Top 10 tips on how to speed up your planning application

We all want planning applications to be submitted and decided as soon as possible to allow development on site to begin and a profit to be made.

To assist in achieving that goal we have put together 10 top tips on how to speed up your planning application and to make sure you get a positive outcome as quickly as possible:

1. Check what you need to submit

Know the validation requirements for the type of planning application you are submitting. Different local authorities have different requirements and therefore it is important that you know what is required to support your application prior to submission. If you don't get this right, the application won't be registered and you'll be delayed before you start.

2. Have a pre-application meeting

Arrange a pre-application meeting with a planning officer and, where possible, other technical officers at the Council before you submit. Such meetings will provide you with an indication as to how the Council will view the scheme and provide an opportunity to address any potentially conflicting points prior to the submission of an application. You can use the meeting to re-confirm what you need to submit too.

3. Get surveys done in time

Some supporting reports can only be done at certain times of the year. For example, many ecological surveys need to be carried out in the spring when animals are starting to become active again. Similarly, if you need traffic counts for a Transport Assessment, these often can't be carried out during the school holidays because traffic is lighter then. Other surveys can need repeated visits over a period of time. So check if there are any time restrictions on these reports as early as possible.

4. Consult the public prior to submission

By carrying out a public consultation exercise, no matter how small or large, prior to the submission of a planning application, you will get an indication of the level of support which will be received for a scheme. Many objections to applications are caused by mis-understanding the information submitted, so if all you achieve is reducing that confusion it will be benficial. Often, it helps you identify concerns that you wouldn't otherwise know existed but which can sometimes easily be incorporated into the design at an early stage.

5. Check your application has been validated

Once an application has been submitted it is reviewed by the Council to make sure it is a valid application. This can take a number of days, but it is worth calling the Council early to check on progress. This should give you plenty of notice of anything

else you need to provided and it might even encourage the Council to validate the application earlier that they may have done otherwise.

6. Speak to the case officer

Once the application is submitted, no matter how large or small it may be, it is very important to maintain a constant dialogue with the case officer. This will make sure that any concerns they may have are discovered early and can be addressed quickly, preventing delays further down the line when you get closer to determination or committee dates.

7. Chase up statutory consultation responses

The Council might not send through consultation responses to you as soon as they arrive, so it is important to keep an eye on the Council's website to see responses as they are received. It can even be worth supporting consultants getting in touch with those consultees direct, to chase up a quicker response and to try to address any issues before they report back to the Council. Some matters may require addressing prior to an application being determined, and therefore any delay in failing to respond to these may subsequently delay the application's determination or even result in a refusal.

8. Check committee dates and election dates

By knowing when the relevant planning committee meetings are scheduled to take place you can discuss with the case officer which committee date they may be aiming for and when they have to have their committee report finalised. This will provide both the case officer and your team of consultants a deadline to work to. Local elections, which often take place during May, can also impact upon the determination of planning applications; some Councils do not hold committees during this month, whilst at other Councils, the prospect of nearby elections can influence members' decisions. Therefore, where an application is of a particularly contentious nature committee dates in May may prove difficult.

9. Prepare thoroughly for committee

If your application is to be decided by planning committee, do your research on it first. How long will you have to speak and what do you want to say? Will you be asked questions by Councillors? Which objectors are speaking? Knowing how the meeting will be conducted will make sure there aren't any unexpected surprises are issues you can't deal with on the day, making sure your application will actually be approved rather than being deferred for another day or, worst of all, refused.

10. Start work on any legal agreement early

Many applications need a Section 106 Agreement to be signed before the Decision Notice can actually be issued. These agreements can often take a long time to resolve so if your application looks to be heading for approval, ask the Council if they will start drafting that agreement in advance of planning committee. It will help them

to be able to report to committee exactly what the agreement will include, and it will help you get a faster decision.

BONUS TIP

And finally, a bonus tip which will assist with the ten other tips and help to speed up your planning application overall. We recommend hiring a planning consultant to manage the submission and monitoring of planning applications. They can manage the technical consultants on the project, ensuring that deadlines are met and issues are addressed as quickly as possible, and liaise with the Council to address any concerns they have. Taken together, this will increase the chances of a positive outcome in the quickest possible timeframe.