



Planning (Development Management) Service Restrictions : Covid-19

(Updated 4th May 2020)

Following receipt of guidance from Welsh Government (29/4/2020), the Council's response to the ongoing Coronavirus situation and its impact on the delivery of planning services (Development Management) has been amended.

The Council buildings remain closed to the public with only a small number of designated key staff in work, and in light of the severity and unprecedented nature of this situation we do not have any indication at this moment in time as to when or in what form the offices will re-open.

In respect of the processing of planning applications and investigation of enforcement complaints, please note that all of the Development Management team are following Government advice and staying at home and, as far as practicable, working from home.

Staff working practices have, however, been amended to reflect recent WG guidance, and while the Council's priority must be to protect and provide essential services for the most vulnerable in our community, the Development Management Service will as far as practicably possible be operating in accordance with the following amended protocol: -

Planning Applications

- Planning Officers are currently unable to take **phone calls** at home but have access to their emails. The support team are receiving calls and are able to pass on messages, but you are encouraged please to communicate by email wherever practicable. This can be to individual Officers or to planning@npt.gov.uk.
- Current applications will, wherever practicable, be progressed to determination and case officers will liaise with you in this regard.
- Any meetings that are necessary will only be held remotely. All Planning Officers have 'Microsoft Teams' which can facilitate any such urgent meetings.
- All Council / Committee meetings are currently suspended, with matters that would usually be required to be brought before the Planning Committee for a decision currently being brought forward for determination as '**Planning Committee Urgency Action**' items determined in accordance with the [Council's agreed procedure](#). This will be on a case by case basis, and some applications may regrettably be delayed pending any resumption of Planning Committee (including under any revised Welsh Government Regulations).
- The Council is currently considering the [Local Authorities \(Coronavirus\) \(Meetings\) \(Wales\) Regulations 2020](#) which came into effect on 22nd April 2020 and which enable local planning authorities to **reconvene planning committees** by making temporary provision during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is likely that a 'remote' Planning Committee will be implemented in due course, but until such time the above urgency action powers will be utilised for committee matters.

- Although we will endeavour to register all **new applications** (and pre-application enquiries) that we receive, it is likely that any ‘paper’ applications submitted by post will be delayed (due to restrictions on staff availability within offices). You are therefore strongly encouraged to submit applications electronically, either via the [Welsh Government’s Applications Portal](#) or via e-mail to planning@npt.gov.uk.
- In addition, we also ask that all **payments** are either made through the Applications Portal or via our “[Online Payments](#)” section on our website. Payment by cheque may lead to further delay in registering applications.
- Such applications will be **registered and acknowledged** as normal, and Case Officers will contact applicants / agents to discuss individual cases.
- **Notification Letters** are now being issued on all applications.
- Although **Site Notices** have not been able to be displayed on the majority of applications in recent weeks due to restrictions on movement – with associated delays in determination pending such publicity - the recent WG guidance states that display of such notices can be displayed whilst complying with the Coronavirus Regulations. Accordingly, Officers will re-commence display of such notices shortly (or alternatively request display of such notices by an applicant where possible, with proof of display provided to demonstrate compliance with the Regulations)
- When considering the best means to bring planning applications to the attention of the public, a variety of methods are encouraged by WG, taking into account the change to people’s movements and social interaction. Accordingly, we will also be using **social media** to draw attention to the Council’s online planning register which contains details of all applications before the Authority and/or to notable applications.
- While all **Site Visits** on applications have previously been suspended, WG advice is that such visits (where the purpose of the site visit could not be achieved through other means) are a *reasonable excuse to travel* for the purpose of the Coronavirus Regulations (as these cannot be conducted at home). Such visits must, however, be carried out in compliance with the requirements of the Coronavirus Regulations. Accordingly, until further notice Case Officers will operate site visits as follows: -
 - Site visits which do not require entry to the application site will be the preferred way to maintain compliance with the Coronavirus Regulations and achieve adequate site assessment.
 - Contact will be made with applicants / agents to seek assistance in providing up to date photographs, remote video ‘meeting’ and/or other information that may assist them in proceeding to determine applications in the absence of a site visit, (this should not, however, be undertaken if it contravenes Government guidance on staying at home)
 - If a site visit is deemed ‘essential’, the Case Officer will contact the Agent / Applicant by phone or email (as usual) to arrange a site visit, requesting that access is afforded; that this is ‘unaccompanied’; and noting that no face-to-face meeting or access through buildings is allowed.

- Provided the visit can be undertaken in compliance with the Coronavirus Regulations and guidelines on physical distancing, then a visit will be made;
- If at any time a visit can no longer be continued under such guidelines then the visit will cease and no further visit made
- If, for whatever reason, the Council deems that they have insufficient information and a determination cannot be made, with all the above options exhausted, then clarification of this will be made to the applicant / agent, and an extension of time agreed, if necessary.

Enforcement Complaints

- While we will still receive complaints electronically (including via our online complaints form), only those matters which are considered by officers to be **significant or urgent** (Priority 1 cases as referred to in our Planning Enforcement Charter), or those matters able to progress in the absence of a site visit, will be investigated through site visits.
- Such urgent (non-appointment based) site visits will only be made where Officers can maintain compliance with the Coronavirus Regulations and achieve adequate site assessment.
- All enforcement site visits where physical interaction is necessary will be by appointment only (for example with a complainant) which will allow Officers to agree arrangements to ensure suitable protection measures can be put in place before the site visit takes place, including maintaining at least 2 metres between individuals at all times both indoors and outdoors
- Although we will endeavour to respond to urgent matters, the timescales within the Council's [Planning Enforcement Charter](#) are temporarily suspended during the Coronavirus crisis.

Please be assured that as a Team we will do our very best to continue with the Service during these uncertain times however your patience, understanding and assistance would be greatly appreciated.

Thanking you in advance for your cooperation.