PLANNING APPLICATION VALIDATION CHECKLISTS

RTPI NI response
December 2022

Context

This consultation forms part of the Department for Infrastructure's Planning Improvement Programme aimed at creating an efficient, effective and equitable planning system trusted to deliver high quality, sustainable, inclusive and healthy places.

The consultation is found here.

The Department proposes to amend The Planning (General Development Procedure) Order (NI) 2015 to provide for the introduction of 'validation checklists' to address 'poor quality' or 'incomplete' applications entering the planning system.
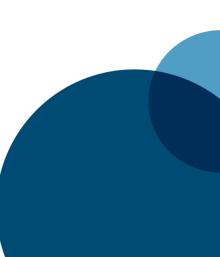
The overall objective for the proposed amendment is to provide the statutory basis for a planning authority to be able to prepare and publish a validation check list to address 'poor quality' or 'incomplete' applications entering the planning system. Once in place, the Department expects that this will improve the quality of applications coming into the system and overcome avoidable delays in the processing of applications for planning permission, by front-loading applications with all the evidence and information deemed necessary for their determination. This approach should also lead to improved statutory consultee response times, reduce the need for re-consultations and improve the time taken to reach planning decisions.

Consultation Questions

Question 1: Do you agree with the proposal to provide a statutory basis for planning authorities to introduce a Validation Checklist for planning applications?

Yes. The Royal Town Planning Institute Northern Ireland (NI) is supportive of this proposed amendment, which will improve efficiencies and therefore confidence in the planning system. A collaborative, well resourced, and efficient planning service can deliver long term goals and ambitions and act in the long-term public interest. The planning system offers an effective process to enable solutions and facilitate a sustainable future for Northern Ireland. "Planning shapes the environments where people work, live and interact. Through strategic spatial planning, the system can ensure that all residents and businesses have a good level of access to services and infrastructure, resources are appropriately accounted for in development decisions, and that new developments make efficient use of resources and technologies. Planning can also address potential negative impacts of development which can be harmful to human health." RTPI | Invest and Prosper 2020

A Validation Checklist would have a positive impact on the delivery of Development Management services. It would help to ensure that applications are supported by the right level of information at the beginning, resulting in less delays to the application process and less pressure on statutory and non-statutory consultees. It would also improve the transparency of the planning process, providing agents with a useful tool in advising their clients on the information required to be provided with their applications, and the costs involved.

All in all, a Validation Checklist would help to increase confidence in the planning system.

Question 2: Do you agree that a 'dispute mechanism' should be available to applicants who disagree with the information/evidence requirements to be submitted with an application?

Yes. The Validation Checklist should be used as a positive tool, to improve transparency and make it clear to applicants what they need to provide. It should not be used as an administrative checklist - there should not be a "one size fits all" approach, recognising that no two sites will be the same and that information requirements may vary from one application to the next.

Question 3: Would you prefer a dispute mechanism linked to 'non-determination' of the application as in England (see para 4.3-4.4 above) or a 'stand-alone' approach as in Wales (see para 4.5 above)?

A 'stand-alone' approach as in the Welsh example would allow for the validation issue to be resolved in a timely manner and would then allow the planning authority to still decide the application.

Question 4: From the list below, please select the category of respondent most appropriate to you.

Other. (Chartered institute)

❝
A well-resourced, plan-led, positive planning service can bring together objectives across services