Issue number 8 Autumn 2008

Newsletter

Building Control and Development Control Environmental Services

Wigan Council

The articles in this newsletter are designed to...

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

Planning Committee

Following the April elections the Planning Committee saw some fairly significant changes. The Chair and Vice Chair both retired along with some other members. The committee of 14 councillors is now chaired by Councillor John Hilton and the vice chair is Councillor Eunice Smethurst. The total make up consists of 8 labour councillors, 1 Liberal Democrat member, 1 Democratic Alliance (Community Action) member, 2 Conservative members, 1 Independent Conservative member and 1 Independent member.

Over the last few months a survey of the views of those attending the committee has been carried out to get feedback on the whole "committee experience". So far the results are very positive. The surveys will be undertaken at a number of future meetings and the results will be reported back to committee. If it felt the feedback shows any changes are needed this will be recommended to committee.

Built in Quality Awards

Building Control are currently considering short listed nominations for this years Built in Quality Awards. LABC, the national organisation for Local Authority Building Control are in the process of setting up a North West Award, to which winners of the Wigan awards will be entered. Our building control team are involved in the organisation of the regional scheme.

Building Control Awarded ISO 9000

Our Building Control team have achieved accreditation under the international management standard ISO 9000. Achievement of this award is recognised world wide as demonstrating that we have a quality management system in place. Unlike most services within the council, Building Control operates in direct competition with the private sector and achievement of ISO 9000 is a valuable tool for inspiring confidence. It may also help attract major clients, many of whom will only engage with ISO accredited firms. The application for accreditation was made in conjunction with six other authorities within Greater Manchester, Oldham, Rochdale, Bury, Bolton, Tameside and Manchester City Councils. This collaborative approach, which was a Wigan BC initiative, led to a significant cost saving on the accreditation process.

Local Development Framework

Core Strategy

Consultation on the Issues and Options stage of the Core Strategy has been drawn to a close. This consultation covered the issues we identified for the borough, the vision for the borough, objectives to meet this vision and options for where and how future development in the borough should take place.

We are now beginning work on the next stage of the Core Strategy, identifying the 'preferred options'. This will identify our preferred spatial strategy for the borough and the sites needed to deliver the strategy. The document will also set out policy directions. Consultation on the 'preferred options' stage is due to commence in March 2009.

Key Local Studies

The Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment which has been prepared for Wigan and the Greater Manchester wide Strategic Housing Market Assessment are both in their final stages of production. Phase 1 of the Greater Manchester Wide Strategic Flood Risk Assessment is coming to a close with work beginning on Phase 2 which will look at Wigan in more detail.

Supplementary Planning Documents

The nominations for the Buildings of Local Interest (Blints) SPD have now finished. A draft document for consultation is anticipated for October, with adoption by the end of the year.

Advice across the country

Our BC admin team recently received a number of technical questions from an agent based in the South West. After one such query they asked why he was asking us for advice on schemes being buit in the South West of England. He replied that he has viewed our web site and found the information very clear and easy to follow and felt we offered really good advice.

BC Technical Seminar Programme

Building control will be hosting another two technical seminars this autumn. The first of these will be on 1st October. Technical representatives from Velux will present their Robust Detail Seminar. Rooflights are increasingly popular as we make best use of available roof spaces. Velux are perhaps the best known name in Rooflights and their research facility has developed some very interesting and innovative products. Their talk will highlight common specification issues and will look at some of the sustainability issues developed around their zero carbon home.

On 25th November we welcome Dave Collier and Tony Stanforth of Kingspan Hot Water Systems who will provide us with some practical information on meeting the requirements of the Code for Sustainable Homes. They will provide information on achieving code levels 3-6 for a mid terrace and a 2½ storey 4 bed detached house. There will also be discussion on the benefits and advantages of Solar Hot Water systems.

A record 49 people attended the last breakfast seminar we held on Aqua-mist Fire Suppression Systems. This included representatives from Building Control in neighbouring St Helens, West Lancs and Chorley councils.

Householder Permitted Development Rights

In the spring newsletter, it was reported that, following a consultation exercise, the government set out its proposals for amending householder permitted development rights in November 2007. The new regime seeks to simplify the system by replacing rules based largely on volume calculations, which are often difficult to work out, with an 'impacts-based' approach. Details of the latest proposals can be viewed at www.planningportal.gov.uk.

The government is also looking to introduce measures to give Local Planning Authorities increased powers to introduce local variations by either extending or restricting permitted development rights where, for instance, there is a need to protect specific neighbourhoods.

Legislation to bring forward these changes is expected on 1 October 2008.

Changes to Planning Appeals

In line with wider proposals to reform the development control system, the government has proposed a number of changes to appeal procedures. The most controversial of these, the introduction of 'Local Member Review Bodies', which in certain instances would have resulted in the removal of an applicant's right to an independent appeal, has now been dropped.

However, a pilot project for 'fast tracking' householder appeals is presently being tested across the country, with the intention that all authorities will be participating by April 2009.

The changes relate to householder appeals dealt with by means of the written representations procedure. The procedure is presently voluntary for both appellants and local planning authorities. The main changes include:

- the use of electronic submission and correspondence,
- the full case must be set out in the initial appeal statement,
- a reduction in paperwork, with the Inspectorate using the Council's electronic file, saving postal costs and the need for duplication of material,
- where it is possible from a public vantage point, the Inspector will undertake a solo site visit,
- an estimated reduction in timescale from 18 to 12 weeks.

It is intended that the procedure will be rolled out nationally by April 2009.

Partners

Building Control are pleased to announce we have recently entered into partnership agreements with Mark Copeland, Tom Hill, Belong Construction and Hughes Bros Ltd. The LABC partnership scheme enables designers and developers to submit schemes to the Local Authority of their choice for works anywhere in England and Wales. Our Building Control team will carry out the plan check and the site inspections will be carried out by the Building Control team in the actual authority where the works are being carried out. The scheme has been operating for several years and provides benefits to designers in that they are dealing locally with surveyors they know and respect rather than dealing remotely over large distances.

RTPI Presidential Visit

Janet O'Neill, newly elected President of the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) and an expert in urban regeneration visited Wigan on 19 June. Her visit was to meet young planning officers working for the Council and to view some of the recent regeneration initiatives which have taken place in the Borough over the past few years.

As President of the Institute, Ms O'Neill has pledged to support the next generation of planners and to promote their professional development. Ms O'Neill met young officers from both the Development Control and Planning Policy sections who have recently gained or are currently working towards their chartered membership. She commended the new generation of planners for choosing to work as public servants for the benefit of their local environments and community.

Accompanied by the Director of Environmental Services, Martin Kimber and representatives of Stewart Milne Homes, Ms O'Neill also toured the newly restored Trencherfield Mill. She commented that "Wigan is really holding its own against the demands of the modern economy" and that the "high quality new flats and office space in the mill bring together the old and new really well".

Planning Policy Statement 25: Development and Flood Risk Practice Guide

A practice guide was published in June explaining how to improve the policy of securing sustainable development, in the right places, taking into account flood risk, as set out in PPS 25 'Development and Flood Risk'.

The Guide is relevant to anyone involved in the planning process. This includes developers and their agents who need to understand how the planning process assesses flood risk and what is required to ensure that development is being located in the right places and designed to achieve the aims of PPS 25.

Changes to the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995

New Rules on Domestic Microgeneration Equipment

From 6 April 2008 all homeowners are now able to install microgeneration equipment, including solar panels, without the need to obtain planning permission, as long as there is clearly no impact on others.

In terms of new changes, Part 40 of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995 allows for the installation of solar photovoltaic's (PV's), solar thermal, ground and water source heat pumps, biomass heating and combined heat and power systems on or within the curtilage of a dwelling house. Part 40 does not include domestic scale wind turbines.

Limitations have been set to reduce the impact on neighbours and the permitted development rights do not apply to the curtilage of Listed Buildings.

Legislation

Time limits for prosecution: CLG were to lay before parliament a commencement order for proposals to extend the time limits for prosecution of offences under Building Regulations. At the time of writing it is expected that these new limits will take effect from 22nd September 2008.

Code for Sustainable Homes: A new edition of the Technical Guidance for the Code for Sustainable Homes has been published. Copies can be downloaded from CLG website at: http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/planningandbuilding/codeguide

We believe the code will have increasing importance in meeting government targets for sustainability and will be a feature of most new housing developments. Our Head of Building Control Services has now qualified as an assessor under the code so that we can better assist with the understanding and implementation of code requirements.

Government Consultations: *The Future of Building Control*. The first stage of the CLG consultation process on Building Control in England and Wales has closed. Paul Swift was to meet with CLG representatives at the Building Control Alliance meeting on 8th September and will give an update on this at the next BC/DC User Forum meeting in October.

Approved Document G: A consultation on proposed changes to Part G was completed in August. Proposals in this area include measures to reduce average consumption of potable water. It is generally accepted that we each use around 150 litres of water a day. Proposed changes to Building Regulations aim to lower this to 120l/person with further reductions planned in future revisions. This is in line with figures announced under the Code for Sustainable Homes (CSH) on which we have previously reported. There will be flexibility on how the new limits will be met, and a calculation procedure based on the CSH will be introduced. Features to be considered will include the installation of dual flush wc's, aerating taps and flow limiters. It will also include the specification of low water use washing machines, dishwashers and showers. Rainwater harvesting and the recycling of grey water will greatly improve performance. Architects will be expected to take these aspects into consideration when drawing up plans and specifications and should carry out the initial calculations to verify compliance.

Approved Document L: Part L is also under review, overall carbon emission targets will be tightened up as previously announced.

BC Performance: Customer Satisfaction

Building control request customer comments (good or bad) from all completed jobs and we monitor customer satisfaction across a range of areas of our service. Latest analysis for 2008/9 shows that 91% of respondents felt we processed their job within reasonable time, 98% felt we made a satisfactory number of inspections of their work. 91% found our published information easy to understand. 97% said their overall impression of our service was positive and 91% felt it offered good value for money. All found our staff to be helpful.

Customer comments drive improvements to the service and as a result of comments received this quarter we will be changing the wording on the letter which accompanies approval notices to draw attention to the importance of completion certificates.

Discharge of Planning Conditions

Recent changes to the Regulations now apply charges to the approval of details to discharge conditions attached to planning permissions.

There are exceptions to the charges for:

- requests relating to Listed Building Consent;
- requests to discharge conditions on an Outline permission (other than submission of reserved matters);
- discharging conditions attaching to applications resulting from a condition removing permitted development rights.

There will be a standard charge of £25 for householder development and £85 for all other development per request.

Produced by Communications Group Graphics Team, Civic Buildings, New Market Street, Wigan, WN1 1RP

Killian Pretty Review

A review of the process for seeking planning permission is being carried out by Joanna Killian, Chief Executive of Essex County Council and David Pretty, who recently retired as Group Chief Executive of Barratt Developments PLC. It was jointly commissioned by Communities and Local Government and Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Departments.

So far, after taking into account the views of stakeholders, a document has been published identifying reasons for delays in deciding planning applications called "Planning Applications: A faster and More Responsive System - A Call for Solutions". (June 2008). The next step is to consider how to deliver solutions and this is being addressed by considering a number of questions relating to the following key issues:

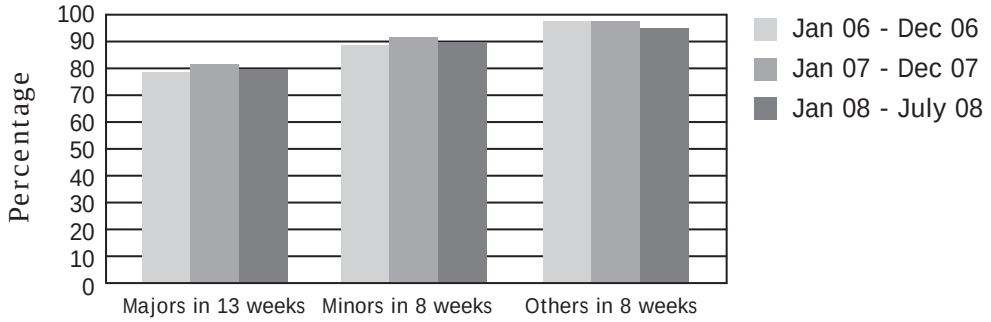
- matching skills and resources
- removing unnecessary complexity
- changing culture within LPAs to steer and shape development, and away from controlling it.
- the need to ensure more effective engagement
- process improvement

Housing and Planning Delivery Grant (HPDG) 2008

Ministers have announced a provisional allocation of £100 million payable to Local Authorities to aid improvement to planning resources and services. HPDG is targetted to recognise and incentivise growth and the Government will closely monitor both the housing market and the impact of the HPDG.

The Government wants plans to be formed on the basis of strong community involvement and on early open collaboration with key stakeholders and aligned with a Sustainable Community Strategy. The production of high quality LDF documents is an example of this but the Government wants more to be done to deliver sound plans on time. Where this is achieved authorities will be eligible for awards under the Housing and Planning Delivery Grant. For the first year of the grant (2008) provisional allocation for Wigan is stated to be £132,051.

Percentage of applications determined within statutory time periods



Comments, compliments and complaints!

We welcome any comments you may have regarding our work, they help us to improve the service. If you have any comments, compliments or complaints. Please contact Paul Swift or Penny McGinty directly, or, use the corporate complaints process on the council website.