



Planning (Development Management) Service Restrictions: Covid-19

(Updated 22nd March 2021)

One year on from the first National lockdown, these Service Restrictions have been updated to reflect the extent to which the ongoing Coronavirus situation continues to impact on the delivery of planning services (Development Management).

The Council buildings remain closed to the public with only a small number of designated key staff in work, and in light of the ongoing and unprecedented nature of this situation we still 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 continue to follow Government advice and, as far as practicable, working from home.

Staff working practices have, however, been amended to reflect the pandemic and guidance from Welsh Government, and while the Council's priority remains to protect and provide essential services for the most vulnerable in our community, the Development Management Service continues to operate and does so in accordance with the following amended protocol:-

Planning Applications

- Planning Officers have access to their direct line phone numbers via their laptops at home, however you are encouraged please to communicate by email wherever practicable. This can be to individual Officers or to planning@npt.gov.uk.
- We have also set up the following generic phone numbers for any queries that cannot be answered online at www.npt.gov.uk/planning, and do not require a specific case officer:-
 - West Team 01639 686776
 - East Team 01639 686777
 - Planning Enforcement 01639 686779
- Officers remain committed to validation and determination of planning applications 'as normal', and in this respect case officers will continue to 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 meetings.
- Although we will continue to register all **new applications** (and pre-application enquiries) that we receive, it is still likely that any 'paper' applications submitted by post will be delayed (due to quarantine issues and 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** continue to be issued on all applications.
- Where statutorily required **Site Notices** are now being displayed by officers (or alternatively we may on occasions request display of such notices by an applicant , 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, at times we may also use **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 were initially 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 continue to 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.

Planning Committee

- Since May 2020 all Planning Committee meetings have been held remotely using Microsoft Teams, usually on a three weekly cycle on Tuesdays at 10am. See [Committee Details - Planning Committee](#)
- To observe future meetings live via Microsoft Teams you will need to pre-register to be part of the virtual public gallery by emailing democratic.services@npt.gov.uk by 12 noon the day before the meeting. Details of how to join will be provided in response.
- All meetings are recorded and are available to view online at available to view at: [Planning Committee \(npt.gov.uk\)](#)

Enforcement Complaints

- While we will still receive complaints electronically (including via our online complaints form), we are experiencing a backlog of enforcement cases which will take some time to clear, despite recent investment in our enforcement service.
- Accordingly, Officers are having to prioritise their site visits / investigations, and there will often be delays in progressing visits on those cases which are not considered by officers to be **significant or urgent** (Priority 1 cases as referred to in our Planning Enforcement Charter).
- All (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 continue to 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.