

the West of England Planning Toolkit 2012

making the planning process work better for everyone

The four West of England authorities and the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) have jointly published this toolkit to promote a more positive and consistent approach to handling large scale and complex development proposals – one where the authorities, developers and stakeholders work together to deliver high quality planning applications and effective decision taking.

It has been produced because a streamlined and collaborative planning system is key to securing the investment needed to protect and enhance the environment and enable sustainable economic growth.



part one Culture, Values and Behaviour

Our approach to managing development proposals within the West of England will be based on the following principles:

- **Working in partnership:** the authorities will work collaboratively with applicants and other stakeholders to simplify the development management process.
- **Acting positively:** we will adopt a positive "can-do" approach, working proactively with applicants to unblock development and identify opportunities to add value to proposals which meet local visions.
- **Front loading:** we will explore with applicants different ideas and options for sites early on before proposals get fixed.
- **Effective pre-application discussions:** we will encourage applicants to enter into pre-application discussions and to engage with those communities most affected by development before planning applications are submitted.
- **Be proportionate and realistic:** we will discuss with applicants what information is required to support plans and proposals and be realistic about the resources required.
- **Being businesslike:** we will use robust project management tools to reduce uncertainty and delay when dealing with applications.
- **Being open and flexible:** we will be open and transparent in the sharing of information and work flexibly to respond to changing circumstances.

part two Improvements to the Development Management process for large scale and complex proposals

Project inception

Result: Project vision with set of objectives aligned to a PPA

Signpost developers to key stakeholders

Adopt a consistent approach to pre-application discussions

Provide access to a senior officer to test proposals and explore different options

Promote the use of Concept Statements

Identify opportunities for meeting wider objectives as set out in the Sustainable Community Strategy

Pre application

Result: High quality planning application

Publish advice for applicants on how to consult effectively with local communities before applying for planning permission

Scope the resources needed to deal with applications and provide advice on technical aspects including planning obligation requirements

Application

Result: Timely and transparent decision

Clearly set out a managed process for determining applications in a timely fashion

Provide early feedback on officer and consultee views

Provide a more consistent and streamlined approach to Planning Application Requirements (PARs)

Post decision

Result: Timely discharge of conditions and obligations

Adopt a consistent approach to discharging conditions

Undertake post completion reviews

Maintain regular dialogue with applicant and jointly tackle delivery issues

Adopt a consistent approach to unlocking stalled schemes

Adopt a consistent and streamlined approach to using PPAs

Agree a protocol for early member engagement

Talk to existing communities about their priorities for improving the area

Seek advice from statutory bodies where there is potential major change to significant environmental assets

Develop a vision and broad objectives and consult with key stakeholders before engaging in pre-application discussions

Commit to effective pre-application community engagement

Seek advice from statutory bodies before commissioning technical studies

Share viability appraisals

Agree scope and content of application documents before submission

Agree to a time managed process

Submit community engagement statement which explains how the results of consultation have been taken into account

Where appropriate commit resources to assist in processing applications

Submit additional information in a timely fashion

Maintain regular dialogue with the authority and jointly tackle delivery issues

Arrange stakeholder meetings

Manage the process using a PPA

What the Unitary Authorities will do

What the Unitary Authorities will do

What developers will do

What developers will do

"Business needs planning applications to be decided quickly and efficiently. The publication of the new planning toolkit is therefore timely and provides an excellent framework for all parties to work to and Knightstone welcomes its publication."

Mike Day – Director of Development and Home Ownership, Knightstone Housing Association, part of the Arcadia Housing Group

"The four Councils are already working to simplify the way in which planning applications are handled. Including some examples of good practice within the Planning Toolkit will help us to work together with business more consistently. We think this will make the planning process work better for everyone and result in higher quality planning applications and effective decision taking."

Councillor Tim Ball, Executive Member for Homes and Planning, Bath & North East Somerset Council

part three Practice Guide

The four authorities have published their own detailed protocols and practices which have been tailored to each area and these will continue to operate.

Each authority is also committed to importing good practice from its neighbours, especially when dealing with large scale and complex proposals, in order to improve consistency and certainty for developers thinking of investing in the area. The following examples are linked to the key principles, set out in Part One of the toolkit.

Partnership Working

In 2011 Bristol City Council updated its Planning Protocol for engaging with business. It contains detailed guidance when dealing with 'Major' applications.

Concept Statements

South Gloucestershire Council encourages developers to prepare 'Concept Statements' before they submit a planning application. These are concise illustrations of the vision and broad principles for developing a major site and are usually submitted to the council for endorsement following public consultation. Further details are set out in the council's Statement of Community Involvement – adopted May 2008.

Planning Performance Agreements

All four authorities promote the use of Planning Performance Agreements (PPAs) as a project management tool for dealing with large scale and complex proposals. South Gloucestershire Council has published its own PPA Charter and Bristol City Council has included guidance in its Planning Protocol document.

The Development Team approach

For large scale and complex schemes each authority establishes a Development Team of officers representing a range of services. These teams meet regularly and provide detailed advice to applicants.

North Somerset Council has taken this one step further by introducing an Economic Development Protocol aimed at maximising the benefits of investing in major employment opportunities.

Next Steps Programme

The authorities are committed to working collaboratively with developers using this toolkit as a framework. Alongside the Planning Toolkit they will also publish and keep up to date a 'next steps programme' which will aim to continuously improve how large scale and complex proposals are handled as part of the development management process.

"The delivery of infrastructure and housing is a key priority for the LEP, and the Planning Toolkit will help to achieve a quick and efficient planning system capable of delivering sustainable development which will help the LEP to meet its targets for jobs and economic growth."

Robert Sinclair, CEO Bristol Airport

"The Planning Toolkit provides a significant step forward in creating a more consistent and ultimately more timely approach to determining applications. As a framework for developing greater understanding between all parties concerned it is warmly welcomed."

Nigel Holland, Managing Director, Taylor Wimpey Bristol