

Appendix F

Somerset West and Taunton Council Charges 2019/20 Planning

1. Background

Planning have the facility to provide Customers with advice and information when they are considering a development proposal; welcoming and encouraging discussions before applications are submitted.

This service is offered to Customers as an opportunity to better understand the way in which an application will be judged against the policies in the development plan and other material considerations.

As a result of the time and resources involved in giving pre-application advice, we operate pre-application charges based on the type of proposal. This means that the service does not fall as a general cost to the council tax payer.

1.1 How the Scheme Works

Requests for pre application advice, including an application form and supporting information and need to be accompanied by the appropriate fee. Information about the site and details about the scheme need to be provided. This will normally include:

- a) Application Form available from the websites;
- b) a description and summary of your proposals, and preferably sketch plans;
- c) if possible, photographs of the site;
- d) A site location plan.

2. Legal Authority

Fees for planning applications are set nationally. However, charges for pre-application discussion are discretionary. The majority of authorities now charge for this service, with the income being reinvested in the service. In setting the charges there needs to be a balance set between recouping the full cost of the service provided and encouraging developers to engage with the Council as early as possible.

Fee charges have traditionally been set and will continue to be set at a figure that will not generally discourage developers from contacting the Council, taking into account the undoubted benefit gained from obtaining greater certainty of the likely outcome. The charges continue to represent a tiny fraction of the cost of carrying out any form of development.

In 2016 it was reported that due to the pre-application planning advice service for both Taunton Deane Borough Council and West Somerset Council being provided by the one team and there can be no reasoned justification for continuing with two sets of charges. However a decision was made that West Somerset wished to retain the higher level of fees set for Level 3a and 3b Major Development Pre Applications. At this stage it will be necessary to consolidate the fees across the two Councils. It is not felt at the present time of resource level that fees can be increased from those agreed for Taunton Deane therefore the proposal is to bring West Somerset Major Fee charges down to the same level for Majors Pre Applications, other areas are already consolidated.

Based on figures for the last year of Pre Applications this would have meant a reduction of income for West Somerset of approximately £2000. However it is felt to increase fees this year when resources for the Planning Service is incredibly stretched and the ability to respond to Pre Application requests prompting is proving difficult would be likely to result in additional complaints and lack of confidence in the service we can offer.

3. Charges – as of April 2019

(To remain unchanged but to bring West Somerset Fees in line with those already used by Taunton Deane and provided by the same staff resource)

The schedule of charges incorporates fees which are dependent on the nature and scale of the proposal. The charge is per request.

Please see attached Appendix regarding level of fees for the New Council proposed from April 2019

For major developments (level 3a and 3b) pre-application fees are negotiable through the applicant and Council entering into a Planning Performance Agreement (PPA).

There is no charge for advice on revised proposals following a refusal of planning permission or the withdrawal of an application (this exemption is restricted to one letter or meeting only).

We have looked at other Pre Application changes but feel the potential impact on take up of services taking into account this year's current income and fees being set for cost recovery only prevent any further rise in fees.

Planning Policy advice that is directly related to the preparation of a Local Development Document (LDD) will be exempt from these charges.

4. Discounts

This scheme does not include any discounts or exemptions.

5. Budget Impacts

These charges have been taken into account in developing budget saving proposals for 2019/20

6. Equality Impact Assessment

What are you completing this impact assessment for? E.g. policy, service area	PLANNING ADVICE CHARGES 2019/20
Section One – Aims and objectives of the policy /service	
PLANNING To provide a proactive planning service from pre-application to delivery and monitoring	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Responsible for overseeing building development in the district• Co-ordinating the way our surroundings develop• Preventing developments which are not appropriate• Investigate breaches of planning regulations	
Section two – Groups that the policy or service is targeted at	
All Groups have the potential to be affected; however the perspective is that the only significant increases in charges are for major developments whereby the pre application charge is an insignificant part of total development costs.	
Section three – Groups that the policy or service is delivered by	
The Development Management staff and Business support staff will administer and provided the pre applications advice – as per current procedures.	
Section four – Evidence and Data used for assessment	
Approximately 35-40 major planning applications are received per year (2% of all application). Pre-applications advice, which is encouraged with such application, will attract the higher fee. As previously stated the pre application charge is an insignificant part of total development costs.	
Section Five - Conclusions drawn about the impact of service/policy/function on different groups highlighting negative impact or unequal outcomes	

The impact of this planning advice charges will be equal for all groups.

Section six – Examples of best practise

Officers work across the Council and community with specific groups e.g.
Gypsy Forum

7. Recommendation

That fees remain unchanged for 2019/2020 but are consolidated for the New Council.