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4 October 2022

Huntingdonshire District Council  
For the Attention of: All Members

(By email: [members@huntingdonshire.gov.uk](mailto:members@huntingdonshire.gov.uk))

Dear Members

**HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL  
PRE-APPLICATION PLANNING SERVICE**

Dear Members,

In late 2021 we had to pause our pre-application planning service to enable the team to focus on our statutory duty of determining applications across a variety of matters, including planning permission, matters relating to trees, listed buildings and discharge of conditions. In the year 21/22 the team issued over 3080 planning decisions, despite several staffing challenges resulting from healthy competition from neighbouring authorities. The purpose of this note is, I am pleased to say, that we are looking to re-starting the service and the anticipated start date is the 12<sup>th</sup> October.

We are very mindful that all Councils have budget challenges, and it is to be commercially minded, and explore opportunities to drive additional income where possible. Restarting our pre-application service provides such an opportunity. This will ensure we can invest in an agile, skilled, and flexible planning workforce, able to respond effectively to the needs of our residents and businesses through ensuring that planning applications are determined on time.

To ensure successful delivery of a pre-application service we need to make several changes. These changes will not only streamline our ways of working but allow us to set clear external expectations with the development industry, which in turn will give certainty as part of their project planning, particularly in these uncertain times.

As many of you will be aware, the challenge from the development industry is timely decision making. In the past, and while aiming to be helpful we have accepted amendments to planning applications which take applications beyond their statutory time frames, but the reality is that amendments are a significant contributor to delayed decision making. A key long- term change in our approach to planning applications is to no longer accept amendments to planning applications (with the exception of large-scale major schemes). Our statutory function is to determine planning applications as they are submitted, and with that in mind, and to drive efficiency we need to ensure that applicants and agents submit high quality applications. This approach gives certainty to applicants, stakeholders, and residents that applications will be determined in a timely manner. In addition, this will allow all interested parties to monitor applications online, without the need to approach officers, effectively freeing officer time to focus on determining planning applications. The route to discuss amendments and changes will be our pre-application service.

Our new pre-application service is route through which applicants and agents can seek an informal officer opinion their scheme. It can be as simple as exploring the principle of their scheme, through to detailed design and masterplanning. It is available for all types of application, from householder applications through to masterplanning of large-scale major sites, renewables etc. We will also offer specialist advice. This will be a paid for service, with costs and timescales clearly available on our website, and now include the ability for services to be paid for online.

In preparation for the restart of this service, one of the first steps we are taking is to push even harder to resolve and determine outstanding applications. To make this happen quickly, between today, Tuesday, 4<sup>th</sup> October and Friday, 14<sup>th</sup> October inclusive we are putting in place temporary measures on how we respond to enquiries from customers, and we are calling this a 'Planning Blitz'. We will continue to respond to urgent and essential matters, however, general contact with planning officers in the Development Management Area Teams, will be prioritised to enable the team to focus on processing and determining applications which may mean there will be a delay in responding or that a response will not be provided until after the close of this period.

This temporary change does not relate to Planning Enforcement. They continue to operate as normal, and any breaches of planning control should be reported to the Planning Enforcement Team. Customers will also receive normal service from the Strategic Team who deal with large scale major applications.

In the short term you may experience lobbying from agents/applicants with a view to amending applications, but the good news is that we would implement this alongside the new pre-application service. In the event you are lobbied your support would be welcomed to encourage people to seek officer advice through the appropriate channel, namely our new -pre-application service. In addition, your support for our Blitz week would be welcomed, namely managing external expectation in the event other look for a communication route through you.

For the avoidance of doubt the changes proposed will also be clearly communicated all, including Parish Councils as we will need them to ensure they respond to planning consultations within their 21-day consultation period. In addition, a notification will be attached to our website.

If you have any further queries, please do not hesitate to contact Clara Kerr, our Chief Planning Officer, or Julie Ayre, our Planning Service Manager (Development Management)

Yours sincerely



**Councillor Tom Sanderson  
Deputy Executive Leader, and  
Executive Councillor for Planning**



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