

**Wigan and St Helens joint Building Control and  
Development Control Services Users Forum 9<sup>th</sup> Meeting  
Held Tuesday 14 February 2006 at The Arena, Robin Park, Wigan**

**Present:**

Mark Dickens	St Helens Council
Dave Melling	Wigan Council
Graham Dickman	Wigan Council
M B Richards	St Helens Council
Paul Swift	Wigan Council
Kathryn Barker	Wigan Council – Access Officer
John Mann	Wigan Council – Building Control
Gavin Pinion	Goldcrest Engineers Ltd
Gordon Nash	Nash Building Consultants Limited
Phyllis Bayley	Bayley Design
Julie Clark	Clark Planning Consultants Ltd
Brian Rimmer	Wigan Council – Community Protection
Dawn Hewitt	Environment Agency
Chris Waring	Environment Agency
Andy Houghton	Helena Housing, St Helens
G Broomes	Building Design
Tim Smith	ALG Investments
Peter Anderson	NPS NW Ltd
Peter Downs	NPS NW Ltd
Bill Pye	Pye Design
M Cawley	Cawley Design Services
Dyfan Jones	Steven Abbott Associates
Mark Copeland	Architectural Services
John Copeland	Architectural Services
Lesley Johnson	United Utilities

**Apologies:**

Peter Ball	Peter T Ball - Architects
Mr Ashall	Wigan & Leigh College

**Action**

1. **Minutes of meeting held 3 August 2005 – noted and agreed as accurate.**
2. **Matters arising.**
  - (i) Wigan's Shop Front Design Guide – a copy was circulated to each attendee.
  - (ii) Wigan's supplementary planning document on Landscape Design – copy was circulated to each attendee.

- (iii) As a result of neighbour satisfaction survey in Wigan, letters of notification to residents have now been amended to indicate that they will only be informed of decision if they write in but that the decision will be available for 3 months on the website.
- (iv) Letterbox at Wigan Planning & Regeneration Department – will be considered when Reception area is remodelled.

**3. Presentation on Access and Design Statements by Kathryn Barker, Access Officer, Wigan.**

Kathryn Barker outlined the approach and content of the forthcoming Wigan supplementary planning document on Access for All. The aim of the SPD is to offer guidance to ensure that developments in the Borough create an accessible environment. The SPD will shortly be issued for consultation with an intended adoption date of October 2006.

Kathryn explained that an Access Statement will be required for all planning applications except those relating to house extensions when the SPD has been adopted. She went on to explain what an Access Statement should contain and what standards it should be based upon.

Julie Clark enquired whether the Access Officer would be consulted on every planning application as this might impact on timing of decisions. Julie also enquired about the content of Statements and the overlap between Planning and Building Regulations. Kathryn replied that there was no intention of slowing down application processing. Applicants will require sufficient knowledge of the Building Regulations to be aware of the minimum requirements which will be required at Building Regulation stage.

Gordon Nash expressed the view that applicants will have to provide detailed designs at the planning stage.

Paul Swift confirmed that at least the approach and access arrangements to the building will have to be addressed.

Graham Dickman said that in some cases proposed access arrangements were not workable and the applicant is unwilling to amend the proposal at the planning application stage. Therefore, forethought about the Building Regulation stage will help the planning process.

Gordon Nash said that the client will need to agree to pay for the fees for the detail stage before securing planning permission. This will involve some risk but it will bring a reality to the budgeting process at an earlier stage.

Andy Houghton enquired whether use of former housing for offices on a temporary basis will be included in the requirements for Access statements.

The officers confirmed that this would be the case although Paul Swift pointed out that the temporary nature of the use could be reflected in the access statement.

**4. Development Control performance in Wigan and St Helens.**

Information was circulated showing performance over the calendar year 2005. This indicated that both Authorities had exceeded Government targets for processing applications in all three categories, Major, Minor and Other applications. Information was also presented on appeals determined during 2005.

**5. Survey of those notified of planning applications in Wigan.**

Graham Dickman explained the Neighbour Satisfaction Survey which was carried out in the Summer of 2005 and summarised the main highlights which indicated that most customers were satisfied with the service they had received. Graham indicated that the only weak area was in response to telephone enquiries and that further thought will need to be given to providing information on when callers will be contacted by officers.

DM

As previously noted, the neighbour notification letters had been amended to advise about how information may be obtained on decisions.

**6. New arrangements for consultation with Environment Agency on applications with low risk flood implications.**

Dave Melling explained the new consultation arrangements which have now commenced in Wigan. It was explained that a risk assessment approach was adopted and in certain instances, flood risk assessments will be required.

It was explained that a letter of compliance can be obtained from the Environment Agency at pre application stage which can deal with flooding issues and help speed the application process. Chris Waring indicated in a response to a question from Julie Clark that ideally the Agency would respond within 21 days to a request for a letter of compliance.

Gordon Nash enquired whether flood risk assessments were required for applications to be validated. Chris Waring said that the Agency would prefer this to be the case because the information will be required to process the application.

Dave Melling advised that the planners in Wigan had been instructed to accept the application in the absence of a flood risk assessment but to immediately notify the agents that one was required and send a copy of the appropriate guidance note. If a flood risk assessment was not submitted within a specified period, then the application might have to be refused on the basis of insufficient information.

Chris Waring pointed out that the arrangements were not really any different from the present arrangements except that Local Planning Authorities were now dealing with more matters themselves. For example, with regard to domestic extensions, the practical difficulties of flood risk could often be solved by raising floor levels.

Chris Waring pointed out that flood zone maps are available on the Environment Agency website and there will also be a prompt on the new application forms about flooding issues. All to note

Chris Waring went on to present a note on Draft Planning Policy Statement 25 which he indicated will strengthen rather than change PPG25 regarding flooding. The new procedures require the Agency to report all applications which have been approved contrary to the Agency's advice on flooding. There is also a draft Direction which would require Local Planning Authorities to notify the Deputy Prime Minister before approving any application to which the Agency had objected on flooding grounds. The draft PPS25 is expected to be adopted in the Summer of 2006.

**7. Progress on High Hedges.**

Dave Melling reported that five formal complaints were being processed in Wigan and the procedures were more complex than originally envisaged.

**8. Staff changes in Development Control in Wigan.**

Detail plans were circulated showing the staff changes.

**9. Team of the Year Awards in Wigan for Building Control and Development Control.**

It was reported in the Achievement Category, Development Control had been awarded third prize and in the Customer Satisfaction Category, the DC/BC service had been awarded first prize following the award of Charter Mark. Thanks were extended to all members of the Forum for their regular attendance and support which had been of considerable benefit in securing the awards.

10. **Website developments in Wigan and St Helens.**

Mark Dickens encouraged the submission of planning applications on line and offered training sessions via the Planning Portal. He emphasised the important time savings which agents could achieve by using the system.

St Helens also offers to scan plans for agents. St Helens had scored 20 Pendleton points for E Government after some difficulties.

Wigan reported similar progress and a score of 21 Pendleton points. Wigan's website had allowed viewing of applications on line immediately after Christmas, but this facility was no longer in operation following a system fault. This will be rectified as soon as possible. However, a large range of other information could be obtained from Wigan's website and applications could be submitted and fees paid on line.

Dave Melling outlined the confidentiality issues which surround website use and in particular the requirement of the Data Commissioner that personal telephone numbers, signatures and email addresses should not be available on line. There is currently some lack of clarity regarding these issues.

11. **Legislation/Guidance update for Development Control.**

(i) Green Belt direction.

The officers reported that this will require applications in the Green Belt for buildings of 1000 square metres or more or any other development which will have a significant impact on the openness of the Green Belt to be referred to the ODPM before it can be approved by the Local Planning Authority.

(ii) Draft PPS3 on housing – this updates planning guidance on residential development.

(iii) Satellite dishes – enables up to two dishes to be erected on dwellinghouses and other buildings without planning permission, subject to size limits.

(iv) Planning gain supplement – a proposal by the Government to introduce a levy on development of land for all purposes except house extensions. This is not likely to be introduced before 2008.

12. **Timetable for UDP/LDF.**

Details of the programme in Wigan was circulated and the St Helens programme will be supplied to Forum members separately.

13. **Emerging Supplementary Planning Guidance Documents in Wigan** – extracts from the Wigan web pages were circulated. The introduction of the requirement for contributions for off-site open space in relation to residential developments was highlighted. From 12<sup>th</sup> April 2006, contributions will be required for all residential developments irrespective of size. A separate letter has recently been issued to all 205 No. agents on Wigan's database regarding this matter. Graham Dickman explained the procedures.

St Helens reported that their supplementary planning document on design is currently out to consultation.

14. Dyfan Jones of Steven Abbott Associates enquired about front loading applications and responses from Council consultees and external consultees. Apparently, there had been examples of lack of co-operation, particularly from English Nature.

Dave Melling explained that he had recently received a letter from English Nature advising that because of their incorporation into Natural England later in the year, they will only respond on planning applications which affect SSSIs. They will not engage in pre application discussions at all.

Graham Dickman made pleas for information to be provided up front in order to enable all relevant issues to be identified so that the right people could be made available at the pre application meeting.

15. Dyfan Jones indicated that some Local Planning Authorities are refusing to deal with working amendments. he drew attention to a report to Newcastle City Council's Planning Committee regarding a legal case which prevented working amendments being accepted by Planning Authorities.

Dave Melling indicated he was familiar with the case and was currently taking legal advice but at the present time there was no change in the usual approach of accepting working amendments which did not impact on third parties.

Mark Dickens indicated a similar approach was being adopted in St Helens but legal advice might indicate a stricter approach in the very near future.

### **Building Control items.**

1. Paul Swift reported that Building Regulation applications in Wigan had declined by 12% recently but the Department was coping with all applications in house. A quick turnaround is being provided.

St Helens were currently processing 92% of applications within 10 days and 98% within 15 days.

Application numbers were also in decline in St Helens. In 2005, £87 million value was processed in Building Control applications compared to £76 million the previous year. So far this year there have been 11,000 site inspections and 100% of requests for inspections were carried out on the day requested. A facility is available on the website to track the progress of all Building Regulation applications.

2. **Customer Satisfaction Survey** – this is proceeding in Wigan and questionnaires are sent out with Completion Certificates. A good response rate was reported and the consultation is now being widened to include other bodies and agencies.

3. **Access to our services.**

An Equality and Diversity questionnaire was circulated by Wigan and Forum members were asked to complete it in order to improve our accessibility for all groups.

4. **New legislation.**

Paul Swift reported that proposed changes to Part B of the Building Regulations has now been delayed.

Part F relating to ventilation and L relating to thermal efficiency were due to come into effect on 6 April but have not yet been issued by Government. When appropriate, training workshops for BC officers will be set up in the Spring

Paul reported that these would be the most complex changes in the Regulations in the last ten years. Paul explained that the intention was to create buildings with low carbon values and this required a very technical approach to building design and also involved pressure testing of buildings when completed to ensure thermal efficiency.

Part F will include assessment of the performance characteristics of ventilation systems.

5. **Part P Guide Book** - this relates to electrical installations and is intended mainly for contractors. Paul will distribute these when available. PWS

6. **Built in Quality and Urban Design Awards.**

These very successful awards were held in early October 2005. The winners were as follows:

- Small domestic work – DJ & E Birchall and T Parkes & Son
- Housing – Loughlin Homes
- Commercial – Laing O'Rourke Construction and Eric Wright Construction

The idea of these awards has now been taken up by the Greater Manchester Building Control Group.

Gordon Nash suggested a leaflet might be helpful to promote good practice and encourage other firms to seek nomination for the awards. Paul Swift said this would be considered.

PWS

7. **Development Control/Building Control Newsletter in Wigan.**

Paul Swift introduced the third edition of the Newsletter and welcomed feedback on it.

8. **Wigan Building Control seeking ISO 9000 accreditation.**

Paul Swift reported that Wigan will jointly be seeking this with other Greater Manchester Authorities although Wigan will be taking the lead and it is likely to take six months to complete.

Mike Richards indicated that St Helens were also considering applying for the accreditation.

9. **Revised procedure on demolition of properties.**

Paul Swift reminded the members that Building Control need to be notified when demolition of buildings is actually taking place so that procedures can be monitored.

10. Peter Anderson enquired about the on-line information available on Building Control applications in St Helens and Mike Richards explained what was available. Paul Swift indicated that he is intending to install a similar system in due course. Both Building Control Authorities can accept on-line applications via Submit A Plan but agents have not yet taken up this service.

11. **Next meeting to be held at Robin Park Arena in September.**