

Brecon Beacons National Park Authority
Scrutiny – Planning Pre Application Advice Service 01/2013

Feedback from Developers who have used the planning pre app paid service

1. If you have used the paid pre application advice service how useful did you find it?

- Very useful. It was quite a long process and it fell behind schedules but it gave us the answer we wanted which was whether it was worth proceeding or not – which was ‘yes’.
- As a general rule, pre app is very important – it sets the scene for what the Authority’s expectations are in terms of the acceptability of the planning application and also what supporting documents might be necessary. Generally it has been a very useful process.
- Very useful
- Very informative
- Very good
- Senior Planner who knows what he wants

2. How easy was it to access?

- Yes, no problem
- Very easy really. It was just a question of emailing the question through, paying the appropriate fee and then arranging a suitable meeting.
- Through planning consultant
- Bit of delay in organising meeting

3. How helpful was the officer(s) providing the service?

- No problems at all – very good.
- The person who was responsible for our advice was very good and came across very well. The only negative was the timescale, the weeks went by very quickly between correspondence, asking questions or planning a site visit etc but appreciate they’re busy people.
- Same officer dealt with all queries.
- On the whole, excellent. It is important to receive ‘no nonsense’ advice. What we and clients appreciate is having frank and honest answers at the outset, not ‘holding responses’ such as ‘we need to consult with others’ etc. Full, honest and upfront advice is needed at the outset and hopefully face to face during meetings. The worst that can happen is that we don’t have answers to questions that we raise or if we do to then get different answers further down the line when an application is made – this is the biggest frustration. Generally, officers have been very good.
- [The Planning Officer] was very helpful
- We had an issue with sewerage capacity via Dwr Cymru which was flagged up and dealt with by the Planning Officer.

4. Did you need to seek further advice following your session with Officer(s)?

- No we were happy with the decision and we then put in for full planning permission thereafter.
- Generally I know the sort of questions that I want to have answered so I will ask them during the meeting. Sometimes if they are of a technical nature officers do have to go out and liaise with others either with other officers in the Authority or with other organisations such as Powys CC and so sometimes we don’t get the answers there and then which I understand. We then keep up a dialogue either by telephone or email so that information is fed through and then a little further down the line we have a written response which seeks to summarise all that was discussed.
- The schemes evolved and extra information was required.

5. If your application was successful, how far do you feel this was benefitted by the pre app advice?

- I'm not sure how to answer that – I wonder if it may have been just as quick to put in an application and then re submit it. It took almost an additional year and was a bit like putting two applications in.
- Overall it should shorten the process because we know at the outset what supporting documents might be required. I think it's very beneficial for the Authority reducing the amount of time it takes to determine applications because you should have more comprehensive planning submissions with all the required documents provided up front. It should be beneficial to both parties but occasionally relevant issues aren't brought up during the pre app discussions, which can cause frustration to both.
- Yes definitely.

Were you given any advice to contact outside agencies for information that you weren't aware of before you started the process?

Yes, what did come across from the pre app planning advice was the advice that we should go and do all our homework first. We were advised to get all our reports done and submit them with the pre planning but then it's almost the same as putting in an application anyway. So you're given the advice to submit your application and provide the various reports and documents.

By the time we had done the pre planning application it could almost have been the proper application. What I think helped is because we had the pre app planning phase we were able to talk to the officers, we had a site visit but if that was all covered in the application anyway it could all be rolled into one.

I have applied for quite a few planning applications and generally if you submit an application you don't get much assistance and you take a chance whereas with the pre app planning there is more opportunity to get the reports lined up and to meet and discuss the requirements with officers then you submit that followed by a formal application itself and it was useful to have that lead in. Instead, you could have planning application incorporating consultation with planning officers. Once you've got the pre app advice back you then simply turn it around again as a formal application. The pre app advice was useful because we could submit our application with confidence. Without the pre app advice we would probably have failed. I have the confidence now to submit applications as we are aware of the reports that need to be done, covered all the bases and we know we've done our best in moving the application forward.

6. Would you use this service again?

- Yes, I think so because it enables you to submit a proper application. If you pay for a professional service they would do this for you but as a private individual you are looking for as much advice as possible.
- Yes, I would.
- Yes.

7. Do you feel the service provides value for money?

- Yes. The only drawback was that the timescales were quite long. Tighter timescales would render the service better value for money – it did drag out a little.
- Yes as long as the information provided is clear and unambiguous and there are no u-turns further down the line.
- Yes
- Other Authorities – no – due to inexperienced officers.

8. Would you recommend this service to colleagues/contacts?

Yes to individuals like ourselves who are quite new to what is required in National Parks – as it is a bit more involved than outside of a national park. Various reports are needed. There is the reputation that it is harder to obtain planning permission within the Park than outside. **We have to take the environment more into consideration.** Yes absolutely so.

- Yes I do as a matter of course unless the application is entirely straight forward (and not many are these days) I would suggest that pre app discussions take place.
- Yes.

9. Suggestions for improvement?

- Tighten up timescales to drive projects on.
- Replies are very wide covering – [Planning officers] do recommend a lot of reports and studies. As in a lot of industries now we must make sure all the 't's are crossed and the 'i's dotted to make sure we're not putting ourselves at risk.
- The reports are quite costly documents but essential to covering all the bases.
- Officers need to ensure that they provide as much information on the day as possible and they also need to be very mindful of advice that is given at pre app when they are then considering applications further down the line.
- Problems with S106 and other matters, highways, housing.
- Unviable – BBNPA legal held things up. Stick to policy.

10. Overall, how would you rate the planning advice service?

- Very good (only timescales would prevent it from being 'excellent').
- Very good
- Excellent/Very Good