

Issue number 2 July 2005

Newsletter



Building Control and Development Control Environmental Services Department

As a service user, we hope you find this newsletter helpful. The articles are intended to:

- **Alert you to new regulations or requirements**
- **Guide you to sources of help**
- **Help you to understand our processes**
- **Seek your views on how we can improve services for you**
- **Provide information on our services and performance.**



Award for excellence

We did it! Wigan's Building Control and Development Control Services are officially recognised as providing excellence in customer service. We submitted our joint BC/DC Chartermark application in April and

it received a tremendous reception. The Assessor visited us on 5th May, examined our processes and interviewed a selection of staff, partners, customers and forum members. We received formal notification of our success at the end of May. We also received a letter of congratulations from Tony Blair. The challenge now is to live up to the award and ensure we retain this status when it is reviewed.

Multimedia access to information

Working with the other nine authorities in Greater Manchester, our Building Control team are producing a Building Control information CD. The disc will contain general information on Building Control. It is hoped this will be a useful information source for those who do not have access to the internet.

Building Control Performance

The increase in construction activity continues and 3002 applications were submitted to Wigan Building Control in 2004/5. This is a 21% increase from the previous year.

Despite the increase in applications our performance on plan checking has improved from last year with 75% of full plans Building Regulation applications checked within 2 months of deposit. Last year we achieved 67%.

Service Plan 2005/06

Our service plan containing information on our performance last year, our aims for the current year and our role in delivering the Council's corporate priorities has just been published. If you would like a copy please contact Dave Melling, Assistant Director of Planning and Regeneration on 01942 404255.

Open File Policy

We will soon be introducing an Open File Policy for our planning application and building regulations files. This will enable current files to be inspected by members of the public before decisions are taken on the proposals. This change is being introduced at the request of some of our regular customers. People wishing to inspect files will be requested to sign a register containing their name and address. The arrangements will provide that files can only be inspected in the reception area, that they remain within the building and are returned, for signing off, to the reception desk after inspection. We hope this service improvement will help all our customers.

Newsletter Feedback Summary

Our first Building Control and Development Control Newsletter, published in January, proved to be 'a very good review' and 'very interesting' according to the thirty-three responses received.

Readers said that the newsletter had provided concise and informative articles on the main topics covering Building Regulation Changes and the newly adopted High Hedges Legislation. It also showed that the articles regarding the Development Control team areas and contact details, the website information, and the team performance results were very useful.

Readers were asked to suggest topics for discussion at the upcoming Service Users Forum. Issues concerning the new building regulations, local authority initiatives, new development opportunities, updates on the Leigh Sports Village and Gadbury Business Park and the speeding up of planning applications were all raised.

Thank you to all those who provided feedback, your comments are invaluable to the continued success of our service.



Complaints considered by the Planning and Regeneration Department

April 2004-March 2005 by type and number

Planning procedures	15
Condition of land	15
Tree matters	4
Planning decisions	3
Travellers sites	3
Staff responses	2
Non-compliance with planning conditions	2
Delays	2
Unauthorised business activity	2
Building control procedures	2
Landscaping	1
Noise	1

High Hedges Legislation

As of the 1 June 2005, new powers were given to local councils in controlling the issues surrounding high hedges. Along with the new powers, the Government has issued national guidance on the way that councils should approach and deal with high hedge complaints in its document 'High Hedges: Prevention and Cure'.

The document outlines the law and suggests ways in which Councils can run the system in line with good administrative practice. Along with this guidance, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) has produced a general leaflet (Over the Garden Hedge), looking at factors that should be considered before planting a new hedge and advice on resolving disputes over problem hedges.

However, should disputes remain unresolved a separate leaflet explains what will happen if the council becomes involved (High Hedges: Complaining to the Council). Complaint forms are available from the Planning and Regeneration Department in Wigan and online at www.wiganmbc.gov.uk. Currently, the fee for high hedge complaints is set at £500 with a discounted fee of £100 available for those on Council tax benefit or housing benefit.

All documents can be downloaded from the Wigan Council website.

What are planning contravention notices?

The Planning Enforcement Team sometimes find it helpful when investigating potential breaches of planning control to serve a planning contravention notice (also known as PCNs).

We serve PCNs in order to move cases forward towards a satisfactory conclusion. They require provision of the information about all those who have an interest in the land and premises which are being investigated. PCNs also provide a formal opportunity for recipients to discuss the matter with the council in more detail at a specified time and date.

It is an offence to fail to return a completed PCN within 21 days of the date of issue. There is a maximum £1000 fine upon conviction.

In spring 2005 a local business was fined £450 with £130 costs for the non-return of a PCN.

Planning contravention notices are a useful instrument to resolve problems of unauthorised development more quickly.

Built in Quality and Urban Design Awards.

We are pleased to announce we have now secured sponsorship for our awards scheme and the first annual ceremony will take place at the Investment Centre, Waterside Drive, Wigan on 3rd October.

Modus Properties, developers of the Grand Arcade have generously offered to sponsor this year's awards to be presented by his worship the Mayor. The awards, for Built in Quality and excellence in Urban Design form part of a co-ordinated initiative to improve the quality of design and development within the borough over a sustained period of time. Categories for Built in Quality Awards will include;

- Small domestic (extensions alterations etc)
- House building (including apartments)
- Commercial and Industrial developments

Winners of our awards will be entered into the LABC national award scheme. Works inspected by the Council's Building Control team will be eligible for consideration. Judging criteria will include site management, site safety and quality of workmanship. The Urban Design Award categories will include:

- Individual new building or group of buildings
- Conversion, refurbishment and conservation
- Environmental quality- landscaping, street furniture, public spaces and the like.

