

The NPPF on Pre-application engagement and front-loading: a comparison between the original (2012) and revised (2018) versions (changes shown in red)

Early engagement has significant potential to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the planning application system for all parties. Good quality discussion enables better coordination between public and private resources and improved outcomes for the community.

Local planning authorities have a key role to play in encouraging other parties to take maximum advantage of the pre-application stage. They cannot require that a developer engages with them before submitting a planning application, but they should encourage take-up of any pre-application services they offer. They should also, where they think this would be beneficial, encourage any applicants who are not already required to do so by law to engage with the local community and, where relevant, with statutory and non-statutory consultees, before submitting their applications.

The more issues that can be resolved at pre-application stage, including the need to deliver improvements in infrastructure and affordable housing, the greater the benefits. For their role in the planning system to be effective and positive, statutory planning consultees will need to take the same early, pro-active approach, and provide advice in a timely manner throughout the development process. This assists local planning authorities in issuing timely decisions, helping to ensure that applicants do not experience unnecessary delays and costs.

The participation of other consenting bodies in pre-application discussions should enable early consideration of all the fundamental issues relating to whether a particular development will be acceptable in principle, even where other consents relating to how a development is built or operated are needed at a later stage. Wherever possible, parallel processing of other consents should be encouraged to help speed up the process and resolve any issues as early as possible.

The right information is crucial to good decision-making, particularly where formal assessments are required (such as Environmental Impact Assessment, Habitats Regulations assessment and flood risk assessment). To avoid delay, applicants should discuss what information is needed with the local planning authority and expert bodies as early as possible.

Local planning authorities should publish a list of their information requirements for applications for planning permission. These requirements should be proportionate kept to the nature minimum needed to make decisions, and scale of development proposals and should be reviewed on a frequent basis at least every two 14 years. Local planning authorities should only request supporting information that is relevant, necessary and material to the application in question.

Local planning authorities should consult the appropriate bodies when planning, or determining considering applications, for the siting of, or changes to, major hazard sites, installations or pipelines, or for development around major hazards them.

Applicants and local planning authorities should consider the potential of entering into for voluntary planning performance agreements, where this might achieve a faster and more effective application process. Planning performance agreements are likely to be needed for applications that are particularly large or complex to determine.