

Belfast

PLANNING SERVICE

Pre-Application Discussions

A guide to pre-application advice

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Pre-Application Discussions

What is a Pre-Application Discussion?

A Pre-Application Discussion (PAD) is a discretionary service that enables you to discuss your proposal with a planning officer before you submit an application. The process is beneficial because it helps to identify issues at an early stage, smoothing the application process and leading to better quality outcomes.

What is the scope of a Pre-Application Discussion?

A Pre-Application Discussion can be used to discuss the following:

- How to make a planning application
- The information that is required to support an application
- Which regional and local planning policies apply
- Whether or not a proposal will likely be acceptable in principle
- The planning issues relevant to the consideration of a proposal including an informal assessment of the whether it might be supported
- The application process including pre-community consultation (for Major applications), consultation with stakeholders and neighbours, how a decision is made, and timescales for a decision
- The need for a Section 76 planning agreement including the requirement for financial or other types of contributions to mitigate the impacts of the proposal
- Any need for Environmental Impact Assessment

What is the role of the Council in giving Pre-Application advice?

We are here to help you obtain planning permission provided that the proposal is within the planning rules. Our responsibility is to provide you with **impartial** advice. It is not the role of Planning Officers to act as agent, advocate or planning consultant for any individual, business or organisation, or to promote a proposal. This is because the Council is required to make planning decisions in the wider public interest.

If you do not have any specific experience in planning you may wish to appoint your own agent (a planning agent, consultant, architect, architectural technician or other representative) to act on your behalf.

What is the status of Pre-Application advice?

Pre-Application advice is given by Planning Officers acting on behalf of the Council. It is informal advice only and not binding on any future decision that the Council may make once a formal planning application has been submitted.

All advice given is on the basis of the information available at the time. The planning application process involves consultation with neighbours and technical consultees and it will not be possible to predict all the issues that will arise once a planning application is submitted. Moreover, not all planning decisions are made by officers with some applications, including all proposals for Major development, decided by the Planning Committee.

We will, however, always give you the best advice that we can at the pre-application stage. We will also try to ensure consistency of advice once at planning application is made.

If you submit an application following a Pre-Application Discussion and it does not accord with the advice that we gave we will not normally negotiate and will refuse the application.

Please always remember that pre-application advice cannot give certainty to the outcome of an application because the only means by which a proposal can be properly tested is through the planning application process itself.

Is there a cost for a Pre-Application Discussion?

Pre-Application advice is a discretionary service and the Council charges for the more complex enquiries on a sliding scale basis. Information about our charging rates can be found online on the Council's website.

The Council does not charge for advice on householder proposals, such as domestic extensions or outbuildings, and provides a Duty Planner service to deal with these queries. There is no charge for advice on non-profit community related proposals. We do not normally provide Pre-Application advice on proposals for advertisements.

How do I submit a request for a Pre-Application Discussion?

To help us deal with your request for a Pre-Application Discussion more quickly, we ask that you submit your request both in **hard copy and** **electronical form**, using the special form on our website:

www.belfastcity.gov.uk/buildingcontrol_environment/Planning/applying.aspx

Please submit your form and supporting information to the following address AND either by email or on a CD-ROM/memory stick with the postal copy.

By post – Belfast Planning Service
Belfast City Council
Cecil Ward Building
4-10 Linenhall Street
Belfast
BT2 8AB

By email – planning@belfastcity.gov.uk

What information do I need to include?

You **must** include the following with your request for advice:

- A Pre-Application Discussion form – available online or on request
- Fee – if required
- Site location plan – clearly showing the location of the site outlined in red with any other land in the control of the applicant in blue

In addition, the following information may be helpful:

- Site layout – showing the location of proposed building/s and means of access (if applicable)
- Elevations and floor plans – both existing and proposed (if applicable)
- Description of the site (including its existing use) and adjacent property, including any particular site characteristics (e.g. changes in levels)
- Details of any known planning history
- Photographs of the site and immediate surroundings
- Any known constraints to development; and
- Technical studies (if available), e.g. design statement, transport, flood risk, drainage and contamination

Please remember that the better the quality of information you give us the better feedback we can provide.

What level of service can you expect?

We will provide the following service:

- We will aim to provide a substantive response to your proposal within eight weeks of submission once all information has been received. This will include an initial meeting, where necessary, within six weeks;
- Some advice may be reliant on the input of external consultees including Government Departments. If we do not receive feedback from them in time we will go ahead and provide our response and forward you the advice from the consultee once we receive it;
- We will give you a clear opinion as to whether your proposal might be acceptable where it is possible to do so;
- If your proposal is unacceptable we will provide advice on what you can do to improve it, assuming it is achievable;
- We will help you identify what information needs to be provided with an application, including advice on the type of specialist consultants you may need to appoint to help you put together your application;
- Where a Pre-Application Discussion fee is required this will include an initial meeting with a Planning Officer and a follow up meeting, where it is necessary and expedient to meet. Additional meetings will be at extra cost (this does not apply to Largescale Major proposals where only one meeting is included);
- We will visit the site where it is necessary to provide you with the appropriate Pre-Application advice.