

Barnsley Planning Department Customer Charter



2025 Edition

Introduction

This Charter has been developed to align with changes in how central government measures the performance of Local Planning Authorities (LPAs). With shorter performance monitoring periods introduced by the planning guarantee, there is a greater emphasis on making decisions within statutory time limits: 8 weeks for non-major applications, 13 weeks for major applications, and 16 weeks for Environmental Impact Assessment development.

Our objective is to expedite the decision-making process and demonstrate our commitment to being open for business. This Charter outlines the level of service you, as our customer, can expect from us as the Local Planning Authority, and what we expect from you in return.

We are dedicated to providing a professional, supportive, and business-friendly service to ensure a smooth and efficient planning process for all parties involved.

To help enshrine this, the planning department has collaboratively developed a mission statement that we are embedding within our culture.

“Our mission is to work together to provide good quality decisions without unnecessary cost or delay.”

Key elements to achieve our mission:

1. **Effective Pre-Application Advice Service**
2. **Improvements to the Application Validation Process**
3. **Clear Process Map for Application Determination**
4. **Clarity on Engagement Levels with Case Officers**
5. **Applicant self service**

1. **Effective Pre-Application Advice Service**

By taking advantage of the pre-application service, you can significantly improve the likelihood of a positive outcome for your planning application while saving time and resources. The virtues of good pre application engagement are outlined below:

1. **Early Feedback:** Receive professional advice on your proposal before submitting a formal application, helping you understand potential issues and opportunities early on.
2. **Time and Cost Savings:** Identify and address potential problems upfront, reducing the likelihood of delays and additional costs during the formal application process.

3. **Improved Application Quality:** Enhance the quality of your application by incorporating feedback from planning officers, increasing the chances of a successful outcome.
4. **Clarity on Requirements:** Gain a clear understanding of the necessary documents and information needed for your application, ensuring it meets all validation requirements from the start.
5. **Informed Decision-Making:** Make more informed decisions about whether to proceed with your proposal based on detailed assessments and professional guidance.
6. **Efficient Process:** Streamline the application process by resolving key issues at the pre-application stage, leading to a smoother and faster determination once the formal application is submitted.
7. **Professional Insight:** Benefit from the expertise and experience of planning officers who can provide valuable insights and recommendations tailored to your specific project.
8. **Enhanced Communication:** Establish a line of communication with planning officers, fostering a collaborative approach and ensuring you are well-informed throughout the process.

The more information you can provide us, in respect of your proposal, the more detailed advice we will be able to provide to you. In all cases we will require the following as a minimum:

- 1:500 Site plan
- Sketch/outline drawings and elevations
- Any further information you have about the proposal

It may be necessary for us to ask you for further information for more complex proposals, such as:

- A draft Design and Access Statement
- Site surveys (e.g. Tree, Landscape, Ecology, Archaeology, Noise etc)
- Initial Flood risk assessment
- Any proposed planning obligations identified by yourselves

On the basis of the above, we encourage all customers considering the submission of a planning application to engage in pre-application discussions with officers. Whilst the advice will not prejudice the outcome of a formal planning application, it will give you a detailed assessment of the relevant planning considerations and a professional steer on the likely outcome of a planning application.

Where applications are submitted without the benefit of pre-application advice or where the pre-application advice has not been followed, only very minor changes (i.e. those not requiring

any re-consultation in the professional opinion of the case officer) will be accepted during the determination of an application.

Details of our pre-application advice service and the relevant fees can be found via the following link:

<https://www.barnsley.gov.uk/services/planning-and-buildings/commercial-and-housing-developments/planning-pre-application-advice-for-developments/>

2. Improvements to the Application Validation Process

We have adopted a checklist of local validation requirements, expanding on national standards. This checklist provides clarity on the necessary documents, linked to local policies and site-specific needs, ensuring applications are valid upon submission and avoiding delays.

Adopting such a checklist is common practice across most LPAs and provides clarity for applicants about what information will be required to support an application for it to be valid on the date that it is submitted.

The key benefit to all parties of a local checklist is that this avoids a situation where an application is registered as valid because it meets the very broad national requirements, but progress is delayed later in the process because important site specific information is missing.

There are many technical reports that, if not presented at the validation stage, can delay the determination process.

The local validation checklist can also be accessed from our webpage with the link below:

<https://www.barnsley.gov.uk/services/planning-and-buildings/the-planning-process/>

3. Clear Process Map for Application Determination

Our process map outlines how we will determine planning applications within statutory timeframes. Engagement through the pre-application advice service is prioritised to maximize efficiency.

We are aiming to reduce the number of applications that are determined to an agreed timescale that extends beyond the statutory periods of 13 weeks for major 8 weeks for non-major applications.

Major applications that are the subject of a Planning Performance Agreement will be determined in accordance with the terms of that Agreement.

For other applications, those schemes that have been submitted following pre-application advice (and have been adapted to reflect that advice, where applicable) will be granted extensions of time where appropriate, upon request by the applicant/their agent, where the case officer considers a short extension would allow resolution of the outstanding matters.

If the case officer is of the view that it would take more than a short extension of time to resolve outstanding issues, it is highly unlikely that we will agree to extend the statutory timeframe for determination.

For those applications that have not been the subject of pre-application discussions and advice from officers, or where the application contravenes the pre-application advice given, extensions of time will not be granted.

For non-major applications (including householder development), the determination process will follow the stages listed below:

- By end of week 1 – notification of validation (the following steps begin upon validation being confirmed);
- By the end of week 3 – officer site visit undertaken and outstanding consultee comments chased;
- By the end of week 5 (where required) – officer correspondence to the applicant that sets out any minor (see definition below) changes needed to make a scheme acceptable and giving a 1 week deadline to reply, or the application will be refused if it is not withdrawn within 5 working days; or
- By end of week 6 (where appropriate) – officer correspondence to the applicant advising that more than minor changes are required in order to secure officer support for the application and that the application will be refused if it is not withdrawn within 5 working days;
- By the end of week 7 – draft recommendation produced;
- By the end of week 8 – decision issued.

For clarity, a minor change (as referred to above) is one where the principle of development is considered to be acceptable, but a minor and very specific adjustment to the plans is required to satisfy a statutory consultee or an issue identified by the case officer. This situation will only apply where no formal consultation is required.

An example of this would be the Local Highway Authority stating that they are confident that an adequate visibility splay can be achieved from a proposed access arrangement but that this needs to be shown on a scaled plan for certainty. This would require a minor change to the plan to show compliance with consultee comments, further input from the consultee would not be required.

For major applications not subject to PPA, the process includes:

- By end of week 1: Notification of validation
- By end of week 3: Officer site visit and chasing outstanding consultee comments
- By end of week 6: Officer letter for minor changes with a 2-week deadline
- By end of week 7: Officer letter for more than minor changes with a 5-day deadline
- By end of week 9: Applicant provides draft section 106 agreement
- By end of week 13: Decision issued

There is an increased likelihood that major applications will be determined at the Planning Committee. Therefore, officers need to be in a position to make a recommendation by week 9, allowing time for the production and publication of the report before the Planning Regulatory Board meeting.

Given the tight statutory determination period, there is insufficient time to allow more than minor amendments (as defined above for minor applications, which also applies to major applications). The case officer will use their professional judgement to determine if an amendment is minor, based on the merits of the case.

For applications recommended for approval, subject to the completion of a Section 106 Agreement, we kindly request that applicants present a final draft version of the Section 106 Agreement at least 1 week before the Planning Regulatory Board meeting where the application will be determined.

4. Clarity on Engagement Levels with Case Officers

In setting out the above processes, we understand that the timescales are tight and that you may often want to discuss why a particular course of action is being taken by the case officer. Given the need to determine as many applications within the statutory period as possible, we want to be transparent about the fact that these opportunities will be more limited than they have been in the past.

That's why this process is part of a broader package that emphasizes the importance of our pre-application advice service, as outlined earlier. Our vision for the service is to spend more time engaging with prospective applicants in detailed pre-application discussions, rather than relying on extensions of time to resolve issues that arise once a formal application has been validated.

We appreciate your understanding and are here to support you through this process.

5. Applicant & developer self service

To ensure the smooth determination of planning applications, we offer a range of information on the planning pages of our website to provide as much information as possible. Additionally, the Council has produced several Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) that complement the policies within the Barnsley Local Plan. You can access these documents here:

<https://www.barnsley.gov.uk/services/planning-and-buildings/supplementary-planning-documents/>

The Council has also developed a series of specific masterplans that sit under the Local Plan, outlining the key principles that future planning applications must adhere to. These masterplans should be read in conjunction with the adopted Local Plan and the supplementary planning documents. You can find our masterplans here:

<https://www.barnsley.gov.uk/services/planning-and-buildings/local-planning-and-development/our-local-plan/masterplan-frameworks/>

We expect that all schemes will be submitted in full accordance with the Council's SPDs and masterplans unless there are significant material reasons for deviation.

Future self service:

The Council is committed to engaging with its customers, allowing for transparency of decision making as well as working in partnership with its communities and will be looking to a digital future in which additional self service initiatives will be explored. Additional communication will take place

Review of this customer service charter

Officers will regularly review the function and content of the Charter to assess its use and effectiveness, including identifying any improvements which can be made to it.