



MDC Planning Bulletin

2nd February 2021

Introduction

In order to limit the spread of COVID-19, the Planning Service is following Government advice on physical distancing and working from home as far as possible. You will know our offices have had to close due to the restrictions, and staff are not permitted to carry out site visits or erect site notices.

In addition, following the urgent call for assistance from Government and the NHS, some staff are helping deliver the vital vaccine programme to our communities. We've had to reduce our offer, and some service standards, but are progressing as much application work as we can.

Planning Decisions and Consultation responses

Due to the national medical need, and temporary re-set in the Council's priorities, some application decisions will experience delays, or be put on hold until they can be considered. Some internal consultees are also assisting with the vaccine programme and consultation delays are having further impact on our ability to make decisions. However, the Planning Service is a statutory function and we will continue our offer. We ask that you are patient and contact staff only when absolutely necessary and thank you for your understanding.

Validation of Planning Applications and uploading of comments - extended service standard from 5 days to 10 days

We are currently experiencing high volumes of letters from members of the public in relation to applications currently under consideration. We aim to upload these on the Council's website within 5 days of receipt however there may be some slippage. If you are concerned a letter has not been uploaded, please do not contact us for at least 5 days from the date of submission.

The same goes for additional information submitted as part of an application for planning permission. It is sometimes taking longer than we would like to be uploaded to the website. Please bear with us.

Site Visits and Site Notices

Officers are currently unable to carry out site visits or erect site notices due to the restrictions. For current applications applicants/agents may be asked to provide photographs to allow a decision to be made. If a site visit or site notice is necessary, an extension of time will be requested, and the application put on hold until a visit can be carried out and/or the site notice erected.

Requests for Extensions of Time for Planning Applications

Due to the ongoing Phosphates issue, there are high numbers of applications that cannot be determined at the current time. This, and the restrictions on site visits and site notices etc, mean Planning Officers are likely to requesting Extensions of Time from agents and applicants early in the process.

The councils across Somerset are continuing to work on solutions to the Phosphates issue to unlock development. An update on planning applications affected and progress on a tool to assess site impacts, will be published shortly.
<https://www.mendip.gov.uk/phosphates>

Following the recent hearings, the Inspector has issued a progress note ED38. The Council will be consulting on additions to policy text on phosphates for the sites in Local Plan Part 2. Details can be found here on the [examination page](#).

Suspension of Decision notices to Parish Councils

Regrettably, we are having to suspend the automatic issuing of decision notices to Parish Councils until further notice. If you would like to be alerted when a decision is issued, or if revised plans are received, you can register on our Public Access system via our website and you will receive electronic notifications. Details and instructions can be found here: <https://www.mendip.gov.uk/publicaccess>

Suspension of Duty Officer service and Pre-Application process

Please also be advised that, due to all the above reasons, we will be suspending our duty officer service and the Pre-Application advice service for all proposals other than economic development. We will review this decision on a monthly basis.

Planning Enforcement

During COVID restrictions, officers within the Planning Enforcement Team will only be carrying out site visits in respect of complaints received regarding unauthorised works to Listed Buildings, and trees which are the subject of a Tree Preservation Order. All other complaints will be registered, and an acknowledgement forwarded to the complainant advising their concerns will be investigated once the current restrictions have been lifted.

Advance notification of new process for Parish Council to submit comments

As part of ongoing efforts to improve our service, we'll soon be introducing a new way for Parish Council's to submit comments to us. This will be done via the website, similar to the way members of the public currently make comments. As a consultee, Parish Councils will have an inbox where all current consultations can be found, along with records of previous responses. We hope this will assist Parish Councils to keep track of their consultations and ensure responses are logged and forwarded to Planning Officers much quicker. We'll be contacting all Parish Councils sometime during March to explain further and provide training sessions for Clerks.

Agents or Applicant's comments to Parish Councils

We are increasingly noting agents and applicants are indicating to Parish Councils they will be submitting revised information to address concerns raised at Parish Council meetings. In some cases, Parish Councils are withholding or delaying their formal response to the Council whilst they await submission and are contacting us to request extensions whilst they await their submission.

Please note we are often completely unaware that agents or applicants have promised these revisions to the Parish Council, and therefore are also unaware of the reasons why the Parish Council have not commented.

It is crucial that Parish Councils provide comments on the application before them - and the information that is on the website - within the 21-day consultation period for each specific application.

If revisions are received, they'll be uploaded onto the website where the Parish Council can make further comments if necessary. We may decide to re-consult the Parish Council but note this is only done when amendments are significant and is at the Planning Officer's discretion. Notwithstanding this, you can place an alert on an application via the Public Access system, so you are notified of revisions in any case.

Consultations

Finally, may I take the opportunity to remind you of two planning consultations currently taking place, one of which ends imminently.

Review of the Local Validation List for Planning Applications

The Government requires local planning authorities to review the "local list" every two years. Mendip District Council's current validation requirements have undergone a significant review to reflect changes in planning legislation, policy and guidance.

The Local List is open to public consultation for a period until **5th February 2021**.

You can comment on the draft Local List by email: planning@mendip.gov.uk

<https://www.mendip.gov.uk/article/9638/Consultation-on-Local-Validation-List>

Mendip Landscape Character Assessment

The Council is extending the deadline for comments and contributions to its revised District Landscape Character Assessment. The study divides Mendip District into 8 main landscape areas and then 56 individual character areas. The study, map areas and a wealth of information on Mendips' landscape are now online here: [Landscape Character Assessment website](#). The study includes [interactive maps](#) which allow comparisons with the last landscape work in 1997.

Comments on any part of the study or the website are welcome, although it would be particularly helpful to get views on the following:

- The 8 special characteristics – Consultants have identified 8 special qualities of the Mendip District landscape. Further information can be found [here](#).
- Favourite walks, views and hidden gems, places you value as part of your daily routine or where you go for a long walk, jog, cycle or ride. What makes these special? You can contribute to the online survey [here](#).

Details of how to submit your comments can be found on the [consultation page](#).

Comments and suggestions are invited by **28th February 2021**.

Many thanks,

Julie Reader-Sullivan

Head of Service – Planning & Growth