Issue number 11 Spring 2010

Newsletter

Building Control and Development Control Environmental Services

Wigan Council

Update on Killian Pretty

In response to the Killian Pretty report into opportunities for improving the planning application process, a number of changes have been, or will be, introduced.

These include:

- simplified applications to extend unexpired planning permissions, and a procedure for non-material alterations to permissions (October 2009)
- changes to publicity arrangements for planning applications
- changes (to be introduced April 2010) to reducing the number of minor non-domestic applications, streamlining information requirements for planning applications, and scaling back of the use of Planning Obligations

Consultations are being carried out until 19 March 2010 on Development Management, improving the use and discharge of planning conditions, and improving consultation arrangements.

In addition, pilot studies are underway looking at Local Development Orders, business process improvement reviews, alternative dispute resolution, and recognition for agents who make good quality submissions.

All these reports can be viewed at **www.communities.gov.uk**

Marketing information

Our BC team operate their building function in a competitive environment and fear that misinformation may be responsible in part, for the reduction in applications received recently. To counter this, a new marketing strategy is being launched and this will include a new information leaflet, aimed principally at householders.

The new leaflet details the services we provide and gives information on how we can help people who are planning to carry out building works.

It also highlights the advantages of using our service: our professional, impartial and accountable staff and of course we are a not for profit organisation, unlike our competitors.'

CLG Consultations

CLG released two building control related documents in December. The first was the annual report on reducing the regulatory burden.

The second being the consultation on proposals to change the administration, monitoring and quality assurance of competent person schemes. The aim is to improve the level of compliance with the regulations and increase consistency across the schemes. The Wigan Council reply was submitted in December. If you wish to comment on the consultation you must submit them direct to CLG by 19 March.

Non-material amendments

A formal application is now required for all amendments to planning permissions, with a separate procedure for material and non-material changes.

Non-material changes are made on a standard form and presently there is no fee. The procedure is limited to changes of the same site area and description as the original application, where changes would not materially alter appearance, change design, or result in greater visual intrusion, nor be larger or higher than previously. Notice of a decision must be given within 28 days.

Building Control technical seminars

Our next technical seminar will take place at Wigan cricket club from 9.30 am on Tuesday 2nd March. Sponsored by Dorma UK Ltd it will cover fire doors and door controls. Future events planned include a session on the new Approved Document G. If you would like to attend any future seminars, please contact the building control team who will arrange invitations.

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.

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.

BC/DC admin unification

To enable the council to provide a more efficient service to users delivered at reduced cost, the Building Control and Development Control admin and technical support teams are to merge, effective from 1st March.

Building Excellence Awards

Wigan held their annual Urban Design & Building Excellence Awards in December. (We changed the name to Building Excellence from Built in Quality to follow the new name of the national award scheme) The standard of entry was again very high and awards were given for best small domestic extension, best housing-small developer and large developer, best healthcare building, best commercial building and best sustainability project – details of which can be found on our website. All this years' winners are to be entered into the North West regional Building Excellence awards which will take place in April at the Reebok Stadium.

Building Regulations Minister visits Wigan

Wigan were honoured to receive a visit in November from Lord McKenzie of Luton, the government minister responsible for Building Regulations. He was in the area and had called in on a fact finding visit. He talked with several members of our Building Control team. Given the current national review of building control being undertaken by the government, Lord Mckenzie asked colleagues what we would change first. We suggested a reintroduction of simplified thermal insulation standards for houses and the scrapping of the Building Notice system for anything but the most minor works.

Steve Gaskell discusses requirements with Lord Mckenzie

Moving towards lower carbon developments

We want to work more closely with developers to help them deliver lower carbon development across Wigan and move towards the government's aspiration for zero carbon development.

As well as considering energy efficiency measures as a priority, development will increasingly need to include low carbon technologies such as solar panels, wind, biomass, heat pumps and Combined Heat and Power schemes.

Through policy EM18 'Decentralised Energy', the North West Regional Spatial Strategy already sets a requirement that 10% of the energy demand from new developments should be met from 'low carbon generation' on site.

This policy applies to any housing development of 10 units or more or non residential development of 1000sqm or more.

We expect appropriate developments to achieve this target with our advice and assistance, unless it can be demonstrated that it is not feasible and/or viable.

Wigan Core Strategy

Work on the Wigan Core Strategy continues with an emphasis on filling the gaps in our evidence base, namely:

- The 2009 update of our Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment has now been completed and we will be proceeding with the 2010 update in April. If there are any 'new' potential sites that we should know about, please let us know.
- JBA consultants will conclude our Level 2 Strategic Flood Risk Assessment in late March.
- The Valuation Office are undertaking our affordable housing viability assessment.
- B2B have undertaken market research on the level of attraction to the market of our key strategic sites for employment development.
- The Greater Manchester Transportation Unit is concluding the modelling work on the transport implications of our proposals.

We are also working with key stakeholders to confirm the proposed policies in the Core Strategy.

The Local Development Scheme; the project plan for the local development framework; has been revised, setting out a new schedule for the Core Strategy, with the final full stage of consultations scheduled for September and October 2010. There are also proposals for a Wigan Central Area Action Plan to commence this summer and an Allocations Plan to follow completion of the Core Strategy and bring forward more detailed policies and allocations.

Planning application fees frozen

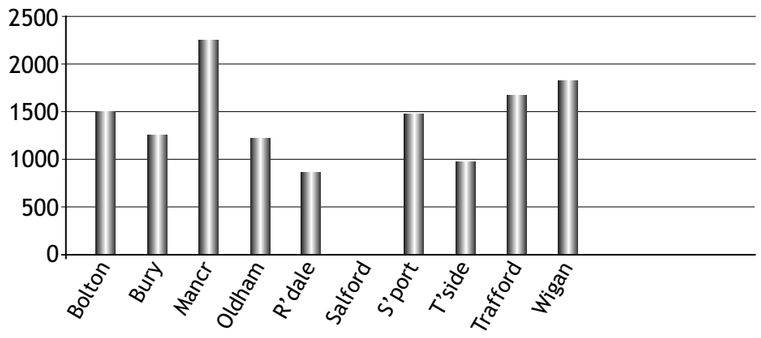
The government has recently announced that planning application fees will be kept at their current levels to help developers through the economic recovery and keep builders on construction sites by saving them up to £23m a year.

Fees for planning appeals were also being considered, but will not be introduced this year to avoid placing any further burdens on businesses and householders during this difficult economic time.

Performance

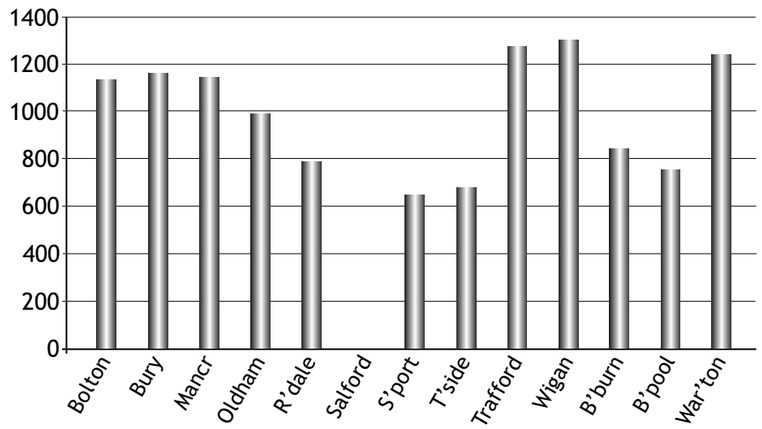
Wigan Building Control plan checkers are currently checking deposited applications within two weeks from deposit.

Building regulations applications 2008/9



Applications received are lower than last year, due primarily to the national financial situation.

2 month plan check - number of applications checked



Statistics produced by the Association of Greater Manchester Authorities (AGMA) show that for last year, Wigan BC received the second highest number of applications in the region. This was also the third highest number per surveyor and our plan checkers checked the most applications within the two month period, of any authority within the region.

Building Control Charges

New legislation to radically change the building control charges scheme was issued by Government on 25th February. At the time of going to press the proposals were being reviewed. It is however clear that they allow for considerable change over the present system. In particular they provide the flexibility to vary charges according to complexity of work and they more clearly define those works, in connection with disabled persons, which are exempt from the charges.

We will issue our revised scale of charges after 1st April. Copies will be available from the Building Control office and will be published on our website.

House Extensions Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document

This time last year public consultation was carried out on the Draft House Extensions Supplementary Planning Document. As a result, the document has been amended. Further comments are now sought and should be submitted by 2nd April 2010.

The aim of the document is to raise awareness of good design and how best to adapt a house to suit an occupier's present and future needs whilst protecting residential amenity and enhancing the appearance of the built environment. By providing such a document the council hopes to improve the quality of submissions for planning approval, in order to achieve a better quality development and quicker decisions.

Renewal of unexpired planning permissions

A new procedure has been introduced, allowing for an extension to the timescale for implementation of unexpired planning permissions. The application is made on a standard form, and requires a reduced fee. The amount of information required to accompany an application is reduced, however, where there has been a significant change in development plan policy or government guidance, further information may be required.

Further information can be obtained at **www.communities.gov.uk/archived/publications/planningandbuilding/flexibilitypermissions.**

Review of planning committee procedures

The council is currently in the process of reviewing current procedures at Planning Committee with the aim of producing a best practice model for Wigan and a corresponding improvement plan. Consultants will be employed to examine best practice with a view to providing recommendations for improvement in the way we operate. The study will examine our procedures “right across the board”, including such as information provided, room layout, community involvement, chairing and speaking arrangements and other procedures. It will involve the views of applicants and members of the public who attend committee meetings being canvassed.

Approved Document G: Sanitation, hot water safety and water efficiency

The draft of AD G was published on the web late last year but implementation has been delayed due to procedural issues relating to European approval.

CLG have told us that the document is to be reprinted and will be ready for implementation on 6th April. It considerably extends the range of work covered, introducing new aspects such as water conservation, recycled water usage (rainwater harvesting and greywater) and measures to prevent accidental scalding.

The requirements will apply to all new dwellings including those created through a change of use. Designers will be required to design dwellings that have a potential consumption of no more than 125 litres of wholesome water per person per day. A water use calculator; downloadable from the Planning Portal; is used to assess the whole house water efficiency and must be completed and details submitted with your application. In addition, applicants must provide a notice specifying the calculated potential wholesome water consumption, within 5 days of completion of the work. Building control bodies will not be permitted to issue a completion certificate until this notice has been deposited.

Wigan BC plan to offer a technical seminar on the new guidance in the next few months.

Copies of the (draft) new guidance can be downloaded from the Planning Portal **www.planningportal.gov.uk/.**