

RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Agenda Item No.

meeting date: 12 JANUARY 2012
 title: REVISED CHARGES IN RELATION TO PRE-APPLICATION PLANNING ENQUIRIES
 submitted by: DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY SERVICES
 principal author: JOHN MACHOLC – HEAD OF PLANNING SERVICES

1 PURPOSE

1.1 To request Committee's authorisation to revise the current pre-application charging levels in relation to pre-application discussions on development proposals. It also requests Members to authorise charging fees on previous services which were not charged and this relates to domestic enquiries, listed buildings, advertisement consent proposals and hedgerow and tree matters.

1.2 Relevance to the Council's ambitions and priorities

- Council Ambitions - }
- Community Objectives - } To be a well-run and efficient Council.
- Corporate Priorities - }
- Other Considerations - }

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 In January 2010 a charge for pre-application advice was first introduced to the Council following Committee's ratification on 17 December 2009, which was subject of a previous Committee report in July 2009.

2.2 The current scheme of charging is for:

- minor developments;
- intermediate developments;
- major developments.

2.3 The fee varied from £50 - £300 depending on the category and whether a meeting was requested. There was no charge for householders, advertisement proposals and listed building advice.

2.4 In 2010 from January to December, the total fee received was approximately £24,000 and there was a total number of 433 enquiries. The majority of the enquiries still related to householder domestic enquiries. In December 2011 there was a total fee of approximately £26,000 and number of enquiries 379.

2.5 Due to workload commitments and a need to prioritise other tasks from within the Head of Planning Services function, it has not always been possible to deliver a reasonable level of service when dealing with pre-application requests. As a result at the discretion

of the Head of Planning Services, some fees have been refunded with advice still given as it was considered that the level of service was inadequate.

- 2.6 Members will be aware that following on from the agreed restructure, a new post has been created which is a Senior Planning Officer under the Development Management function has been established. A critical role of this post will be to give advice on pre-applications and attend the requisite meetings resulting from pre-application proposals. It is considered that as the post will predominantly be dedicated to give pre-application advice it will enable a prompt response to such enquiries.
- 2.7 It is clear that since the introduction of pre-application fees by Ribble Valley in 2010, the vast majority of Councils across the country now operate such a system. The level of charging and the type of services that are charged varies across districts, but it is clear that many now charge for householder advice. Locally, this has been introduced by both Hyndburn and Blackburn with Darwen districts and I understand it is been currently considered by many other districts.
- 2.8 I now consider it appropriate to increase the level of charging for the existing pre-application services and also introduce charges for the following categories:
- Domestic enquiries.
 - Advertisement proposals.
 - Listed building and Conservation Area consent proposals.
 - Hedgerow and tree advice.
- 2.9 In relation to the level of the services, I consider that in the case of major enquiries that the required fee should be for up to two meetings often the first meeting being an introductory meeting in identifying key issues and requirements and the second meeting with many of the key stakeholders in attendance. A written response would then be issued. Should there be a request for a further follow up meeting, then this would incur an additional cost at a reduced rate to the initial pre-application charge.
- 2.10 It is evident that a significant time is spent in determining domestic/householder pre-application advice. There has been nearly 200 enquiries in 2010 and approximately 150 enquiries in 2011. In certain circumstances, due to developers requesting a meeting in relation to householder/domestic enquiries, they have often forwarded a fee for the basic minor enquiry meeting of £100, which indicates a willingness for people to pay for such a service. This fee has been refunded in all instances as currently there is no charging for such a service. I now consider it appropriate to charge for domestic enquiries and that this should also be on two levels; one in which no meeting is requested and the second for when a meeting is requested. (The revised fee charging scheme is submitted as Appendix A).
- 2.11 I also now consider it appropriate to charge for advertisement proposals although I do not anticipate that this would generate a significant level of enquiries.
- 2.12 The Council has limited resources available in relation to design and conservation advice and it is clear that a lot of time is spent giving pre-application advice for both enquiries relating to repairs on listed buildings and also detailed development proposals. I do not consider it appropriate to charge for advice in relation to minor repair work on listed buildings but I do believe it would be acceptable to pay for advice in relation to pre-application on listed building enquiries that constitute development work more than just minor repairs. These proposals are often complicated and generate a significant amount

of officer time and on that basis I consider it reasonable to charge a limited fee which will cover some of the costs or time involved.

- 2.13 I recognise that the introduction of additional charges is often unwelcome by some users but my experience of the existing system is that it has been operating reasonably successfully and that people have not objected to the charge itself but have more concerns in relation to the timescale of response. It is hoped that the introduction of the new post within the Development Management function, which will not only free up existing officer time, but will also enable an officer to focus their work on pre-application advice and therefore give a quicker response and have more ability to meet with the developers at an earlier time.
- 2.14 In dealing with written responses, it will be made clear that the views expressed are given in good faith and given without prejudice to the formal consideration of any future application. Furthermore, it is expected that the applicant be fully aware of the advice based on current policy and should local and national policies change, that this might affect the advice given.

3 RISK ASSESSMENT

3.1 The approval of this report may have the following implications

- Resources – no significant impact as the serviced will continue to be met via existing resources and with the appointment of a part time senior planner who would be responsible for pre-application advice it should be possible to improve the service.
- Technical, Environmental and Legal – none.
- Political – none.
- Reputation – AS there will be additional charges it is essential that a good service is delivered in relation to pre-application advice and with the appointment of a planning officer this should be possible to be delivered.

4 RECOMMENDED THAT COMMITTEE

4.1 Accept the revised charges and the introduction of the additional charges for pre-application advice and the other procedures and that the revised charges operate from 1 March 2012.

DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY SERVICES

For further information please ask for John Macholc, extension 4502.

GUIDANCE NOTES FOR PRE-APPLICATION ENQUIRY FEES

As from 1 March 2012 charges will be introduced for certain planning enquiries.

A flat rate of £30 plus VAT will be introduced for site history requests.

Confirmation of valid consents – a flat rate fee of £100 plus VAT.

	COST	VAT	TOTAL
<u>Site History</u>	£30	£6	£36
<u>Permitted Development Rights (check if removed)</u>	£30	£6	£36
<u>Minor Developments</u>	£150	£30	£180
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less than 3 dwellings • Offices/research/business and light industry < 500m² or .5 ha • General industry/manufacturing/storage and warehousing < 500m² or < .5ha • Retail proposals • All other minor developments 			
<u>Intermediate Developments</u>	£300	£60	£360
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 to 9 dwellings • Offices/research/business and light industry 500m² – 1000m² or .5ha – 1 ha • General industry/manufacturing/storage and warehousing 500m² – 1000m² or .5ha – 1ha • Retail proposal 500m² – 1000m² or .5ha – 1ha • All other developments 			
<u>Major Developments</u>			
Schemes that involve development in excess of 1000m ² or 1ha (up to 2 meetings)	£600	£120	£720
Additional meeting	£300	£60	£360
<u>Householders</u>			
1. Without meeting	£40	£8	£48
<u>Householders</u>			
2. With meeting (10 day guaranteed fee returned if not)	£75	£15	£90
<u>Listed Buildings/Conservation Areas</u>			
Repair works	£0	£0	£0
All other proposals	£75	£15	£90
<u>Trees</u>			
Services in relation to high hedge or tree issues prior to formal application	£40	£8	£48
<u>Advertisements</u>			
Advice on advertisement	£40	£8	£48
Prior notification and telecommunications	£75	£15	£90

