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APPENDIX

1. INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

- 1.1 This report describes the results of a review of the role of pre-application discussions and guidance in the planning system in Scotland. The research was undertaken for the Scottish Executive by The Customer Management Consultancy in 1999.
- 1.2 The introductory section of this report outlines the background to the research, describes the objectives set in the original research brief and details the methodology that was adopted in fulfilling these requirements. Finally, the structure of the remainder of the report is described.
- 1.3 The Planning Audit Unit, in the Planning Services Division of the Scottish Executive, in its first annual report, published in August 1998, noted that:-

"Pre-application discussions can make a significant contribution to the efficient handling of planning applications where they are focused and well managed. Experience from the audit has shown that this is not always the case."

The report went on to suggest that there was

"scope for a more systematic evaluation of pre-application discussions and how they can be made more effective"

The Customer Management Consultancy was commissioned to undertake this research in March 1999.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- 1.4 The overall aim of the research was to examine the current arrangements for pre-application discussions and the experience and perceptions of planning authorities, service users and statutory consultees. Specific objectives outlined in the research brief were:-
 - What are the usual forms of pre-application discussions in Scottish planning authorities and what are the common outcomes?
 - Are there any clear indicators of time or cost savings or quality improvements, as a result of pre-application discussions?
 - Conversely, do pre-application discussions cause delays in normal application handling?
 - What are the implications of pre-application discussions for other council departments and statutory consultees?

- What are the implications of pre-application discussions for councillors?
- Do specific types of application, for example, major projects, minor alterations, raise particular issues for pre-application discussions?
- How do pre-application discussions relate to development plans?
- What is the role of design briefs and other advice and guidance published by the planning authority?
- What points of good and bad practice in pre-application discussions can be identified?

In practice, we found that there was a considerable overlap between many of these issues and this is reflected in the structure and content of this report.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1.5 The methods adopted during the course of this research used a combination of quantitative and qualitative techniques. The work was divided broadly into three stages.

Stage One

1.6 The first stage of the research was designed to gather quantitative data about how pre-application discussions and guidance is currently organised within Scottish planning authorities. This involved a number of elements:-

- A postal survey of all planning authorities in Scotland: the **Authorities Survey**.
- A postal survey of a sample of applicants/applicants' agents who had been involved in pre-application discussions in the case study areas: the **Users Survey**.
- A postal survey of statutory consultees: the **Consultees Survey**.
- Consultation in writing with planning agents **Agents Consultation**.

1.7 The **Authorities Survey** received replies from 26 out of 32 authorities, in keeping with the willingness of Scottish planning authorities to participate in this type of research.

- 1.8 The **Users Survey** generated 172 responses from a drawn sample of 401, a response rate of 43%. This is around the response rate expected for postal surveys of this kind. However, some 25 responses (15%) said that they had not in fact been involved in pre-application discussions. This left a base of 147 for analysis, sufficient to present a picture of the experience of applicants and agents across the six case study areas, but not to undertake more detailed analysis.
- 1.9 For the **Consultees Survey**, consultees fell into three broad categories: other departments, namely roads and environmental services, in the six case study areas, local or regional offices of consultees which deal with the case study councils, namely the water authorities, Scottish Environmental Protection Agency, Scottish Natural Heritage, and national bodies such as Historic Scotland, The Scottish Sports Council and the Scottish Executive Transport Division. A total of 18 responses were received.
- 1.10 Finally, for the **Agents' Consultations**, planning agents throughout Scotland were written to with information about the research project and were invited to comment of PADs on the basis of their experience. Ninety six took the trouble to respond, identifying the examples of both good and bad practice.
- 1.11 The aim of these surveys was to use the information gathered to help identify the key issues, which could be explored in greater depth in the case study work during the second stage of the research.

Stage Two

- 1.12 The second stage of the research comprised detailed case studies in six local authority areas. The authorities were selected, following discussion with the Advisory Group, to be broadly representative in terms of:
- Urban and rural areas.
 - Large and small authorities.
 - Geographical location.
 - Key issues.
 - Performance in processing applications within the statutory timescales.
- 1.13 The case study areas selected were Angus, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Moray, Renfrewshire and West Lothian.
- 1.14 In each area we conducted semi-structured interviews with officials in the planning authority and a sample of applicants/applicants' agents who had recently been involved in pre-application discussions. The interviews covered a number of issues including:

- Policy and procedures for handling pre-application discussions.
- The extent to which pre-application discussions take place.
- The format pre-application discussions usually take.
- The time and costs involved in pre-application discussions.
- The implications of pre-application discussions for various stakeholders in the planning process.
- The main benefits and disadvantages of pre-application discussions.
- Any changes or improvements that could be made in the way that pre-application discussions are handled.
- The role of written guidance, including development and design briefs.

Stage Three

1.15 The third stage of the research involved the running of two workshops, one involving planning authorities and statutory consultees, and the other involving planning authorities and applicants' agents. Interim findings were presented to each workshop and then a number of issues relevant to the attendees were discussed both in groups and in plenary.

FORMAT OF REPORT

1.16 On the basis of the surveys, the case studies and the workshops, the final report of the study was completed. This follows a thematic approach, drawing on findings from each of the stages, rather than following the stages of the research.

1.17 After this introduction, the report considers:

- first, the format of the pre-application discussions (PADs)
- then outcomes following PADs
- next the implications of PADS for key stakeholders
 - the role of written advice and guidance, and
 - conclusions on best practice and recommendations

1.18 Copies of the three questionnaires used are in the appendix.

2. THE FORMAT OF PRE-APPLICATION DISCUSSIONS

INTRODUCTION

2.1 This section of the report examines the usual forms of pre-application discussions (PADs) in Scottish planning authorities. It covers the following areas:

- What constitutes a pre-application discussion?
- What format do PADs normally take?
- What policies and procedures do planning authorities have in place for handling pre-application discussions?
- Who is normally involved in pre-application discussions?

WHAT CONSTITUTES A PRE-APPLICATION DISCUSSION?

2.2 There is no agreed, consistently applied definition of what constitutes a pre-application discussion. In particular, there is no clear distinction between the provision of general information and guidance and more specific discussions about a particular development. While the term "pre-application discussions" is widely recognised some planning authorities do not distinguish formal discussions from general enquiries or the provision of guidance about the authority's planning policies.

2.3 There is clearly a continuum from basic enquiries about factual matters, ie "do I need planning permission for this type of development?", to requests for general guidance about planning policies related to particular types of development, to "full blown" discussions about a particular development proposal. In our discussions with officials in planning authorities it was pointed out that it is not always easy to delineate clearly the different stages in the process. Sometimes what starts off as a general enquiry will develop into a discussion about a more specific proposal.

2.4 While in practice it is not always possible to distinguish between different types of enquiry, for the purposes of this report we feel it is necessary to offer a definition of what we understand to be a pre-application discussion. In doing this we are not seeking to impose a rigid classification but rather to allow us to highlight those issues which are specific to pre-application discussions, as opposed to more general issues related to the provision of information and advice, although there are of course overlaps between the two.

2.5 Based upon our research we would suggest that the following represent the key elements of a pre-application discussion, as opposed to a more general enquiry.

- *It is a two way process, involving an element of dialogue and possibly negotiation.*
- *It is concerned with a proposal that is site specific and has been developed to a fairly advanced stage i.e. outline plans and sketch drawings are available.*
- *There is a fairly firm intention to submit a planning application.*

2.6 In the remainder of this report we have used this definition when referring to pre-application discussions as opposed to pre-application enquiries of a more general nature.

HOW WILLING ARE PLANNING AUTHORITIES TO TAKE PART IN PRE-APPLICATION DISCUSSIONS?

2.7 Around half of the respondents to the Authorities Survey, 14 out of 26, indicated that they go out of their way to encourage applicants and agents to approach them at an early stage for pre-application discussions. They are the proactive authorities.

2.8 The next large group, 11 out 26, indicated that they were always willing to engage in pre-application discussions, when requested. They are the reactive authorities.

2.9 Finally, one authority stated that they engaged in pre-application discussions only when there is a compelling reason: “Is there something we need to discuss?”.

2.10 No authority said that it never or rarely engaged in such discussion.

WHAT FORMAT DO PRE-APPLICATION DISCUSSIONS NORMALLY TAKE?

2.11 It is clear from the research that there is no such thing as a typical PAD. Both planning authorities and applicants emphasised the need for flexibility and the need to tailor discussions to suit individual proposals. This flexibility is often a positive factor, allowing procedures to be responsive to the needs of particular proposals and/or clients. However, it could also be seen as a potentially negative factor as it can lead to perceived inconsistencies in the way that different proposals are handled at the pre-application stage. There is clearly a need to strike a balance between having a standard framework for ensuring consistency in how PADs are handled and allowing for individual discretion to tailor the discussions according to the needs of a particular proposal.

- 2.12 Most PADs are initiated by telephone. Indeed, according to the Users Survey, over a quarter of such discussions (27%) take place entirely over the telephone. This somewhat challenges the view from the case studies, given by both planners and service users, that planning authorities will generally only answer basic questions about policies and procedures over the telephone.
- 2.13 Normally planners request that a proposal is submitted in writing, together with sketch drawings and plans, before they will arrange a meeting with the applicant or the applicant's agent. Applicants do not always want to commit their proposals to paper before having a "scoping" meeting with the planning authority. In most cases it would seem appropriate to have proposals outlined on paper prior to a meeting since it provides a focus for the discussions. It also allows the planning authority to conduct any necessary research that may help inform the discussions. However, there may be circumstances, eg where there is a particularly complex proposal or one that raises significant policy issues, where an initial scoping meeting may be of benefit to both parties.

POLICIES AND PROCEDURES FOR HANDLING PADs

Existences of Written Policies

- 2.14 According to the Authorities Survey, only 7 out of 26 respondents (or just over a quarter) said that their authority had a written statement of their policy or procedures for handling pre-application discussions and of these four said it formed part of a general statement of their policies and procedures. In other words, only three authorities had a specific policy on pre-application discussions, which was produced as a self-contained document.
- 2.15 Nine authorities indicated that while their policy was not written down systematically anywhere, their staff were clear about what their policy was in practice. Six authorities said that they had not developed a formal policy. However, (as noted in 2.7 to 2.10 above) all authorities were willing to engage in pre-application discussions.
- 2.16 Where written procedures exist they are more likely to be internal documents that are not generally made available to the public, although they may be provided on request. There was some evidence that this was changing as a number of planning authorities introduce customer charters or pledges which make specific reference to the procedures for handling pre-application discussions.

Edinburgh City Council's Planning Charter contains a specific section on pre-application advice. It states that the council encourages applicants to discuss their proposals before an application is made. It also makes a clear distinction between general planning advice and application specific advice. Service standards are outlined for responding to written communications and convening meetings as part of a pre-application discussion.

2.17 A number of authorities advise potential applicants about the facility to discuss a proposal in advance of submitting an application in leaflets describing the procedures for submitting a planning application or on the application form itself.

Are Written Policies Followed in Practice?

2.18 We found some evidence that even where there were written policies and procedures for handling pre-application discussions they were not always followed in practice. In some areas this could be put down to the fact that procedures were new and needed some time to "bed in". In other areas, however, there was some evidence that the way that the procedures were interpreted and applied in practice by individual officers could lead to inconsistencies. This suggests that greater attention may need to be given to communicating procedures and that training should be provided to enable planning officials to apply them consistently in practice.

When Does a PAD Start and Stop?

2.19 Most authorities with a policy on PADs nevertheless had clear definitions about when the pre-application process starts and stops: where there was a definition it tended to be the first telephone discussion, the first meeting, or the first "contact", which could be a telephone discussion, personal visit or letter. Few had any definition at all of the end of the "process" (two said on submission of an application, two on the determination).

Incidence of PADs by Type and Size of Development

2.20 Only three authorities felt able to give information on the breakdown of their previous 12 months PADs by type of development, and only one of these was based on actual management data rather than an estimate. No pattern emerged from the three responses.

2.21 However, there was a greater willingness to comment on the incidence of PADs by size of development. Twelve authorities stated that PADs were more likely to take place with major developments, whereas 12 said that there was no discernible difference by size of development. One authority replied that minor developments were more likely to lead to PADs.

2.22 Anecdotal evidence from the case studies suggests that pre-application discussions are more likely to take place prior to major planning applications or applications that are regarded as being complex or raise significant policy issues. However, in numerical terms the majority of pre-application discussions involve fairly minor and routine applications. The size of development does not always determine the amount of time required to be devoted to pre-application discussions. Minor applications can take as long as major developments as they often involve non-professional applicants.

2.23 One-off applications, particularly those involving listed buildings or housing in the countryside, are more likely to benefit from pre-application discussions as they are likely to involve issues that are specific to a particular site or building. There was general agreement amongst both agents and planning authorities in the case study areas

that that a good dialogue during the pre-application stage for this type of application resulted in significant benefits for both sides.

2.24 Pre-application discussions were also regarded as being particularly valuable in considering proposals that would have significant economic or social impact. Industrial developments and town centre improvements were often cited as examples of areas where good pre-application discussions could help improve the quality of applications. On the other hand, greater dissatisfaction with pre-application discussions was expressed, by both applicants and planning authorities, in respect of major housing and, to a lesser extent, commercial developments. This may be explained by the fact that such applications are more likely to involve contentious or significant policy issues that are more properly addressed during the formal post-application stage of the process. Some applicants perceive that this reduces the scope for flexibility and dialogue during pre-application discussions

Recording of Staff Time

2.25 Eight authorities recorded time spent on PADs as part of their time recording system. One other authority recorded staff time, but PADs were not a separate category. The majority of authorities, 17, did not record staff time systematically.

Written Notes of Meetings and Other Discussions

2.26 Only five planning authorities said that they always kept a written record of all pre-application discussions, while a further seven said they only kept a record of formal meetings. The majority of planning authorities had no agreed policy or procedures for keeping written records of pre-application discussions. In these authorities it appeared to be left to the discretion of individual officers to decide whether or not to keep a written record of pre-application discussions.

2.27 Only two planning authorities claimed to provide copies of written records of pre-application discussions to applicants or their agents as a matter of course. However, 17 stated that they provided copies of any notes taken at meetings if requested. Most planning authorities claimed that they did not have the resources required automatically to provide written records of all pre-application discussions to applicants and their agents.

WHO IS NORMALLY INVOLVED IN PRE-APPLICATION DISCUSSIONS?

2.28 The primary focus of most pre-application discussions is a dialogue between the planning authority and the applicant or their agent. For many proposals this is sufficient. However, for other proposals it is often necessary to involve other parties, particularly statutory consultees.

Who is Involved from the Authority?

- 2.29 The first question is who represents the authority in the PAD: will it be the same planning official as the person who processes the application? Only one authority said that it is always the same person.
- 2.30 The great majority of authorities, 21 out of 26, responded that it is normally the same person who will process the application, but not always.
- 2.31 However, for four authorities, it is sometimes the same person, but they indicated that there is no direct link.

Who is Involved on Behalf of the Applicant?

- 2.32 Nearly two out of three of those who responded to the Users Survey said that they were acting as an agent on behalf of another party (64%).
- 2.33 Of the remaining 36%, 19% did not employ an agent at all, a further 8% employed an agent but undertook most of the discussion themselves, while 7% had an agent who mainly dealt with the Council.
- 2.34 Overall, based on the data in the Users Survey, 73% of the discussions involved agents and 27% mainly involved applicants on their own, a ratio of nearly 3 to 1.

Involving Consultees

- 2.35 Our research suggests that some pre-application discussions have involved "round table" discussions with all the relevant public bodies and the applicant or their agent. However, this is generally the exception rather than the rule. Experienced agents will normally know which statutory consultees they should consult about a particular proposal and where they do not, planning authorities will often flag up the need to consult other agencies on particular aspects of a proposal.
- 2.36 Some agents expressed a preference for consulting statutory consultees separately; believing that this was easier to organise and allowed them to focus on the key issues with each agency individually. Statutory consultees were reluctant to become involved in round table meetings where their involvement was marginal, as they thought this would be a waste of their time (ie only a short part of a meeting would be relevant). They would prefer to have separate discussions with applicants or their agents to discuss those aspects of the proposal that were of specific relevance to their remit.
- 2.37 Some planning authorities are keen to play a co-ordinating role at the pre-application stage by circulating outline proposals to other council departments and statutory consultees in advance of meetings with applicants and their agents. This allows other parties to submit comments and highlight issues of concern, which can then be

discussed at the meeting with the planning authority or at a separate meeting with the applicant or their agent.

- 2.38 The responses to the applicants survey showed that applicants are most likely to have pre-application discussions with the local authority roads department, the water authority, other council departments (including environmental health), SEPA and Historic Scotland. Of these statutory consultees the local authority roads department was cited as the most important by a large majority of applicants.
- 2.39 Applicants and their agents expressed a strong desire for a more corporate approach to be adopted in dealing with pre-application discussions. In discussion with agents it became apparent that this was generally an issue in their dealings with different departments or sections within the local authority rather than between the authority and other statutory organisations.
- 2.40 Particular reference was made to the need for better communications and liaison between the roads and planning functions and between development control and other aspects of the planning function. (The latter issue seemed to be a particular problem in authorities where the development control function had been separated from other aspects of planning.)

WHERE WERE PADS HELD?

- 2.41 According to the Users Survey, when face-to-face meetings were held, rather than purely telephone discussions, 83% were held at the council office, while 31% were held at the site, and 5% were held elsewhere. (In a number of cases more than one meeting was held.) Three quarters of discussions involved detailed drawings.

KEY FINDINGS ON THE FORMAT OF PADS

- 2.42 The research suggests that Pre-Application Discussions can be defined as site specific discussions or negotiations, where plans are well advanced (eg outline plans and sketch drawings are available) and there is an intention to submit an application. However, some authorities may define PADS more broadly to include a number of more general enquiries.
- Most authorities are willing to participate in PADS, but few have specific written policies or procedures.
 - PADS are usually held at council offices.
 - Agents are more involved with PADS than applicants.
 - Statutory consultees are sometimes involved in PADS. Some agents prefer to approach consultees independently.

- There was some demand from agents and applicants for a more corporate approach from different parts of the local authority: eg planning co-ordinating the views of roads and environment.

3. OUTCOMES FOLLOWING PRE-APPLICATION DISCUSSIONS

INTRODUCTION

3.1 This section of the report looks at the outcomes following pre-application discussions. It covers the following areas

- The likelihood of a planning application being submitted following a pre-application discussion.
- Savings in time and costs resulting from pre-application discussions
- Improvements in the quality of planning applications and developments as a result of pre-application discussions.

LIKELIHOOD OF A PLANNING APPLICATION BEING SUBMITTED FOLLOWING A PRE-APPLICATION DISCUSSION

3.2 Nearly a third of the planning authorities (eight) that responded said that there were substantial numbers of pre-application discussions where no formal planning application resulted. However, in the survey of applicants and their agents the vast majority (93%) said that they did proceed with a formal application. This difference in perceptions can partly be explained by the fact that the sample of applicants and agents was drawn from planning registers. It does, however, suggest that there is a degree of ambiguity between pre-application discussions and more general enquiries. General enquiries are less likely to result in formal applications than pre-application discussions which are focused on a particular proposal.

3.3 The need for consistency between the pre and post application stages in the process was a key issue for applicants and their agents. Eighty-five per cent of planning authorities (22 out of 26) said that the official who was involved in the pre-application discussion would normally be responsible for processing the application. However, of the applicants who proceeded with the application, no fewer than 37% said that the person involved in the pre-application discussions did not deal with their planning application.

3.4 Some applicants also reported that they had experienced occasions when they were given different advice at the pre and post application stages. Although it is not possible to quantify the number of occasions where this has happened, it is more likely to occur where different people are involved at different stages of the process.

Savings in Time and Money

- 3.5 One of the objectives of the research was to determine whether well-managed pre-application discussions resulted in savings in time and money at the formal application stage of the process.
- 3.6 Only 36% of planning authorities currently record the amount of staff time spent on pre-application discussions and, of those which do, a number have only introduced the system recently. We were not, therefore, able to identify any quantifiable evidence of savings in the time taken to process planning applications where there had been a pre-application discussion.
- 3.7 Both applicants/applicants' agents and planning authorities generally agreed that well-managed pre-application discussions could mean that the time taken to determine the formal planning application could be reduced. This did not always happen, however, for a variety of reasons.
- 3.8 On the basis of the applicants survey it is clear that the majority of applicants expected their planning application to be processed more quickly than was actually the case. 18% of applicants said that they expected their application to be processed in less than a month and 47% said that they expected it to be approved within two months when in fact only 8% of applications were processed in one month and 39% within two months. Thus, some applicants' expectations were for a faster process than required by statute or offered by authorities in practice, despite the fact that 75% of respondents claimed that they "fully understood" the timescale, in response to another question.
- 3.9 Planning authorities identified a number of barriers which can prevent applications being processed quicker following pre-application discussions. The most commonly cited reason was that applicants do not always follow the advice given during pre-application discussions or provide all of the information required to process an application, even if this has been requested during the pre-application discussions.
- 3.10 They also claimed that applicants do not always understand the fact that the formal consultation process needs to be adhered to even where statutory consultees have been involved at the pre-application stage. Indeed, it was suggested that there may be a need to be "doubly vigilant" at this stage where there have been extensive pre-application discussions to ensure that the proposal has not changed in any significant way.
- 3.11 Having said this, the vast majority of people we spoke to, including applicants, applicants' agents, planning authorities and statutory consultees, agreed that well-managed pre-application discussions should allow planning applications to be processed more quickly.
- 3.12 There are clearly costs involved in having pre-application discussions, for the applicant, the planning authority and other organisations such as statutory consultees who may be involved in the process. The main costs are in terms of time. However, for applicants there are also costs involved in preparing preliminary sketch drawings and plans (not necessarily in a form which they would be doing so anyway).

- 3.13 Most applicants said that they accepted these costs as part of the process of submitting a planning application. Indeed, many said that it is less expensive to amend or redo drawings at this stage of the process, rather than after they have submitted a formal planning application. Planning authorities generally accepted that the costs involved in taking part in pre-application discussions were a necessary part of their public service role. There were some concerns that this aspect of the service was not recoverable from fee income and some planning authorities suggested that charging for pre-application discussions could be introduced, possibly rebated against planning fees when an application is made. Overall, however, the general view was that introducing charging was not a good idea as it could discourage applicants from seeking to enter pre-application discussions.

IMPROVEMENTS IN QUALITY

- 3.14 It is difficult to evaluate whether pre-application discussions result in better quality planning applications and resultant developments. Planning can be an emotive subject and very often the quality of a proposal is open to subjective judgement.
- 3.15 We did find some examples where all parties agreed that pre-application discussions helped improve the quality of a proposal. In most cases this was attributed to the informality attached to the process, which allowed a joint approach, between the applicant and the planning authority, to be developed. This was often contrasted with the more adversarial approach that can be taken once a formal planning application has been submitted.

Moray Council won a Scottish Award for Quality in Planning for its innovative handling of a Private Finance Initiative project for the construction of 279 houses at RAF Lossiemouth. The council took the initiative in the early stages of the PFI process and sought to be party to the terms of engagement with the potential bidders. They prepared a guidance note, which was circulated to all developers who expressed an interest, which advised them on the key planning issues involved in the proposed development. The council also prepared development briefs for nominated sites and design guidance for all schemes. Submissions from developers were assessed against these and "letters of comfort" were issued where submissions were likely to gain planning consent. This eliminated the need for all applicants to seek planning consent at the pre-selection stage.

- 3.16 There was a general agreement, amongst both applicants/applicants' agents and planning authorities, that well-managed pre-application discussions generally meant that amendments to a proposal could be "built in" to an application rather than "bolted on" in terms of conditions placed upon consent at the formal application stage.
- 3.17 Improvements in the quality of applications are more likely to result when all parties approach a pre-application discussion with an open mind and are prepared to discuss freely the pros and cons of particular aspects of the proposal. This does not always happen. Planning authorities feel that some applicants/applicants' agents sometimes use the pre-application process as a first stage in a bargaining process that was used to "soften up" the planning authority before an application was submitted. On the other hand, applicants/applicants' agents often felt that planning authorities were inflexible

during pre-application discussions and were inclined to "hide behind strict interpretations of policy" rather than enter into an open dialogue.

- 3.18 Pre application discussions offer an opportunity to improve the quality of applications and resultant developments. They provide a mechanism for discussing design and other quality standards in an informal way. Applicants are generally willing to make amendments to proposals at this stage in order to improve the quality of the application as long as it does not affect the financial viability of the development. Occasionally pre-application discussions will result in a complete rethink of a proposal with applicants withdrawing their original proposals and subsequently coming forward with an alternative, higher quality, application. The Carrick Hotel development in Glasgow was cited as an example of this type of outcome.
- 3.19 This approach can help provide positive examples of how quality standards can be applied in practice, improving the quality of developments without affecting their functionality and financial viability. Highlighting good quality in this way can help provide other applicants with real examples of how quality guidelines can be applied in practice. In the long run, this may be more influential than abstract written guidance.

KEY FINDINGS ON THE OUTCOMES OF PADs

- Over nine out of ten applicants and agents involved in a PAD said that they proceeded with a formal application: subsequently authorities reported a higher drop out rate, possibly because of a looser interpretation of what constitutes a PAD.
- Most authorities said that the same official would normally handle both pre and post application stages.
- Applicants and agents stressed the need for consistency throughout, but over a third mentioned different officials dealing with them at different stages, and some mentioned different advice being given.
- Most agreed that PADs should enable applications to be processed more speedily but there was little evidence for this happening in practice.
- Authorities said that delay was often caused by advice not being followed by applicants, or new issues being raised in the formal consultation stage.
- Costs of PADs were accepted by both applicants and authorities as part of the process: there was little support for charging applicants fees for PADs.
- There was agreement that the quality of applications was likely to improve where both parties approached PADs with an open mind.
- However, some developer applicants were accused of using PADs to "soften up" planners, while some authorities were accused of inflexibility and refusing to enter genuine dialogue.

- It is hard to say that PADs have improved the quality of applications and resultant developments.

4. IMPLICATIONS OF PRE-APPLICATION DISCUSSIONS FOR KEY STAKEHOLDERS

INTRODUCTION

4.1 This section of the report looks at the implications of pre-application discussions for various key stakeholders. In particular it examines the implications for:

- Planning Authorities
- Applicants and their Agents
- Statutory Consultees
- Councillors, Community representatives and members of the public.

PLANNING AUTHORITIES

4.2 Planning authorities have a key role to play in encouraging pre-application discussion and managing the process in an efficient and effective manner. Our research suggests that while most planning authorities value the role of pre-application discussions, more could be done actively to encourage applicants to seek pre-application discussions before submitting a planning application. This is particularly the case for private householders who do not have an agent acting on their behalf.

4.3 The majority of planning authorities recognised that there is a need to have agreed procedures for handling pre-application discussions. A number have recently introduced new procedures, often in response to Best Value or as part of other quality assurance plans. Others indicated that this was an issue which they recognised they would have to address in the near future.

4.4 Internal procedures need to be complemented by information for applicants about the procedures that will be used in handling pre-application discussions and the standard of service they can expect. Training should also be provided for all members of staff who will be involved in pre-application discussions to ensure that they are aware of what is involved in applying the procedures in practice.

4.5 A key issue for planning authorities was the amount of time and effort that had to be devoted to pre-application discussions, often at the expense of other activities. This was a particular issue for development control "case officers" who often felt that time spent on pre-application discussions deflected their attention from the "real work" of processing planning applications. There was also a strong perception that statutory performance indicators relating to the time taken to process planning applications increased this pressure. Individual development control officers have to manage competing priorities and pressures on their time. An impression was given by some planners that they were more likely to choose to spend time on processing formal

applications than on pre-application discussions, because this was the aspect of their work on which their performance is measured and evaluated.

- 4.6 Another concern for many planning authorities was the amount of abortive time spent on pre-application discussions where no application is submitted. While this may be frustrating for the officers involved, it should be borne in mind that this may mean that they do not have to spend time processing an application which is unlikely to get approval, ie because the proposal clearly breaches planning policies. Viewed in this way pre-application discussions can be seen as providing a "filtering" process
- 4.7 On further examination it became clear that frequently this complaint was more to do with general enquiries rather than pre-application discussions about a particular proposal. This suggests that there may be a need for identifying such enquiries from the outset and having different procedures for handling them from those used for pre-application discussions.
- 4.8 Planning authorities are likely to be the first point of contact for the vast majority of pre-application discussions. We received mixed views about the extent to which they should seek to involve others in the process. Some clearly saw themselves as having a co-ordinating role, which would involve them seeking the views of other interested parties and communicating these to applicants or their agents. Other planning authorities, however, would only seek the views of others where they felt the proposal had major implications for them, while others still would only suggest to applicants that they should approach certain consultees before submitting an application.
- 4.9 There are clearly advantages, from the point of view of applicants and their agents, in the provision of a co-ordinated or "one door" approach to handling pre-application discussions, particularly when it comes to dealing with different parts of a single local authority. Here there is a greater expectation that a corporate view on a proposal can be obtained before a planning application is submitted. Our research suggests that better co-ordination and communication between different parts of local authorities would make the pre-application process more transparent and effective.
- 4.10 The extent to which the planning authority should seek to consult or involve other statutory consultees in the pre-application process is likely to vary depending on the nature of the proposal. In many cases the need to seek the views of others will be apparent from the nature of the proposal and the professional judgement of individual officers. However, written guidelines, possibly using a standard checklist, would help to ensure that a consistent approach was adopted.
- 4.11 The dangers of not keeping a written record of pre-application discussions were highlighted by a number of planning authorities as well as applicants and agents. Not having a written record which can be referred to can lead to misinterpretation, inconsistency and, possibly, disputes later in the process. Most planning authorities recognised that it would be desirable to keep written records of all pre-application discussions but said this was not always possible, usually because of a lack of clerical and administrative support. The use of standard formats for written records, supported by IT systems, would go some way to reducing the burden of keeping written records.

4.12 Having written records of all pre-application discussions is particularly important in ensuring consistency throughout the process. It is essential that the officer dealing with a planning application has easy access to information about any pre-application discussions that have taken place concerning the proposal. A number of authorities ask applicants to state on the application form whether they have had pre-application discussions about the proposal. However, if written records are not available this may be of limited value. Ideally records of pre-application discussions should contain a site reference that allows them to be retrieved easily when a planning application or another enquiry concerning the site is received by the planning authority.

Renfrewshire Council uses a GIS system to record all pre-application discussions. This allows all discussions about a site to be recorded and stored with a geographical reference, which allows them to be retrieved in the future if there are further enquiries about the site. The authority also asks applicants to state on their application for planning permission if they have had any pre-application discussions about the proposal and to name the development control officer who was involved.

4.13 A number of planning authorities claimed that the benefits of having pre-application discussions, in terms of saving time at the formal application stage, were reduced if applicants did not provide additional information, eg a traffic or retail impact study, which they had been told would be required before an application could be considered. This raises the questions about what information is required before a planning application can be regarded as valid and therefore can be registered.

4.14 Planning authorities appear to have different interpretations of what the Town and Country Planning (General Development Procedure) (Scotland) Order 1992 (GDPO) requires in terms of the information that should be included with a planning application before it can be registered. This is an area where further guidance would be useful in providing greater clarity and consistency for both planning authorities and applicants and applicants' agents.

APPLICANTS AND APPLICANTS' AGENTS

4.15 Applicants and their agents welcome the opportunity to have pre-application discussions. The main advantage to them is that it gives them the confidence to proceed to the next stage in the process by submitting a planning application. Agents are more likely to seek pre-application discussions than individual applicants, particularly householders. This may be attributed to the fact that they are more experienced in dealing with the planning process and therefore more aware of the benefits that can be gained from having pre-application discussions.

4.16 Applicants and agents are more likely to seek pre-application discussions with development control officers than with other parties, including statutory consultees. Some agents and developers will seek to have separate pre-application discussions with statutory agencies, where there are major issues that relate to their interests. However, there is also often an expectation that development control officers will seek the views of other parties before offering advice or guidance. In particular, there is often a strong assumption that a corporate local authority view is being expressed when in fact the advice offered has been limited to development control issues. Frustrations may occur

when other local authority officials, particularly in roads or design sections, are not involved in the process or are only brought into the discussions at a late stage. While this raises issues for planning authorities and other statutory agencies, applicants and agents could themselves help make the process more transparent by making it clear from the outset whether they were looking for a corporate view or simply for guidance on the planning issues.

- 4.17 Many agents and developers clearly understand the role that pre-application discussions play in the planning process and recognise the limits to what can be achieved outwith the formal application process. However, some have unrealistically high expectations about what can be achieved at this stage in the process. In particular, it is not always recognised that material considerations or additional information may arise during the statutory consultation process which may change a planning authority's view on a proposal.
- 4.18 Applicants and agents can sometimes also have unrealistic expectations about the extent of discretion exercised by individual officers and a lack of understanding that they need to operate within a policy framework. This can result in a desire to involve more senior officers in pre-application discussions, on the assumption that they will have more discretion when it comes to the discussion of policy issues. This can, however, result in a lack of continuity of approach if the senior officer is not involved in processing the planning application submitted following a pre-application discussion.
- 4.19 A number of applicants' agents said that the best examples of effective pre-application discussions often occurred when all parties approached the discussion with an open mind and a joint problem solving approach was adopted. This type of approach is particularly applicable to "one off" proposals where innovative solutions are required or desired. There is, however, a limit to what can be achieved through the pre-application process and both applicants/applicants' agents should avoid becoming bogged down in detail at this stage of the process.
- 4.20 While applicants and their agents generally felt that the benefits of having pre-application discussions outweighed the disadvantages, this was often expressed in intangible terms. There was a general frustration that there was often no perceived benefit in terms of the subsequent time taken to process planning applications. This led some applicants and agents to suggest that there should be a formal "fast track" approach adopted for applications where there had been pre-application discussions.
- 4.21 The majority of applicants and agents agreed that having a written record of all pre-application discussions would help to make the process more transparent and avoid the possibility of misinterpretations or disputes later in the process. There were, however, some concerns about commercial confidentiality, particularly if written records become a more formal part of the planning process and therefore enter the public domain. Some agents thought that this was the necessary implication of a more transparent process: others were far from convinced.

STATUTORY CONSULTEES

- 4.22 Statutory consultees were less likely to be involved in pre-application discussions than planning authorities, even when they were likely to have views about a proposed development. Applicants or their agents were most likely to seek the views of the local roads department at the pre-application stage than any other statutory consultees: 38% in the Users Survey said they had done so. The views of other statutory consultees, eg Historic Scotland, SEPA, the Water Authority, were generally only sought at the pre-application stage if the applicant thought there was a major issue to be addressed.
- 4.23 Many statutory consultees expressed a desire to be more involved at the pre-application stage. However, they were concerned about the time and resource constraints involved. In particular, they would prefer to be consulted separately rather than be involved in "round table" discussions which might be time consuming given the level of their input.
- 4.24 Most statutory consultees said that pre-application discussions allowed them to have a better understanding of a proposal when it comes to submitting formal comments as part of the statutory consultation process. However, although time may be saved in understanding the proposal the actual process of preparing a formal response is often not reduced substantially. One reason for this is that pre-application discussions tend to deal with broad policy issues with matters of detail only being addressed once a formal planning application has been submitted.
- 4.25 Some statutory consultees felt that becoming involved in extensive pre-application discussions could result in duplication and pressures on their time. As a result, while they were prepared to offer a preliminary view of the main issues to be considered in a planning application they would reserve any more detailed comments until an application was submitted for consultation.
- 4.26 One way the process could be improved, from the point of view of statutory consultees, would be to have clearer guidelines for applicants about when particular statutory consultees should be consulted prior to submitting a planning application. A number of statutory consultees also believed that planning authorities should give contact details for the various statutory bodies, who may be invited to comment on a planning application, to applicants with application forms or as part of general guidance about the planning process.
- 4.27 Some statutory consultees will deal with different applications in different ways, with major applications being handled by head office and more minor applications being handled by local offices. This can be confusing for applicants and their agents and lead to frustrations and delays. Clear guidelines about who should be contacted about particular types of developments would help avoid this situation.
- 4.28 Statutory agencies sometimes made a distinction between their role as consultees in the planning process and their role in issuing other forms of consent e.g. listed building consent or road construction consent. Applicants did not always make this distinction and generally assumed that discussions encompass both aspects of an organisation's remit. Greater clarity about the different roles played by various statutory bodies in

the planning process would help make the process more transparent and understandable, particularly to applicants who do not have a professional agent.

COUNCILLORS, COMMUNITIES AND THE GENERAL PUBLIC

- 4.29 The research suggested that councillors, community representatives and members of the public did not currently have any significant involvement in pre-application discussions. Indeed, a number of planning authorities stated that they actively discouraged councillors from becoming involved in discussions about possible developments prior to a planning application being submitted since it could be seen as prejudicial to their formal role in considering an application once it was received.
- 4.30 Community councils have had a statutory right to be consulted on applications for planning permission since April 1996. This was introduced by the government as one of the decentralisation measures announced during the passage of the Local Government etc. (Scotland) Act 1994. This requirement applies to planning applications and does not extend to pre-application discussions.
- 4.31 Our research suggested that there was very little involvement of community councils at the pre-application stage. Planning authorities will not actively seek to discuss proposals with them prior to an application being submitted and applicants will only do so if it is a major development with significant implications for a local community. There was no suggestion that there was a need or indeed a demand for community councils to be more involved in pre-application discussions than they are at the moment.
- 4.32 The Scottish Executive has commissioned a separate research project on the role of community councils in the planning process, which may provide further information of their attitudes towards pre-application discussions.
- 4.33 Members of the public, including neighbours who are given special notification, have a legitimate interest in commenting on planning applications. It is important, however, that this is part of a structured process, governed by a statutory framework. It would, therefore, be inappropriate to involve the public prior to a formal planning application being submitted.
- 4.34 It was generally agreed by interviewees that councillors, community representatives and members of the public should not be formally involved in pre-application discussions. Developers may wish to consult community representatives and members of the public about the general issues related to a particular proposal, particularly where it is likely to be of significant public interest, eg a town centre redevelopment etc. This should, however, be seen as being distinct from the planning and development control process.
- 4.35 Some planning authorities did comment that pre-application discussions between applicants and their agents on the one hand and planning authorities on the other could be seen by community councils and interested members of the public as prejudging and therefore prejudicing the formal consideration of a planning application. A small number of cases were cited where this accusation had been made, although it was

generally thought that this was as much to do with views about the merits of the proposal as the procedures which had been followed.

- 4.36 While this was not seen as being a major problem at the moment, there were concerns that it could become more of an issue if the pre-application process was to become more formalised and therefore be perceived to have a more authoritative status. The availability of a written record of a PAD to third parties might be proposed as a way of addressing concerns.
- 4.37 The evidence suggested that most councillors accept the legitimate role planning officers can play in discussing proposals with applicants prior to them submitting a planning application. Councillors will often know that a proposal is being discussed and may wish to be kept informed of progress, even if it is only in terms of knowing when a planning application is likely to be submitted. Any involvement at the pre-application stage beyond this is however generally discouraged.
- 4.38 There is a danger that applicants or their agents may attempt to press planning officers to make commitments on policy issues, which are outwith their delegated authority during pre-application discussions. While we found no evidence that planning officers were responding to such pressures, if there was a perception amongst councillors that this was in fact happening there is a danger that it could seriously undermine confidence in the pre-application process. Applicants and their agents need to be sensitive to this.

KEY FINDINGS ON IMPLICATIONS FOR STAKEHOLDERS

4.39 Planning Authorities should:

- issue written information for applicants on PADs procedures;
- provide guidance material and training for staff, to ensure consistency;
- undertake better co-ordination with other parts of the council;
- make written records of PADs, and offer copies to the other party;
- be open to other interested parties such as objectors, and indeed to members of planning committees, about when PADs have taken place.

4.40 Applicants and agents should:

- have a clear understanding of the limits of PADs, in terms of the extent of discretion exercised by individual officers and the further issues that may arise during formal consultations on applications;
- be aware that the development of written procedures on PADs, and authorities making written records of PADs will produce a more transparent process, with greater public awareness that discussions have been held.

4.41 Statutory consultees should have:

- guidelines on which part of their organisation should be consulted about particular types of developments;
- reach agreement with planning authorities on how they should be routinely involved in PADs, for example through authorities issuing information about their role to applicants.

4.42 Councillors, Community Representatives and Members of the Public should:

- generally not be formally involved in PADs, except when for instance, a developer wished to approach local community organisations on their own initiative;
- be informed where there have been earlier discussions about applications;
- participate in the formal part of the planning process.

5. THE ROLE OF WRITTEN ADVICE AND GUIDANCE

INTRODUCTION

5.1 The purpose of this section of the report is to consider the role of written advice and guidance in the planning process with particular reference to the pre-application stage. The role of a number of different types of written advice and guidance will be considered, including:-

- Design Guidance
- Development Briefs
- Procedural Advice and Guidance

DESIGN GUIDANCE

5.2 The vast majority of planning authorities said that they produced design guidance about particular types of development for the benefit of applicants and agents (22 out of 24 authorities which responded to that question). Design guidance tends to deal with specific types of minor developments, which are relatively routine in nature. The types of development where design guidance has been produced by planning authorities include:-

- Housing in the Countryside
- Roads and Parking Standards
- House Extensions
- Window Replacement
- Hot Food Establishments
- Advertisements

Many planning authorities also produced design guidance about developments in specific conservation areas.

5.3 Good quality design guidance is viewed by planning authorities and applicants/applicants' agents as a good way of informing pre-application discussions. It can also be used as a means of responding to basic enquiries, thereby reducing the need to have discussions about routine matters. Design guidance does not remove the demand for pre-application discussions, but it can help reduce the number of basic enquiries, allowing planning authorities to focus pre-application discussions on more substantive issues.

- 5.4 Traditionally, design guidance has been produced in the form of separate publications, eg leaflets, handbooks etc. A number of authorities are now seeking to incorporate design guidance into development plans. This has the advantage of giving the guidance a more authoritative status and clearly linking it to planning policies. There is a danger, however, that it may be more difficult to update the guidance if it is part of a development plan and therefore difficult to amend.
- 5.5 A number of applicant's agents complained that existing design guidance was not kept up-to-date and, as a result, the planning authority did not always follow the guidance in practice. This was seen as undermining the value of written guidance as applicants did not know whether it could be relied upon. This was one reason why applicants and their agents would often seek pre-application discussions to ensure that their interpretation of the written guidance confirmed with current thinking within the planning authority. The extent of these types of discussions could be reduced if design guidance was made more accessible and kept up-to-date, and if applicants/applicants' agents had confidence that it could be relied upon.
- 5.6 Some applicants complained that some design guidance was too general in nature and, therefore, open to a wide range of interpretations. In these circumstances they would always seek a pre-application discussion to clarify issues that were not clear from the written guidance. At the other extreme, some applicants said that design guidance was often too detailed and overly prescriptive. They felt that this inhibited innovation and creativity, rather than promoting high quality design standards. Producing guidance that is neither too prescriptive nor too generalised is a difficult balance to achieve in practice. Even the best produced design guidance was seen by both planning authorities and applicants/applicants' agents as complementing rather than replacing the need for pre-application discussions.
- 5.7 Design guidance is generally made available in the form of written documents. Some planning authorities are looking at using modern information and communication technology to make such guidance more accessible. The use of the Internet or CD-ROMs would be one way that design guidance could be made more accessible and user friendly, particularly for agents. There will, however, probably still remain a need for hard copies of such guidance, particularly targeted at private householders.

DEVELOPMENT BRIEFS

- 5.8 Development briefs were seen as being valuable in certain circumstances by planning authorities, developers and agents. Planning authorities viewed them as being particularly useful in promoting development on sites that were either regarded as being of strategic significance or sensitive in policy terms. They were also seen as having a role to play where more than one developer was interested in a particular site or building. Agents and developers also felt that development briefs had a role to play in such circumstances although they would usually seek discussions with the planning authority as well, particularly when large investments were involved.
- 5.9 Development briefs have played a particularly important role in Public Finance Initiative (PFI) and design and build contracts, where potential developers need to be confident about the likelihood of obtaining planning consent before submitting a bid.

A number of planning authorities said that they were increasingly being asked to prepare development briefs for PFI or Public Private Partnership (PPP) projects. Briefs often have to be prepared within tight deadlines and often give rise to enquiries from potential developers, which result in pre-application discussions. Concerns were raised about the pressure these projects were putting on staff resources within planning authorities.

- 5.10 Applicants' agents would welcome greater use being made of development briefs but feel that they are only effective when they express a corporate view. A number of agents cited examples of development briefs that had been prepared by planning authorities but did not include the views of other local authority services e.g. roads and transport or statutory consultees. On the other hand some agents and developers cited examples of development briefs which they felt were too detailed and prescriptive. They felt that this approach was often unnecessarily restrictive and closed down possible development options too early in the process.
- 5.11 Planning authorities said that they would like to make more use of development briefs but felt that they were time consuming to prepare, particularly if they involved extensive consultation with other departments and agencies. Development briefs generally have to be submitted to planning committees for approval, which can lead to further delays in issuing them. The time taken to prepare development briefs makes it difficult to make use of them in "time bound" situations, eg when a site comes onto the market with a fixed timescale for offers.

DEVELOPMENT PLANS

- 5.12 Development Plans provide the policy framework and context for the development control process, including pre-application discussions. Planning authorities perceive that applicants and their agents do not always accept that policies set out in Development Plans are "non negotiable" during pre-application discussions. On the other hand, applicants and their agents sometimes feel that officials can "hide behind" Development Plans and use them as an "excuse" for not engaging in meaningful pre-application discussions.
- 5.13 The extent to which Development Plans are kept up to date can potentially have implications for pre-application discussions. Some applicants and agents said that they were more likely to seek pre-application discussions when the Development Plan had not been updated recently. Pre-application discussions were seen as a way of clarifying issues which were open to interpretation or where policies had been overtaken by events or where previously approved departures could be interpreted as setting a precedent.

PROCEDURAL GUIDANCE

- 5.14 Applicants/applicants' agents rated the quality of procedural guidance produced by planning authorities relatively highly. According to the Users Survey 62% said that they found the guidance notes, which accompanied the application form, helpful or very helpful. Where they were regarded as being unhelpful, the main reasons were the use of jargon and confusing guidance about procedures.

- 5.15 The use of plain English in guidance material is particularly important for private householders and other applicants who do not have experience of submitting planning applications. Good quality procedural guidance written specifically for the layperson would help reduce the amount of time planning authorities have to spend explaining basic application and determination procedures. This would give them more time to focus on substantive pre-application discussions.
- 5.16 Written guidance sent out with planning application forms tends to focus on the formal application and determination process. More emphasis could be placed on encouraging pre-application discussions in this material. A number of planning authorities include a section in application forms asking if an applicant has had any pre-application discussions about the proposal. This is useful in helping to ensure consistency between the pre and post application stages in the process but it could also be used to encourage applicants to seek a pre-application discussion before submitting an application.
- 5.17 Procedural guidance should be written in a clear and concise manner and made widely available to the general public. Written guidance could be supported by having well publicised arrangements for providing advice to householders considering submitting a planning application, eg in the form of local surgeries and dedicated help desks or help lines.
- 5.18 Agents who were involved in submitting planning applications to several planning authorities complained about the lack of consistency between authorities in terms of procedures for submitting applications. They believed that there could be more standardisation in the procedures used and the design and content of application forms.

KEY FINDINGS ON WRITTEN ADVICE AND PROCEDURE

- Good quality design guidance was considered by all parties as an effective way of informing PADs, and reducing routine enquiries.
- This guidance should be produced in a range of formats, including the use of modern technology which can be easier to keep up to date than printed documents.
- Development briefs were welcomed where they reflected the corporate view of a council and helped to promote good quality developments.
- They were however both resource and time consuming, and often hard to use when time was tight.
- Procedural guidance material was of generally high quality.
- Applicants and agents who dealt with a number of authorities complained about the lack of consistency in procedures and in the development and content of application forms

6. LOOKING FORWARD

INTRODUCTION

6.1 In this final section of the report we will attempt to draw together the key findings of the research and present our conclusions about good practice in the way that pre-application discussions are currently handled. The section will cover:-

- Key Findings and Conclusions
- Implications for Planning Authorities
- Implications for Statutory Consultees
- Implications for the Scottish Executive

KEY FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

6.2 Our research has confirmed that there is widespread support for the importance of pre-application discussions as part of the planning process. They are seen to play a vital part in the role of planning authorities as public service providers who have an interest in making the planning process open and accessible. Almost all of the people we spoke to, whether from planning authorities, applicants, applicants' agents or statutory consultees said that the advantages of having well managed pre-application discussions outweighed any perceived disadvantages. That is not to say, however, that people were not able to identify ways in which the procedures for handling pre-application discussions could be improved.

6.3 While the term "pre-application discussions" was widely recognised, in practice there was no generally accepted definition of what it encompassed. It was taken to cover anything from general enquiries to discussions about specific proposals. This lack of clarity can lead to confusion since what might be regarded as good practice in terms of handling discussion about specific proposals may be inappropriate for dealing with more generic enquiries.

6.4 The majority of people we spoke to said that they could see a role for more advice or guidance on how pre-application discussions should be handled. Some specifically said that this was an area of procedure that could be usefully informed by the production of a Planning Advice Note (PAN). There was, however, some concern that any advice issued should not seek to make the pre-application process more formal or bureaucratic. This concern was shared by planning authorities and applicants/applicants' agents alike.

6.5 Advice or guidance about pre-application discussions should have the objective of promoting good practice by increasing the clarity, consistency and quality of the process. It should not seek to impose rigid conditions or procedures, which would reduce the flexibility and responsiveness of the system.

- 6.6 While we found widespread support for pre-application discussions, we were not able to quantify whether or not they result in savings in time or money in processing planning applications. Planning authorities were not able to provide us with the information required to undertake this type of quantitative analysis. While a number of planning authorities do record the time spent on pre-application discussions, the majority do not. Even where the total amount of time spent on pre-application discussions is recorded, it is not always recorded in a way that would allow comparisons to be made between the time taken to process applications where there has been a pre-application discussion and those where there has no discussion.
- 6.7 Some applicants told us that they believed that having pre-application discussions did reduce the amount of time taken to process applications, but others believed that it made no difference. While applicants generally wanted to have applications processed quicker, this was not the main reason for entering into pre-application discussions. They tended to be more concerned with the likely outcome of the application than the speed with which it would be processed. On the other hand, some applicants did expect that applications should be processed quicker when there had been a pre-application discussion and were disappointed when this did not happen.
- 6.8 The reason most frequently given by planning authorities why pre-application discussions may not lead to savings in the time taken to process a planning application was that when an application is submitted applicants frequently do not provide all of the information that has been requested during the earlier discussions. This often leads to a situation where an application is registered as valid but it can not be considered until additional information, eg a traffic or retail impact study, is submitted by the applicant.
- 6.9 The best examples of pre-application discussions which were described to us tended to be where all parties entered the discussions with an open mind and a willingness to consider all of the options available to make a proposed development acceptable in planning terms. This seems to be more likely to happen where the planning authority is enthusiastic about the proposed development in principle because of the economic or other benefits which will result. Pre-application discussions can, however, be less productive where a proposed development is not viewed positively by the planning authority (or the authority is perceived as being negative by the applicant.)
- 6.10 Examples of good practice that were highlighted in the case study areas tended to involve one-off applications where nature of the application involved specific issues. In urban areas many of the examples of best practice concerned applications that involved listed buildings. These applications were felt to be particularly suited to an open dialogue between applicants and planning authorities in order to develop a proposal that was acceptable to all parties. In rural areas pre-application discussions were felt to be particularly useful in dealing with applications for housing in the countryside. Again, the specific and individual aspect of this type of development was seen to be particularly conducive to pre-application discussions.
- 6.11 Pre-application discussions were also seen as being of value in helping to speed up the planning process for developments that were regarded as being of significant in terms of local economic development. Projects involving inward investment or where employment opportunities would be created were frequently cited as good examples of

pre-application discussions. These type of developments were also more likely to have been handled on a corporate basis, bringing together all of the parties involved as part of a project team.

- 6.12 Most pre-application discussions involve bi-lateral discussions between the planning authority, normally the development control section, and applicants and their agents. Applicants or their agents may seek separate discussions with statutory consultees but only if they feel that there are major issues that may need to be resolved prior to submitting a planning application. Round table discussions involving statutory consultees are the exception rather than the rule.
- 6.13 Applicants and their agents had a strong expectations that they would get a corporate view from local authorities during pre-application discussions and were often disappointed when they did not. The lack of communication and liaison between planning authorities and roads and transport departments was seen as a particular problem in this context. Some planning authorities are attempting to overcome these difficulties by acting as a central point of contact for all pre-application discussions and co-ordinating the responses from other departments. This is an approach which would certainly be welcomed by applicants/applicants' agents. However, many would probably want to reserve the right to speak to other departments separately.
- 6.14 Some concerns were expressed to the researchers that councillors, community councils and members of the public could see pre-application discussions as prejudicing the formal consideration of a planning application. This was not, however, seen as currently being a frequent complaint or a major problem given the role that pre-application discussions play in the planning system. There is a danger, however, that it could become more of a problem if pre-application discussions were to become more formal and therefore be perceived as having a more authoritative status.
- 6.15 Written guidance, in the form of design guidance or development briefs, are seen by planning authorities and applicants/applicants' agents as complementing well managed pre-application discussions rather than a substitute for them. Where written guidance is available it can act as a "filter" by reducing the number of routine enquiries about generic issues and can also provide a framework for pre-application discussions about a specific proposal.
- 6.16 Design guidance needs to be kept up-to-date, reflecting any changes in a planning authority's policies or attitudes. It should also be made widely available in a format that is "user friendly". Increasingly this may mean making use of new technology such as the Internet and CD Roms.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PLANNING AUTHORITIES

- 6.17 Less than a third of planning authorities who responded to the postal survey said they had a written policy describing how they would deal with pre-application discussions. Even where written policies did exist they were not always well publicised or made widely available to applicants and agents. Our research suggests that all planning authorities should be encouraged to produce a written statement of their policy for handling pre-application discussions.

- 6.18 Policy statements should distinguish between the procedures which will be used for handling generic enquiries and those used for discussions about a specific proposal. They should also set out service standards which applicants/applicants' agents can expect when they enter into pre-application discussions.
- 6.19 Planning authorities should also take a more corporate approach to handling pre-application discussions. They should consider how they could improve communications and liaison with colleagues in other departments of the council who have a role in the planning process as statutory consultees. This could involve developing their co-ordinating role by providing a single point of contact for applicants or their agents. Alternatively they could establish service level agreements or protocols with other departments, which set out respective roles and responsibilities in the pre-application discussion process.
- 6.20 Planning authorities should keep written records of all pre-application discussions about specific sites or development proposals. These should be recorded centrally so that they are available when or if a planning application is submitted. The use of GIS systems to reference records of pre-application discussions may be one way of doing this effectively.
- 6.21 Wherever possible, the development control officer responsible for processing a planning application should be the same officer who dealt with any pre-application discussions.
- 6.22 All application forms should contain a section for applicants to state if they have had any pre-application discussions with the planning authority or any statutory consultees.
- 6.23 More use should be made of written guidance in the form of design guidance and development briefs. Design guidance should be kept up to date and made widely available to potential applicants in formats that suit their needs.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

- 6.24 Further advice about pre-application discussions, probably in the form of a Planning Advice Note, would be welcomed by planning authorities and applicants/applicants agents.
- 6.25 Specific guidance should be provided to planning authorities regarding the requirements of the GDPO on registering a planning application where information such as a traffic or retail impact study has not been provided, despite being requested during a pre-application discussion. Should this be registered as a valid application or not?
- 6.26 There is a strong perception amongst planning authorities that Performance Indicators relating to the time taken to process planning applications can deflect attention and resources from other aspects of the development control process, including pre-application discussions. The Scottish Executive should emphasis that efficiency in

processing planning applications is not the only measure of the quality and effectiveness of the planning service.

- 6.27 Statutory consultees should be encouraged to adopt a policy for handling pre-application discussions and to publicise this to applicants and their agents. They should also be encouraged to publish information about the type of issues they should be consulted about and contact information for the benefit of applicants and their agents.
- 6.28 The Planning Audit Unit should continue to monitor and review the performance of planning authorities in terms of their policies and practices for handling pre-application discussions and the production of written guidance and advice.

APPENDIX

PRE-APPLICATION DISCUSSION AND GUIDANCE

Survey of Scottish Planning Authorities

Introduction: The Customer Management Consultancy Ltd (CMC) is carrying out research for the Scottish Office into the role of pre-application discussion and guidance in planning (PAD's for short). We would be very grateful if you could complete the enclosed questionnaire and return it in the pre-paid envelope. Many questions can be answered by circling the appropriate number.

Where you think it appropriate, please feel free to give us additional comments and to send us copies of documents which set out your policies and protocol on pre-application procedures, if these are available.

We would be grateful to receive your response by 14 May 1999.

Thank you for your help.

First, please tell us about you:

Name of Council _____

Name of Respondent _____

Position _____

Department _____

Address _____

Tel No _____ Fax No _____

e-mail address _____

Q1 Which of the following best describes your service's approach to pre-application discussions?

	Circle one
We have a policy of not discussing potential applications with agents or applicants until they are formally lodged	1
Our policy is to have only minimum pre-application discussions with applicants or agents (eg to clarify implications of local plans): we never/rarely engage in substantive pre-application discussions	2
We engage in pre-application discussions only when requested and when there is a compelling reason	3
We are always willing to engage in pre-application discussions when requested	4
We go out of our way to encourage agents and applicants to come to us at an early stage for pre-application discussions	5

Please expand on your answer if you wish:

(If your policy is not to engage in PAD's, please answer Question 2, and then go to Q13)

Q2 Do you have a written statement of policy or procedures on pre-application discussions?

	Circle one
Yes and I enclose a copy of the relevant documentation	1
Yes, but it is not easy to extract from other documents	2
Yes, but it contains some confidential guidance/information	3
No, it is not written down systematically anywhere, but my colleagues are clear what our policy is in practice	4
No, it is not something we have formally addressed/I am not aware of any such documents	5

When does the process start.....?

Q3 If you have a policy on how pre-application discussions should be conducted, does it say when the process starts?

	Circle one
No, it is not stated	1
First telephone discussion	2
First meeting	3
Production of drawings	4
Other: please specify	5

.....and stop?

Q4 Again, if you have a policy, does it say when the process ends?

	Circle one
No, it is not stated	1
Submission of an application	2
Determination of an application	3
Other: please specify	4

PAD's by type of development

Q5 Can you tell us how many applications over the last 12 months, by category of development, involved PAD's? Please say if your response is based on management data or an estimate, and if you don't have the information and believe that an estimate would be misleading, please skip this question.

	Actual	or	Estimated
Householder	%		%
Residential	%		%
Business and Industry	%		%
Listed Building and Conservation Area Consents	%		%
Other	%		%

Q6 In your experience are PAD's more likely to take place over major or minor developments, or is there no difference?

	Circle one
Major developments	1
Minor developments	2
No discernible difference/hard to say	3

Q7 Are there substantial numbers of PAD's for which no application comes forward?

Yes	1
No	2
Not sure/not clear	3

Types of Discussion

Q8a Can you tell us how many of all PAD's which take place involve telephone discussions only, face to face meetings, detailed drawings and site visits. Again, please indicate if this is an actual or an estimated figure and skip this question if you believe any estimate might be unreliable.

	Actual	or	Estimated
Telephone discussion only	%		%
Face to face meetings	%		%
Detailed drawings	%		%
Site visits	%		%

- 8b Are there any variations in these answers by category of development (as in Q5)?
Please explain.

Recording of PAD's

- Q9 Do you record staff time spent on PAD's?

	Circle one
Yes, as part of our time recording system, which has PAD's as a separate category	1
No, we record our time, but PAD's are not a separate category, it would be hard to extract	2
No, we do not record staff time systematically	3

- Q10 Do you formally make a note of meetings and other discussions during the pre-application stages?

	Circle one
Yes, a full record is always taken	1
Yes, but only of formal meetings	2
Sometimes, when it is a particularly important issue	3
Rarely/never	4

* If you circled 4, please go to Q12

- Q11 If you do note meetings, always or sometimes, are agents or applicants provided with copies of advice given?

	Circle one
Yes, always	1
Yes, sometimes/if requested	2
Rarely/never	3

Same or different official

- Q12 Is the planning official who is involved in a PAD the same person who processes the application?

	Circle one
Yes, always	1
Yes, normally, but not always	2
Sometimes, there is no direct link	3
Rarely/never	4

Advice to agents/applicants

Q13 Does your written guidance to applicants and agents specifically cover how pre-application discussions will be handled

Yes, I enclose a copy	1	No	2
-----------------------	---	----	---

Q14a Do you provide applicants and agents with design guidance about particular types of development?

No, never/rarely	1	Yes	2
------------------	---	-----	---

Q14b If yes, please specify:

Benefits and Drawbacks

Q15 What do you see as the benefits of well managed pre-application procedures, for authorities, applicants, agents and statutory consultees?

Q16 What do you see as the main disadvantages of pre-application discussions from the point of view of authorities, applicants, agents and statutory consultees?

Possible improvements in handling PAD's

Q17 Do you have any thoughts on how PAD's could be improved either in your authority or throughout Scotland?

Q18 Should procedures for handling PAD's be made more formal?

	Circle one
Yes, definitely	1
Yes, probably	2
Not sure/let's see the findings of this study first	3
Probably not	4
Definitely not	5

Q19 Do you think there is a need for new advice on how PAD's should be handled?

	Circle one
No, not at all	1
No, I will take some convincing	2
Not sure/let me see what it looks like first	3
Yes, probably	4
Yes, definitely	5

Q20 Would you like your authority to be considered as a case study area for this study (if you have not already been approached)?

	Circle one
Yes	1
No	2
Not sure	3
I have already been approached	4

Q21 Any other comments on the role of PAD's or on this study?

Thank you very much for completing this questionnaire.

Please return your completed questionnaire in the reply paid envelope provided (or if you are sending documents, attach the reply paid envelope to a larger envelope) to:

Customer Management Consultancy Ltd
 16 Beta Centre
 Stirling University Innovation Park
 STIRLING
 FK9

No stamp is needed

Thank you

PRE-APPLICATION DISCUSSION AND GUIDANCE

Survey of Statutory Consultees

Introduction: The Customer Management Consultancy Ltd (CMC) is carrying out research for the Scottish Office into the role of pre-application discussion and guidance in planning (PAD's for short). We would be very grateful if you could complete the enclosed questionnaire on behalf of your organisation and return it in the pre-paid envelope. Many questions can be answered by circling the appropriate number. If, however, your organisation is not much involved in pre-application discussions, please answer as many questions as you can.

Where you think it appropriate, please feel free to give us additional comments and to send us copies of any relevant documents which you may have. The first part of the questionnaire looks at your general approach and experience and the second part asks about six particular case study areas.

We would be grateful to receive your response by 12 July 1999. If you have any questions, please ring Peter Gibson on 01786 447190.

Thank you for your help.

First, please tell us about you:

Name of Organisation _____

Name of Respondent _____

Position _____

Department _____

Address _____

Tel No _____ Fax No _____

e-mail address _____

PART I General Experiences

Q1 Which of the following best describes your organisation's approach to pre-application discussions?

	Circle one
We have a policy of not discussing or becoming in any way involved in applications in which we may have an interest until they are formally lodged	1
Our policy is to have only minimal involvement at the pre-application stage: we may receive information but we never/rarely engage in substantive pre-application discussions	2
We engage in pre-application discussions only when requested and when there is a compelling reason	3
We are always willing to engage in pre-application discussions when requested	4
We go out of our way to encourage agents, applicants and planning authorities to come to us at an early stage for pre-application discussions	5
It does not matter what our policy might be: in practice nobody/almost nobody approaches us until an application has been lodged	6

Please expand on your answer if you wish – especially if you circled 1 or 2

(If your policy is not to engage in PAD's, please answer Question 2, and then go to Q12)

Q2 Do you have a written statement of your organisation's policy or procedures on pre-application discussions?

	Circle one
Yes and I enclose a copy of the relevant documentation	1
Yes, but it is not easy to extract from other documents	2
Yes, but it contains some confidential guidance/information	3
No, it is not written down systematically anywhere, but my colleagues are clear what our policy is in practice	4
No, it is not something we have formally addressed/I am not aware of any such documents	5

Number of PADs

Q3 How many Pre-Application Discussions has your organisation been involved in throughout Scotland throughout the past 12 months?

Write in: _____ (actual / estimated)

No involvement, go to Q12

PAD's by type of development

Q4 How many of these discussions over the last 12 months were by the following category of development? (Please say if your response is based on management data or an estimate, and if you don't have the information and believe that an estimate would be misleading, please skip this question.)

	Actual	or	Estimated
Householder	%		%
Residential	%		%
Business and Industry	%		%
Listed Building and Conservation Area Consents	%		%
Other	%		%

Q5 In your experience are PAD's more likely to take place over major or minor developments, or is there no difference?

	Circle one
Major developments	1
Minor developments	2
No discernible difference/hard to say	3

Q6 Are there substantial numbers of PAD's in which you are involved for which no application comes forward?

Yes	1
No	2
Not sure/not clear	3

Types of Discussion

Q7a Can you tell us how many of all PAD's with which you are involved, involve telephone discussions only, face to face meetings, detailed drawings and site visits. (Again, please indicate if this is an actual or an estimated figure and skip this question if you believe any estimate might be unreliable.)

	Actual	or	Estimated
Telephone discussion only	%		%
Face to face meetings	%		%
Detailed drawings	%		%
Site visits	%		%

Q7b Are there any variations in these answers by category of development (as in Q4)? Please explain.

Recording of PAD's

Q8 Do you record staff time spent on PAD's?

	Circle one
Yes, as part of our time recording system, which has PAD's as a separate category	1
No, we record time involved in planning matters, but PAD's are not a separate category, it would be hard to extract	2
No, we do not record staff time in this way	3

Q9 Do you formally make a note of meetings and other discussions during the pre-application stages?

	Circle one
Yes, a full record is always taken	1
Yes, but only of formal meetings	2
Sometimes, when it is a particularly important issue	3
Rarely/never	4

* If you circled 4, please go to Q11

Q10 If you do note meetings, always or sometimes, are agents, applicants or authorities provided with copies of advice given?

	Circle one
Yes, always	1
Yes, sometimes/if requested	2
Rarely/never	3

Q11a When you have been involved in pre-applications which of the following usually apply?

	Circle one
Generally, if we have been involved at the pre-application stage, our involvement at the formal application stage is less	1
Sometimes if we have been involved at the pre-application stage our involvement at the formal application stage is less, but at other times it makes no difference at all	2
Sometimes if we have been involved at the pre-application stage our involvement at the formal application stage is greater, but at other times it makes no difference at all	3
Generally, if we have been involved at the pre-application stage, it makes no difference at all to the formal application stage	4
Generally, if we have been involved at the pre-application stage, our involvement at the formal application stage is greater	5

Q11b Please expand on you answer in Q11a.

Benefits and Drawbacks

Q12 What do you see as the benefits of well managed pre-application procedures, for authorities, applicants, agents and statutory consultees?

Q13 What do you see as the main disadvantages of pre-application discussions from the point of view of authorities, applicants, agents and statutory consultees?

Possible improvements in handling PAD's

Q14 Do you have any thoughts on how PAD's could be improved throughout Scotland?

Q15 Should procedures for handling PAD's be made more formal?

	Circle one
Yes, definitely	1
Yes, probably	2
Not sure/let's see the findings of this study first	3
Probably not	4
Definitely not	5

Q16 Do you think there is a need for new advice on how PAD's should be handled?

	Circle one
No, not at all	1
No, I will take some convincing	2
Not sure/let me see what it looks like first	3
Yes, probably	4
Yes, definitely	5

PART II The Case Study Areas

The following case study areas have been agreed – Angus, City of Edinburgh, City of Glasgow, Moray, Renfrewshire, West Lothian.

Q17 In which of the following case study authorities have you been involved as a statutory consultee with one or more applications over the past 12 months?

	Circle all that apply
Angus	1
City of Edinburgh	2
City of Glasgow	3
Moray	4
Renfrewshire	5
West Lothian	

Q18 In which of the following case study authorities have you been involved as a statutory consultee in pre-application discussions over the past 12 months?

	Circle all that apply
Angus	1
City of Edinburgh	2
City of Glasgow	3
Moray	4
Renfrewshire	5
West Lothian	

Q19 Could you tell us here about one (or more) Pre-Application Discussion which was particularly effective and helpful from your point of view. Please say which authority was involved, and give brief details here about who would be involved in each of these areas? (please attach information on an additional sheet if necessary)

Q20 Could you tell us here about one (or more) Pre-Application Discussion which was particularly ineffective and unhelpful from your point of view. Please say which authority was involved, and give brief details here (please attach information on an additional sheet if necessary)

Q21 Do you have any other observations on how PADs operate in the six case study areas which you can give here?

Q22 Would you like to be invited to take part in further discussions about PADs?

Yes 1 No 2

Thank you very much for completing this questionnaire.

Please return your completed questionnaire in the reply paid envelope provided (or if you are sending documents, attach the reply paid envelope to a larger envelope) to:

Customer Management Consultancy Ltd
16 Beta Centre
Stirling University Innovation Park
STIRLING
FK9

No stamp is needed

SURVEY OF PLANNING APPLICANTS INVOLVED IN PRE-APPLICATION DISCUSSIONS

Introduction

The Scottish Office has commissioned The Customer Management Consultancy Ltd (CMC) to undertake research into pre-application discussions and guidance. The aim is to identify good practice.

We have been given your name by «Company» Council for the purpose of this research as somebody who has in recent months been involved in pre-application discussions with them. We would like to hear your views on how that pre-application discussion was handled.

Most questions can be answered simply by circling the appropriate response: for example

Male 1 Female 2

Please return this questionnaire in the envelope provided. Your answers will be analysed by CMC in the strictest confidence. The number on the questionnaire is simply to avoid sending you a reminder if you have already replied. The Council will not know if you have replied or not. Your name will be deleted from our database at the end of this study. A statistical report will be prepared, based on the findings.

If you have not been involved in any such discussions, our apologies for troubling you – but please answer Q1 and send the questionnaire back in the envelope provided.

Thank you for your help. Any problems or queries about the questionnaire, please ring CMC free on 0800 068 1471 and ask for Peter Gibson or Nicola Pleass.

Your Recent Planning Application

Q1 Did you in fact have a pre-application discussion with «Company» Council concerning your recent application?

Yes	1	Go to Q2
No	2	Please return this in the enclosed envelope: sorry to have troubled you

Q2 When you made your recent application, were you acting:

	Circle one	
as a private individual/resident/householder?	1	Go to Q3
on behalf of your employer?	2	
in business on your own account?	3	
as an agent acting on behalf of another party?	4	Go to 4

- Q3 Did you employ an agent, such as an architect, surveyor or planning consultant, to assist you not only in drawing up plans but also in your discussions with the Council's planning officers?

	Circle one
Yes I employed an agent, though I undertook most of the discussions with the Council myself	1
Yes, I employed an agent and the agent undertook most of the discussions with the Council	2
No, I did not employ an agent	3

- Q4 What type of application were you submitting?

	Circle one
Householder	1
Residential Development	2
Business and Industry Development	3
Listed Building and Conservation Area Consent	4
Other	5

Type of Discussion

- Q5 What type of pre-application discussion did you have with the Council's planning officers?

	Circle one	
Telephone only	1	Go to Q8
Telephone and meeting	2	

- Q6 If you met the Council's planning officers to have pre-application discussions, where did you meet them?

	Circle all that apply
Council office	1
At the site	2
Somewhere else	3

- Q7 Did the discussions involve consideration of detailed drawings?

Yes 1 No 2

- Q8 Did the Council's planning officers take a note of the discussion?

Yes	1	Go to Q11
No	2	
Not sure/do not recall	3	

Q9 If yes, were you given or sent a copy of these at a later stage?

Yes	1	Go to Q11
No	2	
Not sure/do not recall	3	

Q10 If you received a copy of the notes of the pre-application discussions, how useful were they to you in drawing up your planning application?

	Circle one
Very useful, they helped a lot	1
Fairly useful, they helped to some extent	2
Neither useful/nor not useful, they made no difference either way	3
Not useful, they did not help at all	4
Not at all useful, they hindered rather than helped	5

Q11 Was the planning official involved in the pre-application discussion the same person who later processed your application?

	Circle one
Yes, it was the same person whom we mainly dealt with later with the application	1
No, it was another planning official whom we mainly dealt later with the application	2
No, we did not proceed with a formal application/not relevant	3

Q12 Overall, how helpful or unhelpful did you find the pre-application discussion when you were making your planning application?

Very helpful	Helpful	Neither/nor	Fairly unhelpful	Very unhelpful
1	2	3	4	5

If you circled either 4 or 5 when answering Q12, what aspects of the pre-application discussion did you feel were fairly or very unhelpful? Please write below.

Discussions with Other People

Q13 Did you have pre-application discussions with any of the following people or organisations, apart from the planning officials?

	Circle all that apply
Neighbours	1
The Community Council	2
The Council Roads Department	3
The Council Environmental Health Department	4
Another Council department	5
A Councillor	6
The Water Authority	7
Scottish Environmental Protection Agency	8
Scottish Natural Heritage	9
Historic Scotland	10
The Scottish Sports Council	11
The Health and Safety Executive	12
The Scottish Office	13
Other: write in	14
No discussion with anybody else	15

Go to Q16

Q14 If you had discussions with more than one person or body mentioned in Q13 above, which was the single most important one? Write in the number or name here:

Q15 Thinking about the organisation mentioned in Q13 or the single main one mentioned in Q14, how helpful or unhelpful did you find your pre-application discussion with this other organisation or person?

Very helpful	Helpful	Neither/nor	Fairly unhelpful	Very unhelpful
1	2	3	4	5

If you circled either 4 or 5 when answering Q15, what aspects of the pre-application discussion did you feel were fairly or very unhelpful? Please write below.

The Guidance Notes

Q16 How helpful or unhelpful did you find the Guidance Notes when you were making your planning application?

Very helpful	Helpful	Neither/nor	Fairly unhelpful	Very unhelpful
1	2	3	4	5

If you circled either 4 or 5 when answering Q16, what aspects of the Guidance Notes did you feel were fairly or very unhelpful? Please write below.

Q17 Before you sent in your application, to what extent did you understand the following aspects involved in making a planning application?

	I understood fully	I understood most of the procedure	I understood some aspects and not others	I did not understand most of the procedure	I understood nothing
The application form	1	2	3	4	5
The Guidance notes which accompany the application form	1	2	3	4	5
The drawing up of plans	1	2	3	4	5
The neighbour notification process	1	2	3	4	5
The timescale	1	2	3	4	5
The fee	1	2	3	4	5
The level of background information required	1	2	3	4	5

After you Submitted Your Planning Application

Q18 Once you had submitted your planning application, what happened next?

	Circle all that apply
The Council acknowledged receipt of my application and its registration as valid	1
The Council wrote back and said it was wrongly filled in/it was incomplete and was not registered as valid	2
The Council contacted me to offer advice on the completed application	3

Q19 How long did the Council take to reach a decision on your planning application?

	Circle one
Up to 1 month	1
1 – 2 months	2
2 – 3 months	3
More than 3 months	4
Still not approved	5

Q20 What was your expectation of how long your planning application would take to get resolved from the time you submitted your planning application to the Council?

	Circle One
Up to 1 month	1
1 – 2 months	2
2 – 3 months	3
More than 3 months	4
I had no clear expectation	5

Outcome

Q21 Which best describes the overall outcome of your contact with the Council about this matter?

	Circle one
I was told I did not need planning permission	1
I have not heard yet about my application	2
I was granted planning permission after a reasonable time	3
I was granted planning permission after a delay due to changes required to my application	4
I was granted planning permission after an unreasonable delay	5
I was refused planning permission	6

Satisfaction with Handling, both Pre and Post Application

Q22 Thinking back on your overall experience of contacting the Council, both at the pre-application stage and later, how satisfied or dissatisfied were you with the way the Council handled your contact?

Very satisfied	Fairly satisfied	Neither/nor	Fairly dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied
1	2	3	4	5

Q23 How has this experience affected your confidence in the way the Planning Service is run by the Council?

	Circle One
My confidence in the way the Planning Service is run has greatly increased	1
My confidence in the way the Planning Service is run has increased	2
My confidence in the way the Planning Service is run has remained the same	3
My confidence in the way the Planning Service is run has decreased	4
My confidence in the way the Planning Service is run has greatly decreased	5

Q24 Have you been involved in making planning applications to any other local authorities over the past two years?

Yes 1 No 2 Go to Q26

Q25 If yes, how do you compare this planning authority with others you have dealt with in terms of your overall experience?

	Circle One
It is hard to say/difficult to form a judgement	1
On the whole this authority is somewhat better	2
On the whole this authority is somewhat worse	3
On the whole, this authority is much the same as other authorities	4

Any Ideas?

Q26 We would be grateful if you could provide any suggestions on how the handling of pre-application discussions or guidance could be improved.

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

Finally, about yourself

It would be helpful for our analysis to know more about you. Remember your replies are completely confidential. Please feel free to skip any question you do not wish to answer.

Q27 Sex

Male 1 Female 2

Q28 Age

Under 25	1
26-35	2
36-45	3
46-55	4
56-65	5
66 and over	6

Q29 Which best describes your housing situation?

Owner occupier	1
Tenant of council	2
Tenant of housing association/Scottish Homes	3
Tenant of private landlord	4
Other	5

Q30 Is your household's income:

Under £10,000 a year	1
£10,001 - £20,000	2
£20,001 - £30,000	3
£30,001 - £40,000	4
£40,001 - £50,000	5
Over £50,000	6

Thank you for your help. Please return your questionnaire in the reply paid envelope provided to the:

Customer Management Consultancy Ltd
 16 Beta Centre
 Stirling University Innovation Park
 STIRLING FK9