

Newsletter



Building Control and Development Control Environmental Services Department

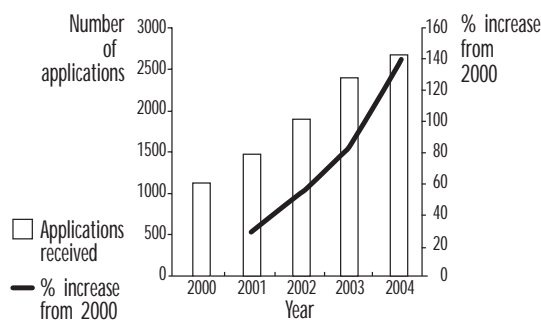
As a service user, we hope you will find this newsletter helpful whether you make applications regularly or occasionally. We want you to understand how to prepare better applications for planning permission and building regulations approval. We can then continue to improve the speed, efficiency and effectiveness of our service.

The articles in the newsletter will:

- Alert you to new regulations or requirements
- Guide you to sources of help on our web site and elsewhere
- Help you understand our processes
- Request your views of how we can improve our services for you

Building Control performance

Agents and builders will be well aware that there has been a considerable increase in work in recent years. Applications deposited with us have also grown steadily with an increase of 140% from 1126 received in 2000 to over 2700 this year. We now make around 9000 inspections on site a year.



We aim to validate all applications within 3 days of deposit and issue decisions on 75% of applications within 2 months. Last year we only achieved 67% of decisions within that time. This was mainly because of the extra volume of applications being received.

We are currently carrying out a customer satisfaction survey and are sending out questionnaires with all completion certificates. So far, replies from both builders and householders suggest we provide a reasonable number of site inspections. Also 96% of respondents think we give good value for money for the service we provide.

Cost of the Building Control service

The net cost of the whole Building Control service last year was 91p per head of population. This compares well with surrounding authorities.

Charter Mark



The Building Control and Development Control service

are seeking to achieve the Charter Mark award. Charter Mark is a government standard of customer excellence. It will provide an ideal way of focusing our efforts on the needs of you, our customers.

We are now reviewing the way we serve your needs in order to introduce improvements so that early in 2005 we can apply for the Charter Mark award.

When we achieve Charter Mark it will be recognition that we have reached an excellent standard of customer service. We can use it as a tool to continue to improve our customer focus.

Wigan and St Helens Service Users Forum for Building Control and Development Control

The joint Wigan and St Helens Forum of agents meets twice a year, providing an opportunity for those who regularly submit applications to discuss new initiatives and requirements. The forum provides an opportunity for a two way dialogue. It allows us to explain to regular customers what our objectives are and how we are achieving them. It also enables our customers to provide feedback on the way we deliver services and how they might be developed. Guest speakers are a regular and popular feature of the meetings. Minutes of previous meetings can be viewed on our web site. The next meeting of the Forum will take place on Thursday 27 January 2005 at the Arena, Robin Park, Wigan. If you would like to attend the forum please contact Dave Melling, Assistant Director of Planning and Regeneration in Wigan on 01942 404255.



Take a look at our web site

You can access our site at www.wiganmbc.gov.uk and click on the Environment button. You will find a wealth of information to help you understand how to prepare Planning and Building Regulations applications and access all our services.

You will also find a wide range of documents for downloading. These include:

- Guidance notes for completing and submitting a planning or building regulations application
- Guidance on extending your home
- All types of application forms
- The list of applications we have recently received including contact details
- Our leaflet 'Community involvement in the planning application process – a step by step guide for developers'
- Supplementary Planning Guidance on Extending your home, Hot food establishments, and Telecommunications development

Recent innovations

You can now access all Planning Committee reports via the council's web site under 'Quick links'.

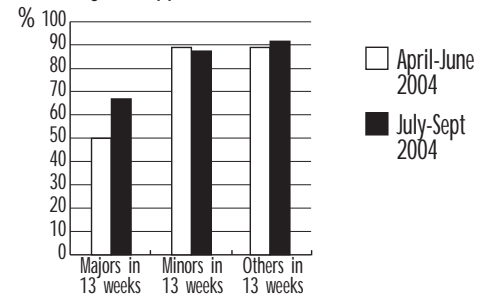
You can now see a copy of the decision notice for each planning application determined in the last 3 months via the Planning Applications button on the department's web site.

Our site is now also linked directly to the National Planning Portal which provides a wide range of publications related to the Development Control process.

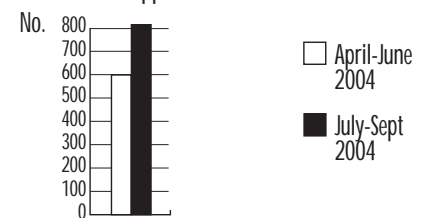
Development Control performance

Development Control performance in Wigan April - September 2004. Development Control has achieved its best performance ever in determining planning applications.

Percentage of applications determined



Total number of applications determined



Part P Building Regulations Electrical safety

Fixed domestic electrical installations will be covered by Part P of the Building Regulations from 1 January 2005. The government has introduced an electrical self-certification scheme where members of certain approved bodies can certify that their electrical work meets the requirements.

Competent persons self-certification schemes are being operated by BRE Certification Limited, British Standards Institute, ELECSA Limited, NICEIC Certification Services Limited and NAPIT. Homeowners should employ electricians registered with one of these schemes. Or, they must submit a Building Regulations application and arrange for the work to be independently inspected and tested (at their expense) at various stages by a suitably competent person.

Architects and agents should include a note on their drawings indicating how the electrical installation is to be controlled. Suggested wording will be made available on our web site during December.

Architects and agents should familiarise themselves with all the new requirements of the Approved Documents. Copies are available on the ODPM web site at www.odpm.gov.uk

Building Regulation changes

Approved Document's A (Structure) and C (Site preparation and resistance to contaminants and moisture) were revised on 1 December. Changes to Approved Document A include revised guidance on domestic outbuildings and garages, changes in foundation and disproportionate collapse recommendations, updated wind speed considerations and the requirement that wall ties should be of stainless steel. The tables specifying the maximum safe span for structural timbers have been removed from the document. Alternative tables are available from the Timber Research and Development Association (TRADA) www.trada.co.uk

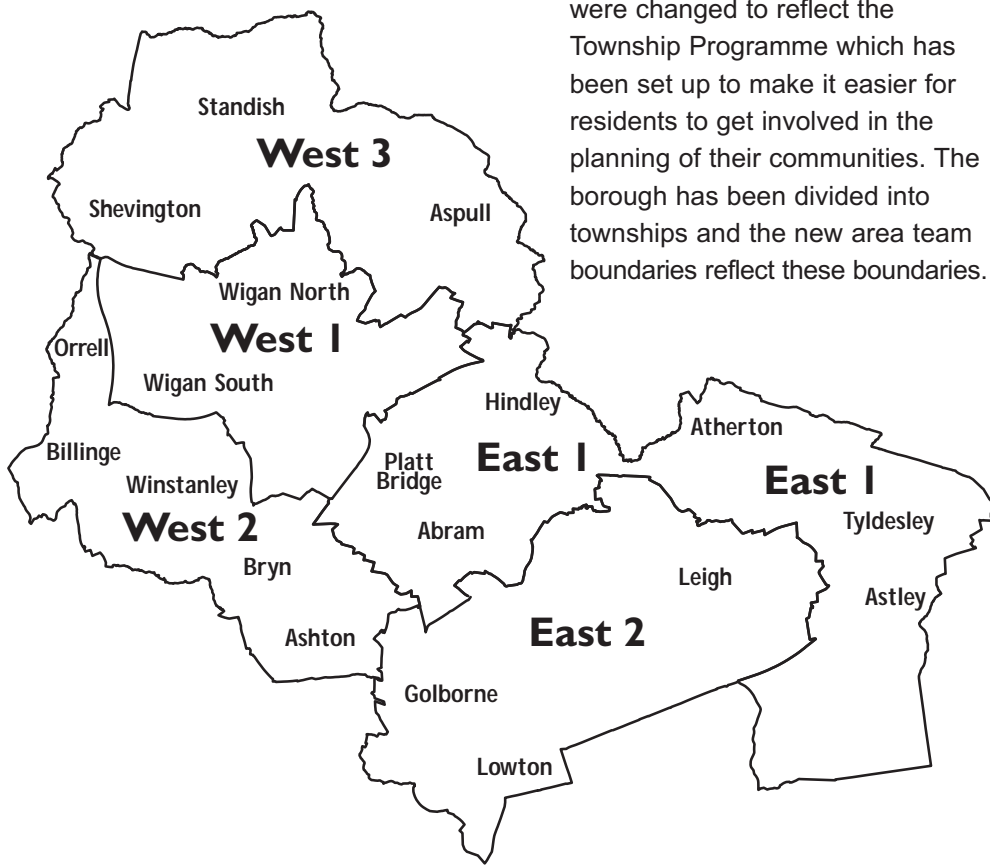
Approved Document C has been updated to take account of anticipated climate changes which are expected to result in increased risk of flooding and increased summer drought, which in turn may cause shrinkage or cracks in buildings. Greater risk of rain penetration as a result of increased driving rain and possible mobilisation of ground contaminants due to increased surface run off or raised ground water levels.

Freedom of Information Act

This Act applies to all our services from January 2005. We will then have to provide copies of planning and building regulation applications, including plans, to members of the public, at a reasonable charge. Further information is available on our web site.

New Development Control area teams

On 1 October 2004 our area teams were changed to reflect the Township Programme which has been set up to make it easier for residents to get involved in the planning of their communities. The borough has been divided into townships and the new area team boundaries reflect these boundaries.



West 1 – Wigan North/Wigan South
Miss C Booth 01942 488046
Mr Graham Dickman 01942 488045
Mr G Nevitt 01942 404070

West 2 – Orrell Billinge and Winstanley/Ashton Bryn
Miss C Byrne 01942 404275
Mr J Corcos 01942 404277
Mr T Cropper 01942 404272

West 3 – Shevington Standish and Aspall
Mr Andrew Smith 01942 404274
Mr S Winnard 01942 404276

East 1 – Hindley
Abram/Atherton/Tyldesley Astley
Mr K Foster 01942 404389
Mr P A Liptrot 01942 404261
Miss Sue Orrell 01942 404260

East 2 – Leigh/Lowton Golborne
Mr R Kilbourne 01942 404262
Mr B V Latham 01942 404264
Mr C McDonald 01942 404266
Mr Dave Rawsthorne 01942 404263

Planning and Regeneration Department Service Plan

We prepare an annual Service Plan which enables all service users, Councillors, partners and stakeholders to understand what we intend to do with the resources available and what our performance targets are.

The Service Plan explains:

- Our aims and purposes
- Our role in delivering the corporate priorities of the council
- How we intend to respond to the needs and aspirations of the community

If you would like a copy of the Service Plan please contact Dave Melling, Assistant Director of Planning and Regeneration on 01942 404255.

Quality Award Scheme: Built in Quality and Urban Design Awards

Wigan Council will be launching a new initiative to promote high standards of construction and design quality in the new year. We will be presenting an annual awards scheme with two themes. Built in Quality Awards operated by our Building Control section and Urban Design Awards operated by the Planning Implementation team.

Categories for Built in Quality awards will include:

- Small domestic
- Housebuilding or apartments
- Commercial developments
- Industrial developments

Works inspected by the council's Building Control Team will be eligible for consideration in the various categories. Judging criteria will include site management, site safety and quality of workmanship. Winners of our awards will be entered into the national Built in Quality Award held in London each June.

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 so on



Complaints

Building Control recently received a complaint from an agent suggesting that we were unreasonably slow in telling him that a house he was extending was built on a special foundation. We have changed our procedures, we now check this item as soon as an application has been validated and if we are aware that special foundations will be required, we will now tell you when we acknowledge the application (usually within 3 days of it being deposited).

You can complain direct to Paul Swift, Head of Building Control or to Dave Melling, Assistant Director of Planning and Regeneration. Alternatively you can use the council's formal complaints process available on our web site.

Contact us

If you have any queries about our Building Control service you can visit our web site at www.wiganmbc.gov.uk or you can call into our offices at:
Civic Buildings, New Market Street or contact Paul Swift, Head of Building Control on 01942 404278, fax 01942 404222 or e-mail p.swift@wigan.gov.uk

High Hedges legislation

Anticipated new powers for local councils to control high hedges are expected to come into force in Spring 2005.

Complaints may be made to the council on the grounds that a person's reasonable enjoyment of their property is adversely affected by the height of a high hedge.

The Development Control Section of the Planning and Regeneration Department will deal with complaints. We will expect the complainant to have taken all reasonable steps to resolve the matter directly with the hedge owner.

If we accept the complaint, a fee will be payable and the matter will be investigated. National guidance notes and advice will be issued to local councils before the Act comes into force.

If the council decides the hedge is too high, a remedial notice can be issued, specifying the action to be taken. Both complainant and hedge owner may appeal against the decision of the council within 28 days of the issue of the council's decision.

If the hedge owner fails to comply with the notice it could result in a conviction in the magistrates court. This could mean a fine of up to £1,000 (present rate). We will also be given legal powers to enter land, carry out the necessary works and recover the costs from the hedge owner.

How do we enforce the Town and Country Planning Act?

We have a team of 4 officers responsible for enforcement matters. Last year they investigated over 650 complaints about a wide range of planning matters. Enforcement officers work hard to achieve successful and permanent solutions to planning problems. If you want more information on our enforcement procedures and the standard of service you can expect, visit our web site and download two helpful leaflets entitled Customer Charter for the Town Planning Enforcement Service and Town Planning Enforcement Policy or contact Brian Collier on 01942 404270.

Feedback

Please help us to improve by giving us your views:

If we produced this newsletter twice each year, would this be helpful?

If **no**, please explain why.

Please tick 

Yes No

Do you think the format of the newsletter is appropriate?

If **no**, how could it be improved?

Yes No

Which topics were of most interest to you?

Please list any topics which you think should be discussed at our regular Service Users Forum.

Your name and organisation

Please complete, cut-off and return this questionnaire to:

Mr M Kimber, Director of Environmental Services, FREEPOST NWW5378, Civic Buildings, New Market Street, Wigan WN1 1ZZ

