

# CHARGING FOR PRE-APPLICATION ADVICE

## GUIDANCE NOTE



**ASHFORD**  
BOROUGH COUNCIL

In addition to determining applications for planning permission, advert consent, listed building consent and works to protected trees, the Planning and Development Unit is able to provide you with advice and information on a variety of topics. Further information is available on the planning pages of our website [www.ashford.gov.uk](http://www.ashford.gov.uk).

In order for us to be able to sustain and improve our current levels of service, a range of charges has been introduced, in addition to the fees payable for the submission of applications. Charges will now be made for pre-application advice, handling minor amendments to permissions and consents, compliance checks and researching planning histories for permitted development restrictions. The full list of charges is available on the Fees for Planning Services leaflet.

This leaflet deals solely with the arrangements now in place for handling pre-application advice.

### **WHY SEEK ADVICE?**

**The Unit encourages and welcomes the opportunity to provide advice before an application is made. There are considerable benefits in seeking advice before making an application as**

- It gives you an opportunity to understand how our policies will be applied to your development.
- It can identify at an early stage where there is a need for specialist input, for example about listed buildings, trees, landscape, noise, transport, contaminated land, ecology or archaeology.
- It will assist you in preparing proposals for formal submission which, providing you have taken our advice fully into account, will be handled more quickly and the result will be more likely to be positive.
- It may lead to a reduction in time spent by your professional advisors in working up proposals.
- It may indicate that a proposal is completely unacceptable, saving you the cost of pursuing a formal application.

### **WHAT ARE THE CHARGES?**

Some telephone and written advice will still be provided free of charge but, for the remainder, a simple charging system is in operation. For all Major applications, the Unit will provide a service centred on meetings and discussion of the many and complex issues that large applications entail. There will be a charge for each meeting. Other enquires will be dealt with in writing and a set charge will apply.

**Free advice** will continue to be provided only for advice prior to an application for

- Alterations or extensions to single dwellings and other householder applications. (This does not include single, new or replacement dwellings which are charged **£133.00** (inc VAT))
- Works to Trees covered by Tree Preservation Orders or located in Conservation Areas.
- Advice on how to submit an application to establish whether planning permission is or was required. A fee will be charged for the application itself.
- Planning application advice following an Enforcement investigation.

### Level 1 Written Advice

**£67.00** (inc VAT) will be charged for written advice on all proposals that will require a consent from the Local Planning Authority under the Planning Acts, other than those free services listed above and those in levels 2 and 3 below.

### Level 2 Written Advice

**£133.00** (inc VAT) will be charged for written advice on all minor<sup>1</sup> developments (see definition below).

### Level 3 Meetings with Officers

**£335.00** (inc VAT) per hour or part thereof will be charges for all meetings to discuss major<sup>2</sup> development proposals (see definition below).

If the meeting is on site then travelling time will be included in the assessment for the above charge.

If further meetings are sought then a further fee will be levied at the above rate.

Should you require a meeting for a Level 1 or 2 proposal and the relevant Officer agrees that it would be an efficient and effective approach to resolving any issues, then the meeting will be charged at the level 3 fee and the level 1 or 2 charge will be waived.

These fees cover administration costs and Officers' time for research, assessment, a meeting as necessary and a written response. Any request for written advice must be accompanied by the relevant fee otherwise advice will not be provided. Each project or separate site referred to in an enquiry will be charged at the appropriate rate.

The charge for meeting will be agreed at the end of each meeting in accordance with the time taken and the fee scale above. An invoice will then be forwarded to you. Payment will be required within 21 days of the date of the invoice.

### **WHAT YOU WILL NEED TO DO.**

If your enquiry is very straightforward, and is one where free advice is provided you may telephone the Unit for advice (telephone 01233 331111), write to us, or you may be able to find the information you need on our Internet site – [www.ashford.gov.uk](http://www.ashford.gov.uk). We will normally ask you to write to us with details of your proposal if you want us to comment on a particular building, extension, design etc.

For level 1 or 2 enquiries you will need to write to us including the following as a minimum:

---

<sup>1</sup> Definitions.

Level 1 – Other development

Changes of Use, advertisement and other related applications

Level 2 - Minor development

Development that does not meet the criteria for level 3 major development and is not a level 1 application or householder development.

2 level 3 – Major development

- Applications for 10 residential units or more
- Residential sites of 0.5 ha or more
- The creation or change of use of 1000m<sup>2</sup> or more of non-residential floorspace,
- All sites of more than 1 hectare in size.

- Description of the nature and scale of development proposed and the uses to which land and buildings are to be put.
- Full site address and location plan (1:1250 scale) with the site outlined in red.
- Site history i.e. occupancy of the site.
- Photographs of the site.
- Sketch drawings providing details of the proposal. Floor plans for each floor of the proposed building together with at least sketch elevations that are sufficient to indicate the initial architectural approach and palette of materials. Drawings should also show any adjacent buildings to identify the context of the scheme, and
- the appropriate fee.

Major (level 3) enquiries will also need to include confirmation of your agreement to pay a fee in accordance with the Council's current charges. They may also need to be accompanied by an initial design and access statement, ecological, landscape, contamination, flood and transport assessments depending upon the location, nature and complexity of the development.

#### **WHAT WE WILL DO.**

On receipt of your initial enquiry, we will decide whether it is a level 1, 2 or 3 enquiry. If it is a level 1 or 2 matter, we will then check that the appropriate fee has been paid. If it has not, we will write to you confirming that we will not progress your enquiry until the appropriate fee has been paid.

If the fee has been paid or the proposal is a major one (level 3), then your enquiry will be allocated to an appropriate Officer. The senior officers of the Unit will decide who is the most appropriate officer to deal with it. An acknowledgement will be sent within 3 working days of a valid enquiry being received in the Unit and it will include a receipt for any fee paid, confirmation of the officer handling it and the date you may expect to receive a written reply to a Level 1 or 2 enquiry (normally 15 working days from receipt). This written reply setting out our advice will comprise the service for the standard charge. Further enquiries will be charged another fee.

If we do not have enough information to answer your enquiry then we will write to you by letter or email, setting out what information we need.

If the enquiry relates to a Major proposal, then you will be contacted by the Officer allocated to your enquiry, who will confirm whether there is sufficient information to provide advice and, if not, will ask for additional information. They will arrange a suitable date for a meeting and request confirmation in writing, if not already received, that you agree to pay the appropriate charge at the relevant hourly rate. The timing of the meeting will depend upon the complexity of the scheme and the amount of work that will be needed prior to a meeting including any time necessary to obtain initial views of other interested parties. Attendance of other officers at the meeting, including specialist advisors, will be at the Case Officer's discretion

At the end of the meeting, the appropriate fee will be agreed and this agreement will be formally recorded in writing. Following the meeting, we will write to you confirming the advice given. This will usually be within 15 working days unless the proposal is particularly complex, when an alternative timescale will be agreed at the end of the meeting. The written response will be verified by the Development Control Manager or the Strategic Sites and Design Manager as appropriate and will outline the major planning issues, matters agreed or raised at the meeting, and other constraints and requirements which have been agreed with the Council. You may also take notes at the meeting and if you wish, we will check and amend these as necessary.

The Development Control Manager and Strategic Sites and Design Manager have the right to decline a request for pre-application advice where it is not considered either appropriate or necessary.

**PLEASE NOTE**

Any advice given by Council Officers for pre-application enquiries does not indicate any formal decision by the Council as Local Planning Authority. Any views or opinions are given in good faith, and to the best of ability, without prejudice to the formal consideration of any planning application. The final decision on any application that you may then make can only be taken after the Council has consulted local people, statutory consultees and any other interested parties. The final decision on an application will then be made by senior officers or by the Council's Planning Committee and will be based on all of the information available at that time.

You should therefore be aware that officers cannot guarantee the final formal decision that will be made on your application (s). Any pre-application advice that has been provided will be carefully considered in reaching a decision or recommendation on an application; subject to the proviso that circumstances and information may change or come to light that could alter that position.

It should be noted that the weight given to pre application advice notes will decline over time.

Separate schedules of all of the Fees charged for Planning Services are available by telephoning 01233 331111 or on the planning pages of the Council Internet site [www.ashford.gov.uk](http://www.ashford.gov.uk) .