

Planning News Update

7th. January 2008

A Message from the Planning Manager

In order to develop its service to applicants a customer satisfaction questionnaire is sent out by the Council's Planning & Development Service with every planning decision notice that it issues.

The questionnaire returns are analysed on a quarterly basis and the latest returns from October to December 2007 confirm the progress reported for previous quarters published on this website.

Particularly encouraging was the very high proportion of respondents who confirmed that they understood the formal Decision Notice (97 per cent) and the outcome of their application (91 per cent) and who considered the decision to have been reached fairly (84 per cent).

The Council encourages pre-application discussions and has recently published a guidance note on this topic, www.northdevon.gov.uk/planningcodesofpractice. Of the twenty one respondents who answered the question whether pre-application advice was found to be helpful 62 per cent considered this aspect of the service to have been either very satisfactory or fairly satisfactory; only one respondent expressed dissatisfaction. The Planning and Development Service is also looking to develop the information available on the Planning pages of the Council's website www.northdevon.gov.uk/planning and the on-line application tracker and it is particularly encouraging to note that 70 per cent of respondents also considered these facilities to represent a positive part of the service provided.

Support for the quality of the staff was strong with 83 per cent of respondents satisfied with the helpfulness and 93 per cent satisfied with the politeness of staff; furthermore 86 per cent of respondents were satisfied with the friendliness of staff. One area to consider further however is the issue of staff availability where only 54 per cent of those replying considered this aspect of the service to be very or fairly satisfactory and 21 per cent considered either fairly or very unsatisfactory. However, 77 per cent of respondents responded positively to the question 'Do you feel that you had sufficient contact from us during the application process'; nonetheless it is an area that the Council is looking to improve corporately with the proposed introduction of a Customer Service Centre.

Previous survey results have identified a need to improve the availability of guidance leaflets and also to increase opportunities to access information and submit applications on-line via the Planning Portal. These areas will continue to be developed in liaison with the different stakeholder groups set up by the Planning and Development Service.

Importantly, the latest survey confirmed the continuing improvement in overall customer satisfaction with 36 per cent of applicants very satisfied and 42 per cent fairly satisfied with the service they had received in the determination of their planning application.

Finally, as with previous surveys, a number of additional comments were received and these will be taken into consideration as part of the Planning Improvement Plan being developed by the Service in conjunction with its Stakeholders and Agents Forums. In the meantime, any further comments on ways of improving the planning service would be most welcome, www.northdevon.gov.uk/planningfeedback.

Mike Kelly Planning Manager