Developers Workshops

11 September 2018

Building Standards application validations

Local Development Plan 2 - Call for Sites

Strategic approach to planning

Building Standards - Feedback

BACKGROUND

Building standards are looking to introduce a procedure to aid validation. Attendees were presented with example checklists from other local authorities to promote discussion on what format the validation procedure should take. The examples showed the varying detail asked for across other local authorities and ranged from more simple lists to higher detailed and descriptive requirements.

Participants were asked for their comments on the perceived pros and cons of creating a validation checklist along with their thoughts on the level of information that should be included in the procedure.

KEY POINTS RAISED

Pros

- A procedure would remove the grey areas of what information is required to be submitted for validation.
- A validation checklist would help show the quantity of work required to apply for a building warrant.
- Time taken to assess information could be reduced.
- Planning have adopted a detailed checklist which appears to be no more onerous than the descriptive building standards list provided by another local authority.
- Several agents noted that most of the information within the detailed checklist is produced by agents at the moment anyway so it is no additional work.
- A detailed validation list could help to reduce the amount of points raised in the first assessment and thus speed up the assessment time.
- Wouldn't be complicated to complete or follow for agents. Shouldn't take any more time to complete.
- Could be a good tool for showing applicants when engaging the agent, to show the amount of work that they were going to have to complete for building warrant submission.
- Detailed checklist can be used as part of Quality Audit process if completed and included within the building warrant application.
- Other industries and professions use checklists as part of an audit process, where they are ticked and signed off before information is submitted or used by others.
- Checklist format would be easy to read through and tick off. Easier to read than generic list.

Concerns

- Time taken for validation could increase.
- One checklist will never cover all types of application (new dwelling, extension, conversion, work on listed building, non domestic work.)
- Level of information required varies from job to job so difficult to have 'one list suits all'.
- If checklist is vague it is open to interpretation and may not increase the quality of information provided at validation.

- If the checklist is too detailed information could be requested which isn't currently required and may be changed on site.
- If invalid, invalid letters would need a quick turnaround time and should include all reasons why the application is invalid first time, rather than another invalid point being raised on resubmission of information.
- The Business Support Officer validating the application needs to know what to look for. If not, information may be asked for which isn't relevant to specific application.
- With a detailed checklist, is the validation too onerous and time consuming? Does the department have the resources to cope with an additional check?
- A complex checklist could put people off submitting their own building warrants.

INFORMATION TO BE INCLUDED

- Procedure should be in the form of an easy to follow checklist.
- One checklist should not try and cover all types of construction e.g., new build, conversion, extension, alteration.
- Form could have separate sections for different work types but must be easy to navigate or people are put off using it.
- Checklists should be relevant to today's applications and standards of information.
- Separate list for non-domestic work required. This could include different scales of work commonly applied for (agricultural shed through to generic complex non domestic building.
- Feedback on the level of information required varied across the three groups. The least amount of people voiced wanting a simple list, with the others roughly halved between wanting a descriptive list and something in the middle.
- The checklist needs to be thorough enough so that it is not open to interpretation but not so thorough that it is onerous.
- Information asked for in the checklist could include points that are commonly missed in first assessments – top ten points requested by first assessments.
- Checklists could be provided with each application submitted to help provide quality assurance.

ACTION POINTS

- **DEVELOP validation checklist:**
  Draft copy of a validation checklist to be created and sent around potential users for comment before rolling out to everyone. This would provide opportunity for feedback before it is used.

- **IMPLEMENT validation checklist:**
  Make available to all users of the service. Consider its inclusion with application forms and information available on website. Building standards to utilise as part of validation procedures.

- **MONITOR validation checklist:**
  Once checklist is in use, set time to review the process and checklist to see if it can be improved on. Consider another workshop to discuss draft validation checklist and/or pilot scheme - with a few agents testing the checklist before rolling out to everyone.

Development Plans - Feedback

BACKGROUND

Local Development Plan 2 - Call for Sites

This workshop was delivered by staff members of the Council's development plans team to raise awareness about the forthcoming Call for Sites process for the next Local Development Plan (LDP2).

The workshop focused on:

- What the Call for Sites is and why we are doing it.
- Why a strategic approach to planning our future communities is necessary.
- The work that has been undertaken on the spatial strategy mapping and the preferred growth area mapping.
- Settlement studies to identify suitable land for housing and business/industry.
- How landowners and developers can get involved and submit sites.
- The benefits of landowners getting involved in the process
- The content of the online Call for Sites form.
- Key dates and what next.

KEY POINTS RAISED

- Planning service needs to make very clear (possibly on the form) that any process/development will not happen if the landowner does not consent to it.
- Forms should be simpler and better explanations of terms and what it asked for (sub-text). Think of target audience when asking questions on the form.
- Remove affordable housing from form as this is asking for too much information at the early stages.
- Can the call for sites be done in two stages? The first stage keeping it really simple and the second stage if the site is acceptable in terms of location, then asking for more information during the second stage.
- Huge amount of time and will be required to prepare information for the process and this may put participants off from getting involved.
- SIC needs to come forward with the land that they own – they are sitting on a lot of land.
- Planning Service should get the community council involved in the process and should be widely consulted to get community feedback.
- There should be front-funding more widely available to help developers meet costs of installing infrastructure. Is this something the SIC could get involved in.
  It is this cost that can hinder or stop medium to larger developments.
- The call for sites consultation process will not highlight capacity issues and will not instil any certainty. Capacity issues need to be highlighted by agencies and stakeholders.
- Consult as widely as possible so no miss-information goes out.
- The call for sites process should streamline the planning application process and make it easier for developers to get planning permission – this is something you should make sure you highlight.

- Explanatory text highlighting that process cannot happen without landowners permission.
- Revisit on-line form again and add in explanatory text to better help users of the form
- Remove unnecessary requests for information.
- Asses the logistics of having a two-stage approach to the call for sites.

Development Management - Feedback

BACKGROUND -

In February 2018 the Development Management Team began using the HOPS validation guidance document when carrying out validation checks on planning applications. The aim of the workshop was to: gain feedback from attendees of their experience of how following the validation guidance document was going; and advise on further steps that had been taken by the Team to streamline and speed up the validation process in-house.

FEEDBACK ON EXPERIENCE

Each group was advised that to promote consistency in the use of the guidelines the Team had sat down together at meetings to validate applications. This had proved to be time consuming, but with Business Support also having been involved and confidence established the groups were told that the responsibility for validation had recently been transferred to Business Support. It had been identified that this also brought with it the benefit of enabling validation checking to take place more quickly following an application's submission (rather than having to wait for the next twice weekly validation meeting as had been taking place), and if it was a simple matter that needed addressing a phone call could be made to the agent or applicant to let them know.

The general consensus from the groups was that they were getting to grips with the validation process, and welcomed that Business Support were now doing the validation and that the process could be speeded and simplified between the Team and themselves as either agents or applicants. The feedback on the greater use of telephone communication was that it would be welcomed by all. It was requested by more than one in the groups that when more information is being asked for there is an appreciation that this represents an additional cost to the client and the agent, and also that consideration should be given to the need for what is being requested - for example, for an existing site plan for what is an empty site in every case, or elevations for existing buildings for applications for changes of windows in conservation areas when photographs might suffice, or a site section for a flat site. There was also discussion in the groups as to what should be the scale for a Site Plan, with its being suggested that 1:250 would be a better scale than the 1:200 or 1:500 which the guidelines advocate. It was thought by some that it was a convention which is why the guidelines say what they do.

Figures were provided to the attendees about the most common issues that had been found had needed to be addressed, and whether there were differences between local agents and those who submit applications but are based south, and also where there are no agents. We advised that we would probably need another six months of use of the guidelines for a true reflection of what the figures show to be gained, the aim of the adoption for use of the guidelines having been to alleviate processing delays. Every group expressed concern about the staffing levels in the Team following departures that had taken place, since whilst the changes made to the validation process was speeding it up, vacancies within the Team meant that once validated it was taking longer for applications to be determined. Some attendees asked that more information be provided about the status of applications given the circumstances to help them advise their clients.

FEEDBACK ON EXPERIENCE CONTINUED

Attendees were provided with validation checklists that had been produced by the Team for use in the validation of householder and full planning applications. These, together with a checklist of other additional documents that may be required for certain types of proposed development, had previously been circulated to invitees to the developer's meetings.

GENERAL FINDINGS

The small group format meant that interaction between individuals was again easier to generate, but the tables being set close together made it too noisy at times to be able to capture everything that was being said straight away. We received some useful feedback from attendees, including on some issues that went outside of the scope of the workshop but reflected a concern that exists that the system should not be burdened by work of its own making e.g. removal of permitted development rights.

ACTION POINTS

- To provide information on the status of applications in the light of staffing levels, firstly on the Council's website.
- To complete work on the suite of Validation Checklists and make them available in an editable format.
- To continue to monitor the validation status of planning application submissions in order that a truer picture of the change arising from the use of the guidelines can be presented at future developer's workshops.