and *“good quality pre-application discussion enables better coordination between public and private resources and improved outcomes for the community.”*

It is with this duty in mind that Sheffield City Council has produced this advice note to explain:

- the nature of the pre-application enquiry service we aim to provide; including what we expect from you; and what you can expect from us; and
- how we will handle planning applications in the context of government guidance and the pre-application enquiry service we offer.

Pre-Application Enquiries

The benefits of using our pre-application enquiry service

The provision of pre-application advice is intended to provide a degree of confidence to applicants and prospective developers before committing to the expense of a full planning application submission.

Negotiations in advance of a submission are likely to speed up the planning application process and reduce the need for amendments. This is important given the government’s increasing focus on speedy decision making.

The benefits of pre-application advice vary according to the scale of the scheme under consideration but can be summarised as follows:

- Clearly sets out the key issues and policy tests which will need to be addressed as part of any formal application submission.
- Provides support and guidance to help improve quality, resolve key issues and identify potential mitigation which will help smooth the way to delivering a favourable outcome at the application stage.
- Identifies schemes which are considered to have insurmountable issues, and which have very little prospect of receiving a positive outcome, thereby saving time and money.
- Establishes the full scope of technical information requirements which will be needed to support a future planning application (with reference to the [‘Local planning application requirements | Sheffield City Council’](#)), thereby avoiding rejection at the registration stage.
- For large scale and strategic developments, establishes the benefits of using a Planning Performance Agreement.



- Establishes the level of community engagement which might be appropriate prior to submission, depending on the circumstances of the case and with reference to the Council's Statement of Community Involvement: [How the Council consults on planning applications & policies | Sheffield City Council](#)

When do we offer pre-application advice

We offer pre-application advice on all development types, including householder applications, though it might not be appropriate for all situations and the level of advice given will depend upon the complexity of the proposal being brought forward.

For householder applications, applicants and their agents are expected to take into account the guidance set out in our supplementary planning guidance [Designing House Extensions](#). In some cases this might negate the need for pre-application advice.

What we expect from you

All pre-application enquiries should be submitted using the forms available on our website: [Make a pre-application enquiry | Sheffield City Council](#) where you will also find details of the current charges (which usually increase annually in line with the Consumer Price Index).

The quality and certainty of the advice we can provide is dependent on the quality and accuracy of the information you submit, so draft plans and supporting information of a level commensurate with the scale and complexity of the development proposed should be provided.¹ As a minimum you should include:

- Completed pre-application enquiry form, including a detailed description of the proposal
- The required fee
- Site location plan (1:1250 scale)
- Photographs of the existing site, buildings and trees
- Existing and proposed plans and elevations
- Details of current and proposed uses

Critical timescales should be communicated so that we can prioritise cases accordingly.

There should be a willingness to take on board the feedback that we offer in a constructive and collaborative manner.

Details of any pre-application advice sought from statutory consultees should be shared with us.

¹ For example, proposals in a conservation area or affecting a listed building should be supported by a draft Heritage Statement, whilst a tree survey would be helpful to support proposals on a site containing trees.



What you can expect from us

We will aim to deal with pre-application enquiries within the following timescales:

- Register and allocate a case officer within 3 working days.
- Small scale or minor development – provide advice within 4 weeks.
- Small-scale major or complex minor development – provide advice within 6 weeks.

If the service requested and paid for includes a meeting or accompanied site visit (as set out in our Schedule of Pre-Application Enquiry Fees), the case officer will contact you within 2 weeks to make arrangements.

For simple enquiries the case officer may carry out an unaccompanied site visit before providing a response.

Whilst we will do our best to adhere to these timescales they are not guaranteed, so it is recommended that you apply for pre-application advice as far in advance as possible. Where we need more time, we will contact you to confirm our intended timescales for responding.

Our advice will be provided in writing. The content and format will be tailored to the scale of the proposal and information submitted, and is likely to include:

- The planning history of the site and analysis, where relevant to the proposals.
- Details of any statutory designations and constraints, such as tree preservation orders, conservation areas, listed buildings, local wildlife sites and flood risk zones.
- An indication of the development plan policies and technical requirements relevant to your proposals.
- Consideration of the key planning issues, including advice on addressing areas of concern.
- Guidance on the plans and supporting information necessary to validate your planning application.
- Advice on whether pre-application advice should be sought from statutory consultees (if not already received).
- Advice on potential planning obligations (Section 106).
- Guidance on the procedure, consultation arrangements and estimated timescales for determination of the application.

Having issued our advice, we will respond to follow up queries and provide clarifications, but further discussions and alternative schemes would need to be submitted under a new enquiry.

Please note, the pre-application enquiry service cannot:

- Provide formal confirmation that a proposal is lawful and does not require planning permission, or



- formally establish the existing lawful use of a property

In both of these cases you should apply for a [Lawful Development Certificate](#).

Planning Performance Agreements

We encourage the use of Planning Performance Agreements (PPAs) for strategic developments and large-scale major applications, particularly where meeting the government's Planning Guarantee is likely to prove challenging.²

A PPA is a project management tool which allows all parties to agree bespoke timescales, actions and resources for handling development proposals from pre-application through to the planning application and discharge of conditions stages.

Given the additional resource commitment to PPA schemes, they require an enhanced fee tailored to the scale and nature of the proposal.

If you would like to discuss the merits of entering into a PPA, please contact: planningdc.centralmajor@sheffield.gov.uk

Internal consultees

As part of your enquiry, the case officer will consult relevant specialists within the Council including Highways, the Environmental Protection Service, Design, Conservation, Landscape, Ecology, the Lead Local Flood Authority and others.

Design Panel

The applicants or agents for some major development proposals will be expected to present to the Sheffield Design Panel as part of the pre-application enquiry process. The Panel is an independent group of built environment industry experts and early engagement with them helps us to secure the highest quality development for Sheffield. More information on the Panel is available here: [Urban Design | Sheffield City Council](#)

VU.CITY

We use the VU.CITY digital 3D platform to assess the impact of major development proposals on the townscape at the pre-application enquiry stage. Details of how to share a model with us are available here: [Make a pre-application enquiry | Sheffield City Council](#)

² The Planning Guarantee is the statutory requirement for local planning authorities to determine valid planning applications within nationally set time limits - 13 weeks for major development (16 weeks in the case of EIA development) and 8 weeks for all other types of development - unless a longer period is agreed in writing with the applicant: [Determining a planning application - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)



External consultees

We do not normally consult statutory consultees as part of the pre-application enquiry process as they are only required to be consulted during the formal planning application stage. In some cases, it will be useful for applicants to seek the views of statutory consultees so that they can address them prior to their formal planning application submission and the case officer can advise when this is appropriate.

Please note that some statutory consultees only engage at the formal planning application stage or charge applicants separately for pre-application advice.

Confidentiality

Pre-application enquiries are not made public. However, applicants can benefit from engaging the local community in pre-application discussions as their proposals are being developed and, for relevant schemes, we will encourage this to happen at an early stage.

Developers and applicants should also be aware that information related to pre-application enquiries may be subject to requests under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Environmental Information Regulations 2004. The Act and Regulations provide for some exemptions from the need to disclose commercially sensitive information but, as a rule, where an enquiry led to an application which was subsequently approved and implemented, we will share the advice given (the rules on personal data and document retention will apply).

Planning Applications

It should be noted that, for all its advantages, pre-application advice will not deliver a guaranteed outcome. This is because pre-application advice cannot pre-empt the democratic decision-making process:

- Planning applications are subject to a wider consultation process and issues may come to light that are not known at the time of the pre-application enquiry.
- Changes in circumstances and planning policy will need to be considered when the subsequent planning application is decided.
- Larger and/or more contentious applications will be decided by a planning committee made up of elected members. Whilst the committee will have an officer report and recommendation to consider, members may decide to give different weight to key issues and other material considerations, in arriving at their decision.

Pre-application advice can, however, be a material consideration to be taken into account and given weight in the planning application process, though the weight given is likely to diminish over time.



Negotiating Amendments to Submitted Applications

Many planning applications involve some form of negotiation or amendment prior to being determined, and the opportunity to amend an application can be beneficial to all parties to remedy initial shortcomings in a scheme and deliver high quality development. However, the opportunity to negotiate amendments is not an alternative to a properly considered and prepared application and substandard submissions can be a significant drain on resources and lengthen the decision-making process. Furthermore, government guidance³ is clear that it is at the discretion of the local planning authority whether to accept changes to submitted applications, to determine if the changes need to be re-consulted on, or if the proposed changes are so significant as to materially alter the proposal such that a new application should be submitted.

In addition, once a planning application has been validated, the government expects local planning authorities to make a decision as quickly as possible, and in any event within the statutory time limit unless a longer period is genuinely required and agreed in writing with the applicant.⁴ Extensions of time should not be used routinely as a means of negotiating applications which are clearly unacceptable as submitted, or to provide additional information which can be adequately secured by condition, as this promotes uncertainty and undermines our ability to manage time and resources efficiently.

On this basis, our approach is for most negotiations to take place prior to the submission of an application, through the pre-application enquiry service. We will therefore deal with planning applications in the following way:

- Where pre-application advice is sought and a subsequent planning application demonstrates that the advice provided has been taken on board, officers will be expected to give them priority.
- Where pre-application advice is ignored or not sought and a proposal is clearly contrary to policy; requires substantial amendments; or raises key issues that could reasonably have been identified before submission, we will normally proceed towards a decision with no negotiations. In these circumstances the reason(s) for refusal will identify the key issues to be overcome.
- Where amendments are submitted by agreement and re-consultation or further publicity is required, it is expected that a reasonable extension of time to the statutory decision-making period will be granted to allow for re-consultation, subsequent assessment and, where necessary, presentation to the Planning and Highways Committee.
- Where amendments are submitted but an extension of time is not agreed, officers may refuse to accept the amendments to avoid

³ [Making an application - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

⁴ [Determining a planning application - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)



undermining statutory decision-making targets and proceed to a formal decision without further negotiation.

Applications for Approval of Details Reserved by Condition

The Government expects applications for the approval of details reserved by condition to be determined within 8 weeks. With this in mind, and given the relatively low fee for these applications, they will generally be determined on their merits as submitted with no negotiation or amendments permitted.

For complex schemes with multiple conditions, we expect conditions to be grouped into subject areas and applications limited to one subject area only (e.g. drainage conditions, land contamination conditions or highway conditions). This is because the submission of a single application to deal with multiple conditions can lead to significant delays.

If applicants or agents are concerned about the likely outcome of their conditions application, they should consider the benefits of using our pre-application enquiry service.

Useful links

Sheffield City Council Planning and Development web pages - [Planning and development](#)

National Planning Policy Framework - [National Planning Policy Framework \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

National Planning Practice Guidance - [Planning practice guidance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

The Planning Portal - [Planning Portal](#)

