

The Chief Planning Officer  
Local Planning Authorities in England

29 July 2011

**Chief Planning Officer Letter:**

**PLANNING GUARANTEE AND INFORMATION REQUIREMENTS**

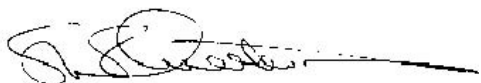
I am writing to draw your attention to the attached statement which the Department has published today. The statement can be found on our web site at:

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/planningandbuilding/planningsystem/planningpolicy/planningguarantee>  
[e](#).

The publication of the National Planning Policy Framework this week marks a major step forward in the Government's ambitious programme of planning reform (my letter to you of 25 July refers). The Plan for Growth released alongside the Budget highlighted a number of other opportunities, and the statement attached here poses a number of questions about the information required to determine planning applications. I would welcome your views on these issues; comments can be sent to [info.requirements@communities.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:info.requirements@communities.gsi.gov.uk).

The statement also gives an initial indication of the issues that will need to be addressed in introducing the 'Planning Guarantee', for which detailed proposals are being developed for consultation in the autumn.

Should you have any questions about this statement please contact Susanna Strandell: [susanna.strandell@communities.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:susanna.strandell@communities.gsi.gov.uk).



**STEVE QUARTERMAIN**  
*Chief Planner*

## THE 'PLANNING GUARANTEE' AND INFORMATION REQUIREMENTS

### Progress in planning reform

1. In The Plan for Growth issued alongside the Budget, the Government announced an ambitious programme of measures to simplify and streamline the system for determining planning applications.
2. This reflects our wider ambitions to reform the planning system so that it is simpler, swifter and more positive in its outlook and operation. We have published for consultation the draft National Planning Policy Framework, central to which is a new 'presumption in favour of sustainable development' that should permeate both plan-making and decision-taking.

### Speeding up planning applications

3. As well as making policy simpler and clearer, we need to make sure that the processes that applicants have to go through, to obtain planning permission, are as streamlined and effective as possible and that decisions are made in good time. The majority of applications are determined within the statutory periods (13 weeks for major applications, 8 weeks for others), but small minority take a considerable time to determine: 3,200 planning applications in the financial year 2010 -11 took longer than 52 weeks.
4. In The Plan for Growth we said that we would report progress in the autumn on a range of measures to speed things up. Key among these will be the introduction of a 'Planning Guarantee', designed to ensure that no planning application should take longer than one year to reach a decision, and measures to reduce the information required to accompany planning applications. Both of these will be subject to full consultation in the autumn.

### Planning Guarantee

5. Ahead of that consultation, this statement gives further explanation of how the planning guarantee could operate, so that planning authorities and applicants can begin to consider the potential implications. The Guarantee will establish clear time limits within which an application should be dealt with by the determining bodies (both the local planning authority and, where cases go to appeal, the Planning Inspectorate).
6. Councils and the Planning Inspectorate will both need to make timely decisions to ensure that the Guarantee is delivered. The Planning Inspectorate already has a service standard of completing 80% of cases within 26 weeks, so one approach to the Guarantee would be for a similar maximum period for the time that cases spend with local planning authorities. This would not alter the statutory requirements for local authorities to determine planning applications within 8 or 13 weeks, or the right for applicants to appeal if cases are not determined within those timescales, but would establish some absolute limits so that a one year Guarantee could be met.

7. We envisage that for individual applications, the clock would need to start when a valid application is received by the local planning authority, and would stop when the application was determined and a decision notice issued. If the applicant then chose to appeal against a refusal the clock could start again when the appeal is validated by the Planning Inspectorate and would stop once the appeal was determined. If the council failed to determine the application, the clock would not stop but would continue to run, including any appeal period.
8. The Guarantee would need to exclude periods when progress on the application is not in the control of decision takers; principally pre-application discussions, and the time between a refusal and any decision by the applicant to appeal. Applications handled via a planning performance agreement could also be excluded, as such agreements already offer more certainty for the applicant about the timescale for determining their application.
9. We will want to make sure that existing performance levels are improved and sustained, particularly as the economy picks up and the volume of planning applications increases. We will also want to ensure that people are able to assess how their local council performs against the Guarantee, using information that is made available by planning authorities as frequently as possible (which we would expect to be at least quarterly). As set out in The Plan for Growth, the Department will also publish a regular report on performance against the Guarantee, by individual local authorities and by the Planning Inspectorate. This report will be made to Parliament, but it will also be of general public interest.
10. The Government's expectation is that public availability of this data will in itself act to drive up standards. However, in order to be a 'guarantee' it is important that applicants feel that there are consequences where the required timeframe is not met. To provide this confidence and to incentivise rapid improvement, the Government will consult in the autumn on further measures that may be needed to improve the timeliness of decisions, and to deal with specific cases where the 12 month Guarantee is not met.

### **Information requirements**

11. We recognise that in determining a planning application, the planning authority must have all the appropriate information available to it. One of the purposes of validating planning applications is to ensure that all the necessary information has been submitted. But applicants frequently complain that they are asked to produce information that is of only marginal relevance, and may be very expensive to produce. In The Plan for Growth, we committed to revisit our policy and guidance on the information that is submitted alongside planning applications. We want to focus on what is really necessary and cut out what isn't.
12. We would like to stimulate discussion about these issues, ahead of detailed consultation in the autumn. We are keen to hear from local planning authorities, applicants and other parties who are involved in or affected by the determination of planning applications. In particular:
  - a. What information really helps people to understand the nature and potential impact of development proposals - and what doesn't?

- b. What information is really necessary to determine, in each case, a full, outline, or reserved matters planning application?
- c. What is the right balance between national consistency and local flexibility in respect of information requirements? How can central government help to achieve this?
- d. Should the existing suite of Standard Application Forms (1APP) be shortened, and if so, how?

13. Comments on these issues can be submitted to the DCLG mailbox [info.requirements@communities.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:info.requirements@communities.gsi.gov.uk), preferably by the end of August this year.