

PRE APPLICATION ADVICE RESPONSES

Date of letter	Received From	Comments	Comments by BBNPA
4/11/2009	Geoff Powell	<p>Advocated this for many years and feel this is a positive way forward that can save time and money in the long run as only good applications would go forward to survey and additional architectural fees. Plus the eventual application should then have a good chance of success assuming the advice is listened to and all the required information is provided. The planning process has become complicated in the last year and is increasing in complexity with so many specialist consultants involved to furnish the applications with cost implications. The cost to applicants has vastly increased upfront and these costs can be a saving if the application is a 'non runner'. Therefore, pre-discussion will help the efficiency of system for applicants, agents and particularly the Authority as this should aid to eliminate many waste of time applications and their processing time, plus the hassle factor when refusals are issued.</p>	Acknowledge response
6/11/2009	Head of Estates, The Caravan Club, East Grinstead	<p>Consider there to be advantages in conducting pre-application consultations, not least because the Club are better able to incorporate any views expressed by the DC Officers but are extremely concerned that to place a charge on this service would not only severely discourage prospective applicants from conducting these valuable pre-application consultations but may even act as an incentive to embark upon development that would otherwise be cautioned as requiring formal planning permission.</p> <p>Whilst one might embark upon a process of adjusting the fee to the size of scheme, as suggested in the consultation paper, the Club believe this would be a retrograde step as the Authority has everything to gain from information consultations and arguably far more in the case of major schemes. The Club believes it would be unhelpful in this respect to load the charges against these major projects.</p> <p>Should the Park decide that it needs to raise funds at every opportunity, the Club strongly recommend that a standard consultation figure should be applied</p>	Acknowledge response

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		<p>at no more than £100 plus VAT irrespective of the size of the project. Not only will this take into account the aspects referred to earlier in their letter but it would also reflect the fact that the formal application will, in any event, carry a fee that is proportionate to the scale of the project</p>	
11/11/2009	Vice Chairman, Crai Community Council	<p>Consider the proposed changes to be fair and reasonable and support what the Park proposes. The Council wished clarification as a matter of urgency relating to agricultural buildings. They hoped and expected that the erection of these would come under 'minor development relating to a small business' and so pre-application advice would not be charged for.</p> <p>If the Council is wrong in this assumption they may well feel the need to comment further.</p>	Acknowledge response and clarify query regarding agricultural buildings.
11/11/2009	Clerk to Llangors Community Council	The Council does not support the proposal particularly in the case of advice for single dwellings and small businesses. It was felt that charges will only encourage projects to go ahead without planning consent leading to more retrospective planning applications and enforcement action.	Acknowledge response
16/11/2009	Kirsty Williams AM National Assembly for Wales	<p>Wanted clarification as to how the charges may impact on the ability of an elected representative to act on behalf of a constituent.</p> <p>Notes the guidance document stated that advice to Community Councils and County Councillors will not be charged. Wanted indication as to whether charges would apply to Assembly Members, Members of Parliament and Members of the European Parliament.</p> <p>Frequently writes to BBNPA on behalf of constituents. Wanted to know if these changes to charging for advice would restrict her ability to pursue cases on behalf of constituents ie will the BBNPA provide substantive responses to correspondence and if so, will Ms Williams or the constituent be charged.</p> <p>Will meetings with herself and a constituent to make progress on difficult cases take place in the future and if so, will they be charged to Ms Williams as she</p>	Acknowledge with extra paragraph to clarify costs to AMs

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		<p>asked for the meeting or to the constituent/community she is attempting to assist.</p> <p>8/12/09 - Email received by Chris Morgan from Kirsty Williams – Does the exemption for Councillors also apply to MP's and Assembly Members, the answer to this will obviously have some bearing on my comments to the consultation.</p>	
19/11/2009	Nicky Williams, Clerk, Llangynidr Community Council	<p>Council meeting to be held next week but wished to point out some typos –</p> <p>Page 6 under Please Note, 6th line down. Should it be 'Planning Authority' rather than 'Council'.</p> <p>Page 2, 1st charge. Not sure what is meant by the wording 'replies to written requests for information on documents received from Solicitors, Developers or Professional Agents'</p> <p>Does this mean the Authority would charge £50 to a professional agent requesting a copy of a Solicitor's letter or has she misinterpreted it. If so, would not this fall under the Freedom of Information Act?</p> <p>Knows that under the FOI (appropriate limit and fees) Regulation 2004, If she receives any requests in writing for information, she can only charge for the actual costs of photocopying and postage and not for her time. If the request does not fall under the FOI, then £50 may be considered to be excessive.</p> <p>26/11/2009 – email received from the Clerk to the Council as a result of their meeting –</p> <p>The Council are pleased the planning surgery will remain free as this is a very good service and staff are very helpful.</p> <p>The majority of Councillors believe charging for advice would be a really bad move for the following reasons:-</p>	<p>Check typographical errors</p> <p>Acknowledge with extra paragraph</p>

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		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Developers are already taking a cut in profits with affordable housing. 2. People will be put off by the charges and just put the application in without discussing it in advance. It is much better to start with consultation in the early stages, when everything is much more flexible. This leads to more sensible planning applications being submitted. 3. The money made from these charges will not be great compared with the extra work load in administering them. 4. More time may be spent working out the complex charges than giving out advice. 5. With the economy in such a bad state at the moment, now is not the time to bring in charges like this. 	
20/11/2009	Clerk to Llywel Community Council	The Council feels this to be a retrograde step and that planning informal discussions prior to applying should not be billed. It was questioned where members of the public would find out information. These charges were therefore objected to.	Acknowledge response
23/11/2009	Ryan Williams, McCartneys. Mr Williams was also responding as Chairman of RICS Mid Wales	<p>Recognises the issue of there being extensive consultations necessary to the BBNPA pre-scheme and the need to try to control and regulate this, it is his belief that charging is actually going to be counter-productive.</p> <p>Because of the difficulty in obtaining pre-application consultation meetings, he believes this has contributed to the slow down in the planning process and made it far more likely that applications will be submitted initially in a way that is likely to be unacceptable to the Authority. When the BBNPA suspended pre-application consultations because we were too busy, the net result was in fact a higher number of recommendations for refusal for this reason. He believes that good, free and accessible pre-application advice is by far the best way to ensure that those who submit an application and our Officers are in tune from the start, so that applications can be submitted and passed without lengthy re-drafting.</p> <p>He also believes there are additional problems. Firstly, applicants and agents will expect value for money from consultations and expect the advice to be sound and fully backed up by senior officers at the next level. To say the advice</p>	Acknowledge response

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		<p>is informal and not binding is not enough. I suspect the Authority will be making “a rod for its own back” if advice which is paid for is then subsequently overturned, changed or withdrawn. He thinks we will have to be exceptionally careful in ensuring that any advice given is indeed fully researched and correct as the implications of paid for advice is that it carries a professional ability which can be actioned upon if the client suffers a subsequent loss. In addition, the cost of administering the scheme will almost certainly be greater than the proceeds from it and Mr Williams is convinced that the scheme will be unpopular with agents and applicants alike.</p> <p>He says that Chris Morgan quite correctly said that agents should, themselves, be conversant with policy and be aware of this prior to any submission. Fundamentally, however, it is the interpretation of the relevant officer that will govern the more minor details of any submission. Continuity of advice will be crucial as a change in officers can result in a change in opinion and interpretation and we have seen this on many occasions in recent years.</p> <p>It seems to Mr Williams another level of bureaucracy that will further strain the relationship between applicants, agents and the local planning Authority. He thinks the charge for this is contrary to natural justice and further increases the cost of an application, which is a further detriment to the normal applicant.</p>	
23/11/2009	Steve Smith, Head of Planning & Control, Blaenau Gwent CBC	<p>Whilst he appreciates the difficult financial climate and strain on the planning service, believes this to be a retrograde step and charging for advice is contrary to what should be the fundamental aims of the service to each of the distinct client groups.</p> <p>Mr Smith refers to the covering letter in that it states charges are being introduced to cover the cost of providing the advice service and to avoid it falling to the council tax payer. The BBNPA does not have any direct council tax payers and he would be surprised if charging covers the cost. He has not seen the background business case and projected income for the next few years and would be interested to read any monitoring reports to see if the income generated covers the cost of providing the service and what effect charging has</p>	Acknowledge response and provide Mr Smith with the results of any monitoring exercise carried out.

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		<p>on the volume of enquiries received.</p> <p>It is common practice in his authority for officers of other departments to attend preliminary meetings or contribute to written enquiries eg highway officers and queries whether the income generated will be shared between the departments who contribute or will it be retained solely for planning. He referred to the section headed "What Advice Will Be Provided" and queried if this should include a bullet point to cover consultee advice.</p> <p>Mr Smith stated that in his Authority, minor charging for solicitor/conveyance enquiries was introduced a few years ago - enquiries seeking confirmation that conditions were discharged or complied with etc and also seeking a planning history. In his view, this was a simple way of circumventing the search process and introducing a fee did result in a reduction in those types of enquiries. This, he says, is different to charging for preliminary advice. The aim cannot be to reduce the volume of enquiries, but ultimately that is a likely outcome.</p> <p>He says, the timing of the initiative comes when workloads and application caseloads are relatively low. Now is the time that many people might be considering a project in the near future when the economy recovers. It is his view that these enquiries should be actively encouraged.</p> <p>He noted that the fee schedule states minor development to small business is not covered and suggested this needed defining. He queried what is a minor development, what is a small business etc. He also referred to the fee schedule where it states that we will charge for "Other small scale major development". He says this is confusing and queried can development be small scale and major?</p> <p>He says it is also confusing from the draft document as to whether a meeting is an automatic right upon payment of the fee. It is implied that senior officers will decide if a meeting is required. If he were paying the fee, he would have a legitimate expectation of a face to face meeting.</p> <p>Finally, he queries how the system would be monitored in terms of what effect</p>	

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		the charging regime has, how will replies be quality assured, will we meet the projected response times, will agents be offered the opportunity to comment after an initial period.	
23/11/2009	Clerk to Llantilio Pertholey Community Council	<p>Members of the Community Council believe that the proposal to give pre-application advice would usurp the Council's chance to say yes or no to an application presented to them for consideration. An applicant, having received advice from the NPA Planning Department indicating that his/her application was suitable, would obviate the council's opportunity to assess the details of the application and make recommendations.</p> <p>Whilst Members agreed that the fees for the service seem reasonable, and the Council could also avail themselves of the service, the benefit of the service to the Council were questioned in light of the views above.</p>	Acknowledge response and provide the Council with the results of any monitoring exercise carried out.
24/11/2009	Clerk to Crickhowell Town Council	The Town Council supports the proposed charges for pre-application planning advice.	Acknowledge response
25/11/2009	Development Management Officer, Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority	<p>The Authority has considered the introduction of charges briefly but have not taken it any further than that. Members are particularly keen to encourage this process and would not want anything to deter people from using the service.</p> <p>Would watch with interest and after say 12 months would ask –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) Whether the number using the pre-app service had increased or decreased, if so by how many? (ii) The amount of money collected (minus cost of collection) ie is it worth it? (iii) The success or otherwise of keeping to the timetable promised (iv) Whether we are ring fencing staff time to ensure that targets for pre-app are met without compromising the 8 week application decision turnaround. <p>With regard to detailed comments, would have thought that few inquiries could</p>	Acknowledge response and provide them with the results of any monitoring exercise carried out.

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		<p>be answered without a site visit so the basic fee of £50 will probably apply to the vast majority of pre-app inquiries. They think that the amounts chosen do cover the cost of providing the service so there will still be some cost to the general council tax payer.</p> <p>Assume the exemption for County Councillors should be widened to cover all Members.</p> <p>Stated there is a need to standardise whether 20 working days or 20 days as both are used in the paperwork.</p>	
2/12/2009	Planning Liaison Officer The Coal Authority	Have no specific comments to make at this stage.	Acknowledge response
2/12/2009	Development Planning Manager Welsh Water	<p>DCWW has no comment to make on the proposal as they believe it is a matter for this Authority to decide.</p> <p>They too offer a pre-planning advice service as a means of assisting potential developers of a development site's viability. The service assists in identifying whether problems may exist regarding their infrastructure and how these could be overcome to allow the development to proceed. They believe their service benefits developments as it can highlight potential issues that may need to be resolved at the earliest opportunity rather than face disappointment once a planning application is lodged and in particular where a consultee may recommend refusal unless mitigation measures can be implemented.</p>	Acknowledge response
6/12/2009	Clerk to Crickhowell & District Civic Society	<p>As a generality accept the proposal but suggested the following –</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Under – We WILL charge for advice on: - include some 'ball park' figures for time allocated, as the time required could vary considerably and should relate to the charge made. 2. Whilst the intentions are clear, would suggest the second paragraph 'WHAT YOU WILL NEED TO DO' should be altered to "For all other enquiries...." And the third paragraph "For these enquiries...." 	Acknowledge receipt and thank them for their suggestions

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		<p>3. MEETINGS – suggested that if a meeting is requested against our advice, it should be allowed but charged for a high rate. Consideration should also be given to charging extra for other officers and specialists at any meeting.</p>	
7/12/2009	Brecon Beacons Park Society	Find the new scheme acceptable as they feel it is sensible to encourage developers and landowners to seek advice before submitting planning applications.	Acknowledge response
10/12/2009	Clerk to Vale of Grwyney Community Council	Strongly object to the proposal and wished to point out that Powys CC rejected introducing such charges. They feel it is unfair for residents of the Park to be charged for advice which is freely available elsewhere in Powys and believed an advisory body such as the Park should provide advice free to its community.	Acknowledge response
16/12/2009	J L Evans CPRW	<p>Understands the principle underlying the proposal but does not agree with the last bullet point on the second page of the document not to charge for advice to registered social landlords as this would give them preferential treatment because their objectives are regarding as socially desirable and of public benefit. If this principle is accepted it should be applied to other organisations and proposals which are of public benefit eg education, health, defence, compliance with disability and other anti discrimination legislation.</p> <p>RSLs are publicly-funded bodies which are much stronger financially than many other often smaller, privately or charitably funded bodies. He states it is wrong to discriminate positively in their favour. Where the RSL will retain ownership and management of the scheme, it will be able to recover any fees charged for pre-application advice, in the same way as fees for obtaining planning permission and building regulations consent by including them as part of its overheads when calculating the rent it charges to tenants.</p> <p>They make no comment on the proposals scale of fees set out in the table on page 2.</p> <p>With regard to Meetings, he stated these should be more flexible and applicant</p>	

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		<p>friendly. It is not in their view, open or democratic for a decision on whether a meeting is necessary to be made by officers. If a meeting has been requested and a fee is to be paid, then a meeting should take place as a matter of course. Often points arising in meetings can be resolved simply there and then without resort to lengthy correspondence and delay.</p> <p>Attendance of other officers at meetings eg ecologist, can also be useful and save time. CPRW do not think their attendance should be solely at the case officer's direction if such attendance has been specifically requested by the applicant. The case officer will have had 20 working days to arrange the meeting and applicants would probably not object to a slight further deferment if it helped to ensure that a specialist other officer would be able to attend.</p> <p>Referring to the last sentence of the meetings section, Mr Evans said this is unduly heavy. Anyone attending a meeting can make whatever notes they like and it is not right to give the case officer power to check and amend these as necessary. If agreed, notes of a meeting are to be kept as a matter of record, it is for all parties attending the meeting to agree them, preferably signing them at the end of the meeting or as soon as they have been typed out.</p> <p>The disclaimers in the "Please Note" section were noted.</p>	
17/12/2009	Clerk to Talgarth Town Council	Unanimously feel there should be no charges levied for planning applications in respect of domestic dwellings when an applicant uses an agent.	Acknowledge response
17/12/2009	Local Agents' response – Andrew Bevan Bernard Eacock Ian Jones Sam Organ Tim Organ Geoff Powell Ian Roberts Ryan Williams	See attached comments attached.	Acknowledge response and inform Agents consultations responses will be discussed at forthcoming Agents' meeting

**LOCAL AGENTS' RESPONSE TO REQUEST FOR CONSULTATION
IN RESPECT OF POLICY ES.25 AND THE
PROPOSED CHARGING FOR PRE-APPLICATION PLANNING ADVICE**

Thank you for your invitation to comment on your proposed Guidance Notes re. Policy ES.25 'The Renovation of Former Dwellings', and charging for pre-application planning advice.

First, we would like to welcome your recent statement at the Agents' Meeting when you announced that a number of your staff are to undergo training in matters of sustainability and energy conservation. As you will know, the Welsh Assembly has emphasised that this must apply as a priority – ["Sustainable development as the overarching strategic aim of all our policies and programmes, across all Ministerial portfolios" – p.4 "*One Wales, One Planet, the Sustainable Development Scheme of the Welsh Assembly Government*", May 2009]. All of those involved in the built environment should be knowledgeable and conversant with these principles, and we hope the access to further training will be made available to all staff and elected representatives, especially those involved in policy making and development control.

In considering your draft proposals regarding ES.25 and proposed charging for advice, we think it is necessary to consider them in the light of all of your policies as a whole, and also how they reflect the Welsh Assembly's planning policies and commitment to a sustainable, well-designed future: in particular TAN.12 and the recently announced Council – "*One Wales, One Planet*" mentioned above.

First, in respect of ES.25 and ES.24, your further Guidance Notes under consideration, we have to say these are not grounded in an understanding of our history, nor do they show any comprehension of good design. For example, even a cursory study of the "*Royal Commission on Ancient & Historical Monuments in Wales*" book, Pevsner's "*Houses of the Welsh Countryside*" or Simon Jenkins' "*Wales' Churches, Houses and Castles*" will demonstrate the evolution of our culture. Each generation has modified, upgraded, adapted and extended buildings for good reason: to improve and enhance its way of life. They did this by responding to their contemporary social, cultural, technical and economic priorities. Each advancement of civilisation is therefore embedded in the buildings that we have inherited. The structures, design details, materials, methods of working and landscaping tell the story of the place. This constitutes our history – our knowledge of where we have come from. This is our tradition.

- Why, in your policies, do you wish to halt this process of maturation?
- Do we have nothing at this time to say culturally?
- Are you advocating a return to the Dark Ages?

What is incomprehensible is that you advocate copying the past at a time when we are faced with the gravest possibilities for the future. The threat of severe and perhaps irreversible climate change could lead to the destruction of our landscape and built environment on a scale unknown before. Those who drafted Welsh Assembly TAN.12 and "*One Wales: One Planet*" clearly understood the seriousness of the situation, and the need for change and call for innovation and flexibility, plus the "need to avoid prescriptive policies".

Expertise in landscaping and architecture, not bureaucratic rigidity, is now urgently needed in order to promote high quality and appropriate development.

It is understood that 80% of existing buildings will still be in use by 2050, and will require extensive retro-fitting in order to make them fit for purpose. Many buildings now being approved for adaptation, enlargement and enhancement will also need to be upgraded because they lack the qualities necessary to absorb passive energy and reduce energy loss, e.g. N^o Cantref Barns [N^o 09/03708]. To advocate now the use of high-embodied energy materials like stone roofing materials, imported from as far away as Asia, is unacceptable. To require that window and door openings remain as found similarly shows a lack of understanding of how people now live, and the need for light and warmth, not to mention other more spiritual aspects of shelter such as visual delight and the aesthetic enjoyment of a connection to the surrounding landscape.

TAN.12 - 3.11 - states "In the spirit of a more holistic approach to design issues, a shift in emphasis is required away from total reliance on prescriptive standards, which can have the effect of stifling innovation and creativity. Instead all those involved in the design process should focus from the outset on meeting a series of key objectives of good design, which achieve the aims of the development and ensure its fitness for purpose."

3.12 advocates "promoting innovative design in buildings, infrastructure, urban and rural landscape, and public art." Innovation involves new ideas, not a rigid application of existing or previous ways of working. 3.12 continues – "designing for change by promoting adaptable development that can respond to social, technical, economic and environmental conditions over time".

The demands of today call for the use of materials with low-embodied energy such as wood and metal sheeting, as opposed to concrete, newly-mined stone and slate. Flexibility in the choice of structure and cladding is vital, choices not limited to those of the past.

In the past, especially in rural areas, where most work was outside in all winds and weathers, buildings turned in on themselves as a refuge from the elements. We now have the ability, the techniques and the materials to conserve energy, and enjoy the landscape, therefore the functional plans of our dwellings and the placement of windows and doors need to reflect these facts.

If your policies are to reflect and promote contemporary priorities, consistent with the past, they need to embrace the need for sustainability in a more comprehensive way. The living standards of today have progressed: for example:

- the manipulation of light to enrich the interiors
- greater volumes and spaces to reflect our increased physique
- rooms that express the way we live and relate to one another
- and, unlike our predecessors, we now wish to connect our interior spaces to the landscape

As drafted, your policy is both too prescriptive and unnecessarily rigid, conflict with the National Parks of Wales Sustainable Design Guide, and fail to acknowledge and adequately address the requirements of TAN.12 and *One Wales, One Planet*.

All of this requires skill and inventiveness on the part of the designer in order to sympathetically work with the characteristics of the place and buildings, enhancing and enriching the lives of those who live and work in the area.

Our work should be a new vernacular as advocated by your Draft Sustainability Guidance Notes.

The need for change and the continuum of our traditions need not weaken our sense of place or our enjoyment of rich landscapes such as the Brecon Beacons. Quite the reverse. Our new work must respect our history. We must constantly strive to enrich our urban areas and countryside. The respect we show is best illustrated by continuing the work of our forebears in a considered and profound way.

When adding to an existing building, built with the priorities of a totally different time, we should not slavishly copy what is there. Contrast enables us to establish differences and accentuates the importance of our heritage. Moreover, two opposites, placed in a contrasting situation, establish a dialogue between them. Contrast is a principle for ordering our environment. For opposites to enter into a 'dialogue', the differences must, however, be sufficiently pronounced. Examples illustrating this approach are commonplace, eg. Norman Foster's Reichstag and Eric Parry's alterations and extensions to St. Martin's in the Field. The eye remains the principal judge. How else are we to understand our history? We should not be trying to create a Disney-esque environment but a faithful visual expression of, hopefully, a cultured and vibrant society.

What we are advocating is not a relaxation of our standards, but a more positive pursuit of quality and a raising of standards as advocated by TAN.12. This can only come about through creativity, not rigid prescriptive, preconceived formulae.

The quest for sound and consistent policies requires criticism of other policies. ES.24 for example: the conversion of barns into commercial accommodation rather than homes is hopelessly irrational and unworkable. Even if this could be made to work, it will only increase the number of vehicles moving through and parking in the countryside, damaging and reducing the remoteness of the mountains. Given that the average ground floor area of a barn is 700 sq.ft., commercial uses could generate at least seven movements twice per day, plus the need for over 1,500 sq.ft of parking areas. So much for landscape and sustainability considerations.

Another illustration: your reluctance to allow extensions to barns and other agricultural buildings when converted is another case in point where restrictive policies do not conform to history. As English Heritage states in their excellent guide to good practice "*The Conversion of Traditional Farm Buildings*", "farmsteads and their buildings must be understood in terms of the function or functions they were intended to house. Their scale and form are directly related to the historic land use of the area, which is also reflected in the wider landscape." Brecon Beacons' farms predominantly rely on sheep farming and, to a lesser extent, on pig and cattle rearing. Farmyards are most commonly formed by groups of buildings to create shelter and enclosure. Large storage barns for food storage and cattle are the support for lean-tos and subservient structures for pig, sheep, chickens, dogs, etc. - all equally important for the operation of a farm and also characteristic of this area.

To strip away these support buildings, as advocated by your policies, destroys the local characteristics and vernacular, leading to an insidious form of gentrification.

Policy ES.25 is another typical case in point, where you restrict an extension to 20%. This is based, not on an aesthetic judgement, but on a bureaucratic calculation. It must be pointed out that some of the best historic buildings in the Brecon Beacons have been extended many times, amounting to well beyond 20%. This should not be a matter of mathematics but a judgement, taking into account appropriateness, design quality and the contribution the proposals make to landscape or urban quality. Our residential space standards are amongst

the lowest in Europe. The people of Wales deserve better than to be restricted in this arbitrary way, in cases where there are no negative landscape or design reasons justifying refusal.

Recent research by Glyndwr University for Powys County Council and yourselves highlights the urgent need for homes for single parents, but also:

- flexible homes for parents plus adult sons and daughters, plus perhaps even their offspring
- shared family space for several generations, and for the elderly requiring support and nursing care. The cost of sheltered nursing home accommodation is now becoming prohibitive for many people.

There are many other inconsistencies and defects in the existing policies which also need attention. We will be only too pleased to list them if this is likely to lead to a productive discussion, leading to improved policies.

CHARGING FOR PRE-APPLICATION ADVICE

A year ago we were consulted on your Proposed Customer Care Charter. Local people and businesses are not customers, as was stated at the time - your staff are employed to administer the development control system on their behalf.

The introduction of charges will change the relationship between you and the public, and, in our opinion, not for the better. It is worth pointing out that we already pay for your services. The public do not pay for education, the Health Service, highway improvements and maintenance etc. on an individual basis. We can see no reason why the public should pay twice for the service you provide. It would be a double form of taxation.

The Planning Service is for everyone's benefit, and to charge for advice, as proposed, is a one-sided tax. Each and every application provokes a response from interested parties safeguarding their own, and every other imaginable other, interested party. Do you intend charging them also, as they are often responsible for excessive amounts of time and effort?

Given that there is a great deal of antipathy towards the Development Control function of the Parks, any further shift towards a "them-and-us" situation cannot be beneficial. This has been generated by a negative response to enquiries, advice and the processing of applications.

A few typical examples causing frustration:

- members of the public attending planning surgeries have subsequently produced designs based on advice received. On returning to the next surgery, the proposals based on the initial advice have been rejected and new advice offered, only for the process to be repeated not once, but a further two times.
- another potential applicant sought advice and confirmed it in writing, only for her scheme, consistent with the advice given, to be rejected.
- detailed and constructive discussions have taken place with your Conservation Officer only for the resulting advice to be overturned by a Team Leader, without an articulate and profound reason being offered.

These incidents are not uncommon. This inability to assess, consider and comment on peoples' and businesses legitimate aspirations has led to a great deal of frustration and anger. Often these rejections have little or nothing to do with the impact on the street scene, countryside or building in question, but have fallen foul of the restrictive policies you have adopted, plus the proposals have been considered in the most negative of lights. In this environment members of the public are angered to the point of potential violence, both verbal and physical.

Charging will only exacerbate this atmosphere of confrontation. It is unfair and will be seen as unfair.

Until the Parks establish policies based on historically sound aesthetic expertise, the advice given would be based on false pretences. If people pay for advice they reasonably expect it to be sound and consistent. Charging for unsound or poor advice will only lead to claims for compensation and legal action, which could be a very expensive waste of the public's money.

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These incidents are not uncommon. This inability to assess, consider and comment on peoples' and businesses legitimate aspirations has led to a great deal of frustration and anger. Often these rejections have little or nothing to do with the impact on the street scene, countryside or building in question, but have fallen foul of the restrictive policies you have adopted, plus the proposals have been considered in the most negative of lights. In this environment members of the public are angered to the point of potential violence, both verbal and physical.

Charging will only exacerbate this atmosphere of confrontation. It is unfair and will be seen as unfair.

Until the Parks establish policies based on historically sound aesthetic expertise, the advice given would be based on false pretences. If people pay for advice they reasonably expect it to be sound and consistent. Charging for unsound or poor advice will only lead to claims for compensation and legal action, which could be a very expensive waste of the public's money.

As a Planning Authority you have a duty to look after the interests of constituents and those who work in the area. As the nearest mountain range to London and other major cities, and with an already established tourist market, the Brecon Beacons should be an area with a vibrant economy. Restricted by poorly-conceived policies, administered in a negative fashion, with little or no viable and/or imaginative alternative visions offered, local people and businesses will remain unsatisfied and disillusioned.

Based on experience, the people in the Brecon Beacons do not get the service, support and protection they deserve. Standards need to be improved.

In conclusion, we would therefore propose:

- before any new policies or guidance notes are advocated, that the Authority appoints an Architectural Adviser, a person with stature and expertise with the ability to offer impartial advice. The Design Commission for Wales, the Royal Society of Architects in Wales or Cardiff University's School of Architecture [regarded as one of the best such schools in the UK] would be pleased to assist in recommending an appropriate person and a method of consulting. Such an appointment has proved to be highly successful in other sensitive places. Bath, for example, appointed Sir Hugh Casson and other similar professional experts who gave one or two days per month, thereby bringing about considerable improvements to proposed schemes.
- It is also worth noting that the Welsh Assembly has put another £1.75 million into the planning system - £70,000 for each planning Authority. Can this money not be used to raise the standards by which applications are assessed?
- a thorough audit of existing policies is undertaken, together with those who work on behalf of the people living and working in the Brecon Beacons plus perhaps the Design Commission for Wales etc. in order to compile principles for high quality designs and developments.
- the Authority undertakes a review of its approach to development work, seeking to adopt a more positive, agreeable attitude to the community's legitimate aspirations: to promote higher standards, not based on prescriptive policies but on good design and well-founded landscape and architectural expertise.

The Brecon Beacons is a very special place, deserving the best built environment we can achieve. This can only be accomplished by the exhaustive pursuit of excellence, not based on mathematical formulae or prescriptive rules, but sound expertise, working in a creative, genial, co-operative framework.

We hope you will read these comments in the spirit in which are intended.

<p>Mr Andrew Bevan, ABplanning, Crickhowell Mr Bernard Eacock, Bernard Eacock Ltd, Peterchurch Mr Ian Jones, Ian Jones Architecture, Llandrindod Mr Sam Organ, CO² Designs for Life Ltd, Llanigon Mr Tim Organ, CO² Designs for Life Ltd, Llanigon Mr Geoff Powell, Geoff Powell Design, Crickhowell Mr Ian Roberts, Ian Roberts Consultancy, Talylylyn Mr Ryan Williams, McCartneys Property Agents and Chair of RICS, Mid-Wales, Hay-on-Wye</p>	<hr/> <p>17 December 2009</p>
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