

Covid-19: Update for applicants and agents on Dorset Council's approach to planning applications (April 2020)

This note provides an update for applicants and agents on Dorset Council's approach to planning applications in light of the current Covid-19 situation. Officers have commenced working remotely, and we are continuing to process planning applications to help keep the local economy moving. We are seeking to minimise disruption to our service as much as possible.

Site visits and site notices

We are not undertaking site visits at this time, in order to reduce the risk of catching and spreading Covid-19, both for our staff and the general public.

We are therefore asking applicants and agents to assist us wherever possible, by erecting site notices associated with their planning applications. When your planning application is registered, we will contact you with a copy of the site notice, and a request for you to print this, and erect it as soon as possible. We will also ask you to date the site notice on the day it was erected, and to send us a photograph of the site notice in situ, which we will keep for our records.

As we are not undertaking site visits, the determination of some applications will inevitably be delayed. However, officers will be taking a pragmatic approach, and will seek to assess sites without a visit where this is possible (for example this may be possible for some householder applications on a flat site with good separation distances from neighbouring buildings). We are therefore asking applicants and agents to send us photographs of proposed development sites, to help officers assess the impacts of proposals without needing a site visit. It will not always be possible to assess an application without a site visit, but providing photographs may help us to do so. The types of photographs that would be useful include:

- The application site viewed from each direction from any roads which it adjoins;
- Views from within the application site in all directions to show its relationship to adjoining land uses and buildings;
- Any views of the site that can be obtained from public footpaths or bridleways or public open space;
- Any significant longer distance views of the site from public viewpoints (including roads and open spaces);
- The site access and views along the public road in each direction from the site access;
- For Listed Building Consent applications, wide and detailed views of any external and internal areas affected by the application.

Where possible please provide a note for each photo of what it shows and where it was taken from. Please also provide a plan or plans marked with the viewpoint location of each photo. We appreciate that you may not be able to help us with these matters, and we will of course understand if it is not possible for you to erect the site notice or provide photographs. In these cases, please be aware that applications may be delayed as a result.

Validation of applications

We are aware that the current restrictions may lead to difficulties for applicants and agents in supplying appropriate ecological surveys (particularly bat surveys) to accompany applications. We will take a pragmatic approach to the validation of applications at this time, and we will consider validating applications without all the relevant surveys, where these are not currently possible to undertake. However, please be aware that all relevant information will still be required before a decision can be issued.

Planning committees

Work is underway to resume planning committee meetings in a virtual format, and we will be in touch shortly if this affects one of your applications. In the meantime, it is worth emphasising that the vast majority of Dorset Council's planning decisions (approximately 97%) are taken by officers under delegated powers.

Pre-application advice

Dorset Council offers a pre-application advice service, with details available [here](#). At this time, we are unfortunately unable to offer pre-application meetings or site visits, due to the need to reduce the risk of staff catching and spreading Covid-19. However, we continue to offer written advice and details of how to apply for this can be found via the link above.

Contacting staff

Officers are now working remotely, and continue to be contactable via phone and email. As I am sure you will appreciate, some staff are currently needing to balance work and caring responsibilities, and therefore may be working reduced hours and / or working outside normal office hours. We would welcome your patience and understanding if you have difficulties contacting officers during this period, and we will continue to do our best to minimise disruption to the service.

Correspondence and payments

Please note that we are currently unable to accept cheques. However, we can continue to process payments over the phone, which is our preference. In addition, we would ask that you refrain from sending any documents or correspondence by post if at all possible and instead use electronic communication unless you have no alternative.

Future updates

As this is an ongoing national situation we hope you will understand that we may need to make further changes to our processes at short notice, and we will provide further updates if this is the case. We hope the above measures will enable us to work together to minimise disruption at this time, and we would welcome ongoing dialogue about these matters, as we seek to maintain our planning service.

Thank you in advance for your assistance and understanding.

Anna Lee, Service Manager for Development Management and Enforcement