



Development and Building Control Services

Head of Development and Building Control Services: Steve Carvell, Dip.T.P., M.R.T.P.I.

If calling please ask for:

Our ref:

Your ref:

SRC/MAM

5 December 2006

Dear Mr Thurlow

Determination of planning applications in Chichester District

Thank you for your letter of 10 November 2006 and the feedback it provides. Naturally I am disappointed to read the negative comments and the perception of your Members but nevertheless I take it as a useful reminder of the need to achieve a balance between speed and quality. You will appreciate that the Service operates within a regulatory framework where high workloads, increasingly complex issues and an engaged, articulate and demanding community dictates the need for a systematic approach. I read your comments alongside the positive comments that are received from other service users about the good progress that we have made in recent years in modernising planning at Chichester.

Over the last four to five years, officers in the Service have worked extremely hard to deliver significant improvements in the performance of planning application handling times and the engagement of those with an interest in planning proposals and as you note this has been rewarded through the allocation by the Government of Planning Delivery Grant. I am pleased that the Council has decided that this grant should be invested in the Service over the long term to try and maintain current performance levels.

Like you, I do not believe targets are there to be followed slavishly. We strive to meet targets that are imposed by Central Government and like to feel that we have been largely successful without suffering any significant reduction in quality, eg the rate of appeals allowed against the refusal of permission does not show any significant increase in the number being allowed.

Without specific examples of additional delay and costs it is somewhat difficult to comment but in general we do encourage pre-application discussions particularly for major developments and commercial schemes to discuss and try to resolve any relevant issues before the planning application is submitted. Since January 2006 officers in both Planning and Economic Development Services have engaged in 99 preliminary business proposals and have in place arrangements for regular discussion of key cases to ensure that progress is made.

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

One good example of our success is the Respiroics case which you may be aware is quoted by SEEDA as a 'good example of local agencies working together to achieve a significant local result' (please see attachment).

Officers are, however, encouraged to meet the eight and thirteen week deadlines and our basic system for dealing with eight week applications usually provides one opportunity for the submission of revised plans in those cases where it is felt amendments can be achieved. In turn this requires agents to respond quickly. Where there is insufficient time for negotiation, case officers will usually offer withdrawal as an alternative to refusal, followed by negotiation before a re-submission. I appreciate that applicants would often prefer to negotiate and amend their scheme whilst an application remains live, but I am afraid this option is no longer open to us. If you read recent Government statements it seems likely that the pressure to perform will continue for the foreseeable future as the Government attaches considerable weight to speedy planning decisions.

I appreciate that the new government regulations for Access and Design Statements are confusing to some and causing delay in registration but statements are now a legal requirement in most cases and new advice about their preparation has very recently been provided but you must encourage your Members to familiarise themselves with the requirements in order to avoid delay. In our experience some agents find it difficult to explain the design rationale of their proposals, which is unfortunate.

It would be helpful to me to receive a list of your Members so that I can see the names that you represent and ensure your Members receive updated advice. On receipt of this information it may be of value if we meet to discuss your concerns.

Yours sincerely



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Building Control Services**
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