



Office of the  
Deputy Prime Minister  

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Creating sustainable communities

# *Standard Application Form*

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Report on Responses to Consultation,  
issued on 24 March 2005



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# INTRODUCTION

On 24 March 2005, the Government issued a consultation paper on specific proposals to streamline and simplify the arrangements for handling applications for planning permission and associated consents. The power to do so is provided in section 42 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

The consultation paper proposed the introduction of a standard application form covering planning permission and other associated consent regimes to be used by all local planning authorities in England. The proposals included an interactive electronic application form as well as a paper-based version.

There was an opportunity to evaluate an electronic prototype form with guidance notes (called 1APP) for householder applications, demolition in a conservation area and listed building consent. The consultation paper also included paper forms and guidance notes for full/outline planning permission including approval of reserved matters, minerals and associated waste, advertisement consent, certificate of lawful development and prior notification. In addition, there was an opportunity to take part in an on-line consultation process by submitting comments on the electronic prototype form via the ODPM website.

It is intended to develop the electronic form to include the full range of planning permissions and associated consents, taking account of the views expressed in the consultation feedback. It is expected that a comprehensive standard application form will be introduced in April 2006 with transitional arrangements (i.e. either the existing forms or the new standard application form may be used) ending in April 2007. When the electronic form is fully implemented, it will be possible to complete and submit a planning application both on-line and in paper format.

This report contains a selection of general themes which have emerged from the consultation exercise. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is currently considering the detailed issues raised in each of the consultation responses.

# RESPONDENTS

A total of 251 responses were received from the following organisational groupings:

- Government – 3% (8 responses)
- Local Government – 54% (136 responses)
- Other representative organisations – 8% (20 responses)
- Statutory consultees – 2% (4 responses)
- ICT suppliers – 4% (10 responses)
- Private sector and representatives – 16% (41 responses)
- Private individuals – 5% (12 responses)
- Anonymous – 8% (20 responses)

The majority of respondents were from Local Government organisations. Of the total responses, 102 were submitted via the online consultation process and 149 were submitted using conventional channels (email and letter.)

## **SUMMARY OF RESPONSES**

### **Standard approach to handling planning applications**

The majority of the respondents (56%) who submitted comments via email and letter stated that they agreed with the principle of introducing a standard approach to handling planning applications. Only a very small number of explicitly negative responses were received (3%). The online consultation process did not seek views on a standard approach to handling planning applications.

The majority of respondents welcomed the standard application form as a means of requesting vital information, at the outset, and ensuring consistency across all local planning authorities. This was considered particularly helpful in cases where similar applications are submitted to numerous local authorities.

Generally, it was recognised that a standard application form would help generate significant efficiency and time saving gains. Many respondents identified the future potential for rationalisation and wider compatibility between local computer systems. They also highlighted the potential for greater co-ordination between the information recorded on the standard application form and the data required for monitoring Local Development Frameworks and Regional Spatial Strategies.

Some were concerned that the standard form might not capture all possible planning application scenarios and that additional layers of complexity within the form might be required for less straight forward applications.

### **Content of the electronic and paper forms**

Generally, respondents considered 1APP as an improvement to the current application form hosted by the Planning Portal. Many found the content sufficient and well structured. Respondents particularly valued the inclusion of a user-friendly checklist which would help to improve the quality of the applications submitted.

Many constructive comments were received relating to the detailed content of the forms. Some felt that the questions were too general and proposed precise revisions e.g. relating to minerals and associated waste, flood risk, land contamination, drainage and associated certificates. There was concern that the standard form omitted some useful questions already included in the various local authority forms. They suggested the inclusion of additional questions as a further aid to evaluating applications e.g. grid references, building materials used in the construction of walls, wildlife/ecology considerations and disability access data. Some local planning authorities emphasised the need for an option to seek locally required information.

Other respondents felt that the forms were too long particularly for householder applications e.g. questions relating to floor space, listed building consent and flood risk were considered to be unnecessary and some questioned whether the full range of certificates were appropriate in the case of householder applications.

Some raised concerns that the standard form appeared to allow applications to proceed without a requirement to submit drawings and plans at the same time. They were also concerned that the form allows scope for an applicant to send other essential information, at a later date.

There were concerns that the minerals and waste guidance note does not take significant account of regional variation. There were some reports of illogical question flows e.g. unforeseen questions on demolition without prior reference in the application and there were also reports of misleading guidance e.g. concerning existing arrangements for appointments and site visits.

There was a proposal that the standard application form should incorporate a specific form covering prior approvals for telecommunications, in view of their complexity.

## Usability of the electronic prototype form

Many positive comments were received from respondents who found 1APP user-friendly. Some commented that the level of information visible on the screen was well pitched and that the style of presentation was effective particularly for novice applicants.

There were also many detailed comments suggesting improvements to the layout and usability of the electronic form. There were reports of incompatibility with some computer software programmes and also of inadequate compliance with computer software used by some disability groups. Many regretted that it was not possible to print a mirror image of the form completed electronically other than the full 13 page form and that they were unable to view their completed form as they advanced through the 1APP screens. There were many recommendations for enhanced functionality including a progress bar, the flexibility to navigate backwards and forwards and the facility to make amendments, as necessary.

The possibility to select a combination of permissions and consents caused some confusion and there was concern that this could ultimately slow down the application process. Some flagged the risk that it could be potentially difficult to decipher a standard form which embraces the full range of planning permissions and consents. They feared that it may not be crystal clear to an applicant which type of permission to choose.

Similarly, some respondents highlighted the need for greater clarity in the terminology used throughout the form including the electronic explanatory signposts. Some respondents requested more detailed guidance notes and more interactive instruction in plain English.

## Broader issues

The general view was that 1APP should be introduced through staged implementation after being piloted with a selection of local planning authorities from each region. Views were mixed on the amount of notice required to prepare for the implementation of the standard form. Many respondents urged the inclusion of some policy and diversity monitoring questions e.g. relating to ethnicity and disability. Some called for a reduction in fees for on-line applications. By contrast, some local planning authorities were unable to anticipate any obvious advantage in reducing fees in order to incentivise the submission of electronic applications.

## **On-line consultation process**

Few respondents commented on the on-line consultation process. The comments received were mixed. Some considered that this innovative method should be adopted more widely across the Office. Others reported specific frustrations with the technology of the electronic prototype e.g. insufficient time was granted to complete responses before page expiry and limited space was available to enter text. Some would have preferred an opportunity to respond to specific questions on-line instead of the on-line approach used to record broad generic feedback.

## **Other comments**

Views were mixed on preferred application formats i.e. electronic or paper versions. Many indicated that it was a positive step to encourage electronic ways of working. Some felt that the paper forms would inevitably be lengthy and therefore obstruct the drive to enhance efficiency and speed up application procedures.

On a more practical level, others questioned the feasibility of scanning the heavy volume of documentation associated with larger scale applications. There was some confusion whether future applications would still be permitted in paper format. Some respondents manifested a strong resistance to any prospect of withdrawal of the paper form particularly as they felt that the electronic form would always be inaccessible to some groups of applicants.

Some commented that any kind of dual system would lead to confusion. Likewise, some respondents considered that partial on-line submissions would create subsequent back office difficulties in re-marrying the various electronic and postal constituents.

Several respondents felt that the term access was employed with ambiguity throughout the entire 1APP application process. They requested further elucidation.

## ANNEX 1 – LIST OF RESPONDENTS

Hart District Council  
Assist Applications Limited  
English Heritage  
East Midlands Regional Assembly  
Warwickshire County Council  
Association of Drainage Authorities  
Buckinghamshire County Council  
Joint Committee of the National Amenity Societies  
Westbury Homes (Holdings) Ltd  
Robert Shaw Planning  
Yorkshire and Humber Assembly  
Wilson Bowden plc  
Planning Officers Society and Local Government Association  
Government Office for East Midlands  
Tunbridge Wells Borough Council  
North Dorset District Council  
Harrogate Borough Council  
London Borough of Barking & Dagenham  
Reigate and Banstead Borough Council  
Braintree District Council  
Wychavon District Council  
Macclesfield Borough Council  
The Barton Willmore Planning Partnership – Western  
Fenland District Council  
Salisbury District Council  
Winchester City Council  
London Borough of Waltham Forest  
Bradford Metropolitan Borough Council  
Hambleton District Council  
London Borough of Camden  
Gilberts Knapp

Government Office for the East of England  
Essex County Council  
Jill Sanders  
West Dorset District Council  
Oxford City Council  
Reading Borough Council  
Crown Castle UK  
North East Assembly  
Wycombe District Council  
Tim Midgely  
Wellingborough Borough Council  
Welsh Language Board  
Kirklees Metropolitan Council  
Carrick District Council  
British Airports Association  
West Midlands Regional Assembly  
National Consultancy Unit  
Bridgend County Borough Council  
London Borough Tower Hamlets  
St Albans City and District Council  
Suffolk County Council  
Stafford Borough Council  
United Utilities  
Leeds City Council  
The Theatre Trust  
Wrexham County Borough Council  
The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB)  
Biffa Waste Services Ltd  
North Dorset District Council  
Peter Nickols  
Southern Water  
Country Land & Business Association (CLA)  
Nottingham City Council

Information Officers Group (IOG)  
Peak District National Park Authority  
Hertford Borough Council  
Rushcliffe Borough Council  
Sefton Borough Council  
Highways Agency  
Leicester City Council  
Oxford City Council  
e.on uk plc  
Audit Commission  
Cornwall County Council  
City of Worcester  
The Emerson Group  
The Access Association  
Winchester City Council  
London Borough of Barnet  
Campaign for the Protection of Rural England  
Babergh District Council  
Cherwell District Council  
The Planning & Development Association  
London Borough of Ealing  
Harrow Council  
Derbyshire County Council  
Mid Suffolk District Council  
Birmingham City Council  
The Wildlife Trust  
Leeds City Council  
Lake District National Park Authority  
Wandsworth London Borough Council  
Chelmsford Borough Council  
Walker Morris  
CABE  
ACA Planning Advisory Group

Joint Strategic Planning and Transportation Unit

Bristol City Council

Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council

Association of British Insurers

Nottinghamshire County Council

Retirement Housing Group

Hampshire County Council

Somerset Conservation Group

Environment Services Associates

Shropshire County Council

Surrey County Council

Devon County Council

Worcestershire County Council

London Borough of Hillingdon

Institute of Historic Building Conservation

Environment Agency

Aylesbury Vale District Council

Herefordshire Council

Chartered Institute of Environmental Health

English Nature

The Planning Inspectorate

Association of Local Government Ecologists

Warwickshire County Council

Association of Local Government

Wealden District Council

Bob Edden

John Mullan

Michael Morley

Nottingham City Council

Sheffield City Council

Stafford Borough Council

Simon Eve

Judith Perry

Hyndburn Borough Council  
Rory Bergin  
Pritchard Architects  
Burnley Council  
Sarah Sayer  
Smart Planning Ltd  
Andrew Pim  
Atrium Software Ltd  
Birmingham City Council  
Jane James  
Bury Metropolitan Borough Council  
Dermot Hanna  
Watford Borough Council  
Copeland Borough Council  
East Cambridgeshire District Council  
Somerset County Council  
Manchester Disabled People's Access Group UK  
Ashfords Ltd  
Mid Bedfordshire District Council  
London Borough of Brent  
London Borough of Camden  
NPT  
Northgate IS  
Chandler Planning  
London Borough of Ealing  
Restormel Borough Council  
Corporation of London  
Pendleton-Associates  
Stoke Borough Council  
London Borough of Brent  
Rochford District Council  
Wolverhampton City Council  
Colin Smith Marine

Winchester City Council  
Warwickshire County Council  
NCL  
Epping Forest District Council  
Christchurch Borough Council  
Rotherham District Council  
Peterborough Borough City  
Bairstow Eves Countrywide  
Wychavon District Council  
Plantech Ltd  
London Borough of Hackney  
Harborough District Council  
South Somerset District Council  
Bury Metropolitan Borough Council  
Churston Plus  
East Hertfordshire District Council  
Epping Forest District Council  
Buckinghamshire County Council  
Alex Andrew  
CFG  
London Borough of Camden  
O Ocella  
Oldham BC  
Hambleton BC  
Wrexham Borough Council  
Morgan Restoration  
South Gloucestershire Council  
Austin Smith Lord  
Andrew Munton  
Neil Armstrong  
Mercedes  
John Grooms Housing Association  
SwiftLG

Flare Software Systems Ltd  
Ceredigion Borough Council  
CAPS Solutions  
Bath and North East Somerset Council  
Hyndburn Borough Council  
Association of London Borough Planning Officers  
DLA Town Planning Ltd  
Peak District National Park Authority  
The Ramblers Association  
Lincoln City Council  
John Whitehead  
IDOX plc  
Bedford Borough Council  
Greater London Association (GLA)  
Outdoor Advertising Council  
Jim Knight MP  
Commission for Racial Equality

