

Planning & Building Standards

Newsletter

Edition 6: March 2018

Welcome to our latest newsletter, the first of 2018! Our newsletters are sent out on an ad hoc basis, when there is sufficient news and updates from our teams.

Service review

We would like to thank developers and agents for their input to our Service Review and for their frank and honest feedback. Our review is over now and we are waiting for the final report, we will communicate with you on the service improvements we anticipate introducing over the coming months.

As part of the wider Council-wide transformation Planning and Sustainable Development will be moving into a new function called 'Strategic Place Planning' for the beginning of April 2018. As changes come forward we will keep you as our key stakeholders updated, we do commit to maintaining business as usual during this period of change.

Our interim Head of Service Eric Owens will be leaving us by the end of this month, thank you Eric for your commitment and contribution to the place of Aberdeen. Gale Beattie our current Planning and Environmental Policy Manager will be taking over Eric's post until a Chief Officer is appointed for Strategic Place Planning.

Development Management

As you will be aware our formal pre-application advice service and validation guidelines have been in place since the middle of last year and are published online. These have been well received by developers and agents - helping to front load discussion and negotiation on applications and increase the number of applications which are valid on receipt. As indicated at that time - and as a logical extension to the emphasis on the pre-application phase - this was to followed in due course by a more speedy approach to determining applications with the aim of driving performance improvement. With that in mind, and given the impetus by the Service Review, an action plan is being implemented in the DM Team that will include more effective performance management, application project management and progress monitoring, the enforcement of protocols for response times for consultees, the simplification of reports and delegation of supervisory responsibility to Senior Planners. Once fully implemented in the summer, the performance management framework will be rolled out to the developers and agents. The expectation will be for applicants to have engaged in pre-application advice where appropriate so that applications can be validated first time with a complete suite of supporting information. Thereafter, one chance only will be offered for applicants to amend plans, and one meeting only offered to discuss, prior to determination on the basis of the information available within the 2 and 3 month timescales for major and local development applications. The result will be faster, more certain decision making which will benefit all parties.

At the moment the plan is to actively engage on this new approach with developers/agents, including an Agents Forum meeting in summer this year, before full implementation in the autumn.

Part of this engagement will be to consolidate the changes into a Customer Charter clearly setting out expectations of the new approach from applicants and the planning authority.

Legal agreement templates

Legal agreement templates (S75) have been published on the Council's website since January 2017 and a S69 Template has recently been added. These will be amended to incorporate changes resulting from lessons learned as a result of the Elsie Supreme Court judgement. The amended template will be circulated to developer/agents in the next few months for comment prior to superseding the existing templates.

Developer Obligations

The Council has decided to bring the developer obligations process in house and discontinue the service level agreement with Aberdeenshire Council. Recruitment is currently underway for Developer Obligation Officer to be based in the Local Development Team.

Masterplanning

We have recently co-ordinated officer reviews of 2 masterplans in order to learn lessons from their ongoing delivery. During 2018 we are determining ways to streamline the masterplanning process and give clearer design guidance in order to achieve better quality places. We will also undertake a further masterplan review with selected developers and their agents.

Union Street Conservation Area Regeneration Scheme

Union Street has entered an exciting phase of historic building repair and traditional skills awareness and training through the launch of a five year Conservation Area Regeneration Scheme (CARS).

Aberdeen City Council in partnership with Historic Environment Scotland (HES), Aberdeen City Heritage Trust and Aberdeen Inspired has established this CARS scheme which aims to encourage the repair and enhancement of the physical fabric of historic properties within a defined area of Union Street Conservation Area. This conservation led programme is set up to tackle the problems of run down historic buildings and streetscape where longstanding economic and structural decline has undermined the character of this historic and architecturally rich street. Consideration of the architectural detail of buildings and proper repair, replacement or reinstatement, respecting traditional fabric, details and skills, will help to achieve these aims. This scheme will run until 2022 and make over £2.4m in grant funding available to owners of eligible buildings to undertake high quality repair. This scheme also links directly with the Aberdeen City Centre Masterplan, which includes a range of projects from community based initiatives, infrastructure proposals, economic outputs and environmental developments for the next 25 years and beyond.

CARS will be used to fund:

- a building repair programme,
- community engagement through training opportunities in traditional skills and through education programmes. These training sessions will help explain the traditional skills required to maintain historic buildings and will allow participants to experience a wide range of traditional methods,
- building maintenance training opportunities that will explain the need (and advantages) of planned routine maintenance for historic properties,
- training opportunities for improving traditional construction skills.

If you would like further information on the scheme, please contact:

Jamie McNamara PG Dip, MA CARS – Project Officer

Building Standards Deemed Refusals

As per Scottish Government requirements, from March 2018 ACC Building Standards will now be refusing Building Warrants.

Any building warrant application that has not been granted within 9 months of its first report, it will be automatically refused unless a longer period is agreed with the verifier. Reminder letters will be sent out to the agent if we have had no response from the agent within either 90 days, and also if 8 months have passed and the warrant has still not been approved. If warrant approval has not been granted within the statutory time period or the period has not been extended, the verifier may consider issuing formal notification of the “deemed refusal”. An applicant or their duly appointed agent has the right to appeal to the Sheriff Court. Further information on the Deemed Refusal process can be found in the Procedural Handbook.

A downloadable copy of the Procedural Handbook can be found at: <http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Built-Environment/Building/Building-standards/ProceduralLegislation>

Building Standards Fire Engineered Proposals

Scottish Government recently issued a change which expands Sect34 of the Building (Scot) Act 2003. Verifiers must now notify the Building Standards Division on a wider range of development proposals which incorporate fire engineered designs. In addition, Scottish Government guidance requests that verifiers ensure fire engineered designs are verified by competent persons. The Building Standards Team do not have a suitably qualified fire engineer to evaluate more complex designs so we have procured the services of a company to 3rd party evaluate proposals. We have agreed turnaround times with our 3rd party engineer so there should be no appreciable delay in the verification process. Full details of the changes can be found at: <http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0051/00518410.pdf>

Street Naming & Numbering

As of 1st April 2018, Aberdeen City Council will be introducing charges for the provision of street naming and numbering. A letter informing developers will be sent out before this date to make them aware of this change.

Planning and Road Construction Consents (RCC)

Our Development Management and Roads Teams are working to align Road Construction Consents (RCC) stage 1 and stage 2 with the planning process.

In addition, work on Local Variations to the National Roads Development Guide is well progressed. Workshops have been held with Homes for Scotland and developer representatives and another workshop will occur on 10 April 2018 with an aim of circulating a final version a few months after the workshop. Please contact the Roads Developments Team Leader Mark Wilkie (01224 523482) if you wish to discuss attendance.

Pre-application

Just a note to remind developers to come to us early and enter into a pre-application agreement – we will include roads colleagues at the pre-app stage. We anticipate that this will help speed up the process.

Payments

Please note we would encourage you to take advantage of the benefits of submitting applications for planning and building warrant via the electronic portals. Application fees can now be paid at the time of submission via the electronic portal or, after submission via our website.

eBuilding Standards Portal: <https://www.ebuildingstandards.scot/eBuildingStandardsClient/ePlanningPortal>:<https://www.eplanning.scot/ePlanningClient/>

Aberdeen City Council ePayment

: <https://www.civicaepay.co.uk/AberdeenCityEstore/estore/default/Catalog/Index?fundcode=33>

New Website

As you may have noticed, the council website has been refurbished. Changes are continuously being made to improve the pages as we are currently in the bedding-in process, with feedback being welcomed. To provide feedback, please complete the following survey: <https://consultation.aberdeencity.gov.uk/customer-services/7f54f8bc/>

Staffing

Since our last newsletter, we have had a few staff changes in the Development Management, Roads and Building Standards teams.

In Building Standards, Allan Scott, our Building Inspector in the South Team has moved on to work for the NHBC. Our inspector in the North Team, John Linklater has been successful in promotion to Building Standards Officer. This currently leaves both our Building Inspector posts vacant which we hope to advertise in the near future and once the current Council Transformation changes are complete.

Rebecca Chapman is currently on maternity leave and has welcomed her second son into the world in February – both mother and son are healthy and doing well. Finally, Jim Ritchie retired in December after 33 years' service with the Building Standards team. Many of you will know Jim and appreciate the help and experience he brought to the service and he is certainly sorely missed by his colleagues.

In Development Management, Paul Williamson (Senior Planner), Jennifer Chalmers (Trainee) and Siobhan Wolverson (Technician) have left us for new opportunities elsewhere. Mark Wilkie has taken over as Team Leader in the Roads Development Management Team and the team is being managed by the Development Management Manger, Daniel Lewis on an interim basis pending restructuring following the Service Review.

Feedback

If there is any topics you feel would be of interest that we are not currently providing updates on, please contact us on: planningsuggestions@aberdeencity.gov.uk.

We are continually trying to improve our quality of service and would like to know your views. Please complete a short feedback form at: <https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/PlanningDM> for planning or at <https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/BStands> for Building Standards to enable us to continuously improve our service.