

# Arun District Council

<b>REPORT TO:</b>	Planning Committee 17 April 2024
<b>SUBJECT:</b>	Review of pre-application planning advice fees
<b>LEAD OFFICER:</b>	Neil Crowther
<b>LEAD MEMBER:</b>	Cllr Hamilton
<b>WARDS:</b>	All
<b>CORPORATE PRIORITY / POLICY CONTEXT / CORPORATE VISION:</b> The recommendations support:- <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Delivering the right homes in the right places;</li><li>• Supporting our environment to support us.</li></ul>	
<b>DIRECTORATE POLICY CONTEXT:</b> The proposals will help to enhance the quality of the natural and built environment, protect the district's natural and heritage assets and to promote economic growth in a sustainable manner, striking a balance between the need for development and the protection of scarce resources.	
<b>FINANCIAL SUMMARY:</b> The proposed amended fee charging schedule for pre-application submissions will have a positive impact on fee income. However, it should be acknowledged that this may be a very small amount relative to the overall fee income for the Planning Department.	

## 1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To review the scale of fees that Arun charges for the pre-application advice service in Planning.

## 2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- i. That the pre-application planning advice fees be amended in accordance with the attached schedule.
- ii. The fee schedule to be implemented on 1 June 2024 after this report is agreed to allow notification to planning agents, changes to the web etc.
- iii. That the pre-application advice fees be increased annually (on 1 April) in line with the national planning application fees that will be linked to inflation (capped at 10%).

## 3. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 3.1 The current pre-application fees were last reviewed amended in September 2021. Since that time, we have also had a new regime of planning applications fees which are now to be increased annually in line with inflation. This report updates the proposed fee schedule for pre-applications submissions made to the Planning Department.

## 4. DETAIL

4.1 The pre-application planning advice system is designed to give service users the opportunity to get detailed, written advice on proposals so that they have an idea of the likely success of any application that may be submitted. It gives the Council the opportunity to positively influence schemes prior to submission by providing advice to applicants such that details relating to aspects of the development can be amended and applications received are of a higher quality through raising issues of design and highlighting the relevant policies for applicants to consider.

4.2 The NPPG gives the following advice on fees:-

*Local planning authorities, including Urban and Mayoral Development Corporations, may charge for providing discretionary services under [section 93 of the Local Government Act 2003](#). Where charges are made they must not exceed the cost of providing the service. It is important that any charging does not discourage appropriate pre-application discussions. In this context, local planning authorities need to consider whether charging is appropriate in all cases, given the potential for pre-application engagement to save time and improve outcomes later in the process. Where possible, local planning authorities are strongly encouraged to provide at least a basic level of service without charge.*

*To ensure transparency, where local planning authorities opt to charge for certain pre-application services, they are strongly encouraged to provide clear information online about:*

- the scale of charges for pre-application services applicable to different types of application (eg minor or major and other)*
- the level of service that will be provided for the charge, including:*
- the scope of work and what is included (eg duration and number of meetings or site visits)*
- the amount of officer time to be provided (recognising that some proposed development requires input from officers across the local authority; or from other statutory and non-statutory bodies)*
- the outputs that can be expected (eg a letter or report) and firm response times for arranging meetings and providing these outputs*
- It is also helpful for local planning authorities to provide links to any charges that [statutory consultees](#) may levy for pre-application advice, where this is known.*

Paragraph: 004 Reference ID: 20-004-20180222

4.3 The current pre-application planning advice service has a range of fees from £100 for householder proposals up to £8,100 for major development of over 200 units. Commercial development fees range from £200 to £4,800 for retail proposals and up to £960 for other commercial floorspace.

4.4 In 2023, there were 24 householder pre-apps submitted and a further 78 other submissions for pre-application advice. These submissions generated £43,800 in fees. Relative to planning application fees in both numbers and income, these

represent only a very small proportion of work within the department. It is also not considered that the scale of fees would cover much more than the cost of the work involved (fees are not intended to be an income generator).

- 4.5 However, it is important that these fees remain appropriate, relate to the time spent of providing responses and are benchmarked against other authorities in the area. There has been a significant change in the state of the economy and wage costs have significantly increased (for example) since the fees were last reviewed.
- 4.6 The time spent on responding to a pre-application planning advice request can vary within each category. For example, a simple household request for a single storey extension in an area with no restrictions takes fewer staff hours than a request for a single storey rear extension, dormer windows and garage conversion in a Conservation Area, adjacent to a listed building with protected trees on site. It is, therefore, necessary to set the fee to represent an average of all types of enquiries.
- 4.7 The fees that Arun charges for pre-application advice are relatively comparative with the rest of the region. Our fees for a householder submission are a flat fee of £100 and other authorities in West Sussex charge between £70 – £220. Fees for a 100 unit residential scheme are £1,600, for which other authorities in West Sussex charge between £1,140 - £3,435. And for a commercial scheme of 1,000sqm Arun’s fee is £500 and other authorities in West Sussex charge between £450 - £860. While benchmarking shows that fees in Arun are comparable it does also show that our current fees are at the lower end of the scale. There is therefore some justification in increasing fees after nearly three years to bring them more into line with the averages within West Sussex.
- 4.8 One element of the fees that has become apparent in recent years and is not addressed within the current schedule, is the involvement of internal consultees such as Engineers, Environmental Health, Parks, Conservation, etc. Pre-application fees are significantly lower than those for planning applications and this reflects the semi-formal nature of them. Many other authorities do have charges for specialist involvement in pre-application submissions. It is, therefore, proposed to introduce an additional flat fee if specialist input is requested. These fees will be:

Minor application	£190 per consultee
Medium application	£250 per consultee
Large applications	£400 per consultee

If specialist input is not requested, then it will not be sought or included within the response and will therefore make the response far less meaningful or valuable.

- 4.9 As a result of the national planning application fees now being increased annually in line with inflation (capped at 10%), it is proposed that an identical increase in the fees that Arun charges for the pre-application service is implemented.

- 4.10 A fee of £60 is proposed for the pre-application service to include a meeting with a Planning Officer. If other officers are required in line with paragraph 4.8 above, this will be charged at £60 per additional attendee. All meetings will be either virtual or in the Council offices.
- 4.11 The proposed fees are broadly in line with other nearby Councils. The main proposed changes are set out below, but a full new fee schedule is attached to this report. It is proposed that these new fees will apply to all applications submitted from 1 June 2024.
- 4.12 Committee should recognise that it is essential that the Council is able to offer a quality service in respect of pre-apps if the Council are to charge for the service. Currently, there is a good service in respect of getting pre-application advice issued. However, there have been some issues in recent years with pre-application advice responses not being provided in a timely manner and the contents of the advice not being useful in providing a view on specific issues. Staff capacity is currently good, and these responses can be provided in good time. We have also significantly improved the quality of our responses. It is essential that these submissions continue to be dealt with in a timely manner and if capacity issues begin to surface for officers, it will be more difficult to charge at fee levels where a good service should be provided.
- 4.13 The final thing to state on the pre-application advice service is that the quality of the officer response is often dependent upon the quality of what is submitted to us. The more detail contained within a submission, the more useful a response will be. This is particularly the case now where we are only going to seek the comments of consultees if the submission states what is sought, and the relevant fee is paid.

## **CONSULTATION**

- 5.1 None

## **5. OPTIONS / ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED**

- 6.1 N/A

## **6. COMMENTS BY THE GROUP HEAD OF FINANCE/SECTION 151 OFFICER**

- 6.1 The increase in fees from 1 June 2024 is supported and the increase thereafter on 1 April 2025.

## **7. RISK ASSESSMENT CONSIDERATIONS**

- 8.1 N/A

## **8. COMMENTS OF THE GROUP HEAD OF LAW AND GOVERNANCE & MONITORING OFFICER**

- 8.1 None.

**9. HUMAN RESOURCES IMPACT**

9.1 N/A

**10. HEALTH & SAFETY IMPACT**

10.1 N/A

**11. PROPERTY & ESTATES IMPACT**

11.1 N/A

**12. EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT (EIA) / SOCIAL VALUE**

12.1 N/A

**13. CLIMATE CHANGE & ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT/SOCIAL VALUE**

13.1 N/A

**14. CRIME AND DISORDER REDUCTION IMPACT**

14.1 N/A

**15. HUMAN RIGHTS IMPACT**

15.1 N/A

**16. FREEDOM OF INFORMATION / DATA PROTECTION CONSIDERATIONS**

16.1 N/A

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**BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:**

	<b>Current Fee</b>	<b>Fee from 1 June 2024</b>	<b>Per Consultee</b>
Householder	£100	£110	n/a
Listed Building	£110	£150	n/a
Minor Residential (3 -9)	£850	£900	£190
Small Residential (10 – 99)	£1,600	£1,750	£250
Major Residential (100 – 199)	£3,100	£3,500	£400
Large Major Residential (+200)	£8,100	£8,500	£400
Food Retail under 500sqm	£200	£235	£250
Food Retail over 500sqm	£960	£1,100	£400
Alterations to Commercial Building	£100	£110	£190
Commercial up to 999 sqm	£500	£580	£190
Commercial 1,000 – 4,999 sqm	£820	£925	£250