

## E Government Progress

The service continues to maintain the highest standards in terms of its use and application of technology to drive forward electronic service delivery.

This was recognised in February by the former Office of the Deputy Prime Minister who carried out a national survey of web based services at the beginning of the year and awarded Wigan top marks for its online delivery of planning services.

In excess of 80,000 visits per month are made to our departmental web pages. Indeed, evidence shows that this figure is likely to increase for the foreseeable future as more people take the leap of faith and conduct more transactions online.

After a very slow start, we now receive on average 5 applications per month submitted online via the Planning Portal. This figure is comparable with other districts in the area. We are confident that these figures will continue to improve in the coming months. For more information and advice regarding the Planning Portal please contact Bill Humphreys, Communication Group Manager. Phone: 01942 404211 or email: [w.humphreys@wigan.gov.uk](mailto:w.humphreys@wigan.gov.uk)

Interactive web based facilities continue to be a feature of the service. For instance, the Unitary Development Plan has been made available online for a number of years. This will soon be supplemented with the emerging Local Development Framework which will introduce new and additional ways in which we collaborate with interested parties, produce policy documentation and undertake public consultation.

The articles in this newsletter are designed to:

- Alert you to new regulations or procedures
- Guide you to sources of help on our website and elsewhere
- Help you understand our processes
- Report performance and request your views on how we can improve services

## Built in Quality & Urban Design Awards

Our second annual awards ceremony will be held at the Investment Centre on 16th October. These awards promote good building and design and provide recognition for outstanding contractors and designers. Nominations are currently being considered.

## Affordable Housing

With the adoption of the Replacement Unitary Development Plan in April 2006, the Affordable Housing Policy (Policy R1H) came into force for the first time. This is accompanied by a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) which gives more detail on the operation of the policy and how it will be applied to particular housing developments.

The policy requires developers to provide an element of affordable housing on all schemes of 25 dwellings and above (or on sites over one hectare in size.) On such sites 20% of the housing provided is expected to be affordable.

Although the policy applies to all housing developments over the size thresholds given above, there are some areas of the Borough where there is not a local need for affordable housing. In such cases the developer will be expected to pay a commuted sum to the Council to enable the provision of affordable housing elsewhere in the Borough. Early contact with the Council is advised to determine whether a site is one where on-site provision is expected or where a commuted sum will be required.

In order to simplify the process the Council has devised a formula to calculate the cost of affordable housing on any site. This will apply equally to situations where a commuted sum for affordable housing is required and to those where on-site provision is expected. The formula is that 6% of the total sales value of the dwellings on the site will be either paid as a commuted sum or used on discounting the price of properties down to an affordable level, as appropriate.

## Diversity Review

The Council is undertaking a diversity review and BC/DC would like your help. If you are aware of any way that we discriminate against any sector of the population or have ideas how we could improve our service delivery to particular sectors, please let us know.

## Development Control Performance 2005/06

We dealt with 2400 planning applications between April 2006 and March 2006, a reduction of 11% over the previous year. But major applications increased by 14%. Minor applications remained about the same level but Other applications (which are mainly house extensions) reduced by 15%. Overall 91% of applications and 99% of householder applications were determined within 8 weeks. This is the highest performance of all Metropolitan Authorities. 82% of Major applications were decided in 13 weeks and 91% of Minor applications within 8 weeks. 94% of applications were approved. This performance is considerably above the national average. Our records show that 88% of housing completions during 2005/06 were on brownfield sites, which shows we are now meeting the target of 80% set out in the Unitary Development Plan.

## Building Control Performance

New national performance indicators for Building Control Bodies were issued for comment at the end of June. Working with the other authorities in Greater Manchester, Wigan will introduce processes to start collecting data on these right away. Applications deposited last year fell from the 2004/5 high of 3002 to 2508 in 2005/6. During the year we carried out 9273 site inspection visits (an increase from last year). We investigated 73 reported dangerous structures during the day and a further 23 out of normal office hours. We continue to consult service users on our performance and replies show high levels of overall satisfaction. The net cost of the Building Control service to each member of the community in 2005/6 was 96.5 pence.

## Proposed Survey of Applicants and Agents

**We will be carrying out our next survey of applicants and agents during September and October 2006. This survey is carried out every 3 years as required by the Department for Communities and Local Government (formally ODPM). We will be surveying all applicants and agents who submitted applications to us between April and September 2006 inclusive. If you submitted more than one application you will only receive one questionnaire. We would ask for your co-operation in returning questionnaires as quickly as possible as your views will help us to improve the service we provide. We will give you feedback on the outcome of the survey in our next Newsletter.**

## Comments, Compliments & Complaints

Two residents recently told Building Control that it would be helpful if we produced information on when they should ask our surveyors to inspect their work as they had reservations about advice received from contractors. We do actually provide this information when we acknowledge applications, but we too have noticed that householders are not always aware when we should visit. To solve this we have rewritten our Site Inspection Information Leaflet and our site surveyors now post this through the letterbox when they make a first inspection.

If you have any comments or complaints (or indeed compliments) about our service you can address these direct Paul Swift or to Dave Melling, alternatively please use the corporate system on our website at [www.wigan.gov.uk](http://www.wigan.gov.uk). Your comments help us to improve the service we provide.

## Building Control Legislation Changes

The government introduced amended **Building Regulations F and L** relating to ventilation and energy conservation on 6th April 2006. The new requirements for domestic extensions and new houses are reasonably straightforward. We have produced a guidance sheet listing common U values and typical specifications to achieve them. (Contact us if you would like a copy) Things are more complex regarding other buildings and guidance is still being developed and issued from central government. We held a seminar for agents on Part L in July and will follow this with an update in September. If you would like to attend this, please let us know. If you attended the July seminar, we will automatically send you an invitation.

The most significant change for new dwellings and for non domestic buildings is the requirement to provide a carbon emission rating. In the case of houses this will be through a Standard Assessment Procedure (SAP) rating and for other buildings a Simplified Building Energy Model (SBEM) rating could be used. These calculations must be submitted with the Building Regulation Application.

The **Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order** took effect in August. This replaces and consolidates a host of previous fire service legislation on non domestic buildings. Fire certificates no longer exist and people responsible for buildings will have to carry out their own risk assessments and provide appropriate safeguards for occupants. A series of guides to risk assessment for various non-domestic buildings has just been introduced and can be downloaded from the DGLC website at [www.communities.gov.uk](http://www.communities.gov.uk). Architects and designers should consider these when planning building work.



## Government Consultation Papers

The Government is currently consulting on amended procedures for the validation of planning applications. It is proposed that there will be a list of requirements for a valid planning application set at national level and an additional list set by each local planning authority. The planning authority would have to publicise its list before adopting it. Planning applications would only be valid if they provided all the information required on the national and local lists. Applications which did not meet the validation requirements would not be valid and there would be no right of appeal. If adopted, these changes are likely to come into effect from April 2007. This timing is designed to co-ordinate with the introduction of a standardised application form which will become available from October 2006 and obligatory after August 2007.

The Government are also consulting on Housing and Planning Delivery Grant. It is proposed that a new planning delivery grant would be introduced to provide an incentive to local authorities and other bodies to respond more effectively to local housing pressures, to become more actively involved in the delivery of additional housing to meet local demands and to secure further improvements in the planning system. Those Local Authorities who take positive steps to meet the demands for housing created by their communities would be rewarded with additional grant which would be based on delivery of houses against targets set out in the Regional Spatial Strategy. The grant would be used to provide direct benefits to those communities that accommodate new housing growth. If adopted, these proposals are likely to start in 2008/09.

## Staff Changes in Planning & Regeneration

Richard Taylor joined us in the new year from Crewe and nantwich as Principal Planning Officer for the central Wigan team, Jason Kennedy has replaced Phillip Powell as Conservation and Design Officer and Stephen Pimlott has been appointed Principal Planning Officer in the Policy section with particular responsibility for employment policy and preparation of the Local Development Framework.

## Changes to Development Control System

Important changes to the DC system came into effect on 10 August 2006 and our regular agents were informed of these on 5 and 26 July.

Additional information now needs to be submitted with outline applications to show the nature and extent of proposals. Most planning applications will also require design and access statements which include an assessment of the area around the site, the design principles which have been applied and an explanation of how the proposal will be accessible to all members of the community. Applications submitted without design and access statements where needed, cannot be accepted as being valid and there is no right of appeal. If you require more information about these matters please contact Dave Melling on 01942 404255.

## Chartermark

Our combined BC/DC

Chartermark award for customer service was



reviewed in May and we are pleased to announce that the government's assessor found that we continue to be worthy of the award. The regular review of our performance ensures that we maintain our standards.

## Is Your Development at Risk of Flooding?

It is always good practice to check whether the site of your proposed development might be at risk of flooding. You can view the flood risk constraint map for England at 1:20,000 scale on the Environment Agency's website (What's in Your Backyard)

[www.environment-agency.gov.uk](http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk). You can also access Standing Advice provided by the Agency to local planning authorities through the website

[www.pipernetworking.com/flood\\_risk](http://www.pipernetworking.com/flood_risk). This contains guidance notes on flood risk assessments and a flood risk matrix which sets out how the Agency is likely to respond to proposed development for different combinations of location, scale and development type. You will find this advice useful in preparing planning applications on sites which are at risk of flooding.

## Fees for Handling Complaints about High Hedges

The Council's Cabinet has recently reviewed these fees and has decided that they will remain the same for the next 12 months. The standard fee for handling a high hedges complaint will remain at £500 whilst those complainants who currently receive benefits will be eligible to a concessionary fee of £100. The fees will be reviewed again in summer 2007. To date, 7 formal complaints have been received.