Belfast City Council

Subject:	Updated Planning Application Checklist
Date:	20 June 2023
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Restricted Reports

Is this report restricted?　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　Yes ☐　No ☒

　　If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?

　　　　After Committee Decision ☐
　　　　After Council Decision ☐
　　　　Some time in the future ☐
　　　　Never ☐

Call-in

Is the decision eligible for Call-in?　　　　　　　　　Yes ☒　No ☐

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of Main Issues
1.1	To report on updates to the Planning Service's Planning *Application Checklist*, which provides guidance to customers on the information they need to submit with a planning application. The Application Checklist has been updated to reflect the new policy requirements of the adopted Belfast Local Development Plan: Plan Strategy.
2.0	**Recommendation**
2.1	The Committee is asked to note the report.
3.0	**Main Report**
3.1	Background The bar for information submitted with a planning application in Northern Ireland is low. The Planning (General Development Procedure) Order (Northern Ireland) 2015 only requires details of the applicant, description of the site, site location plan, plans sufficient to identify the proposal and a planning fee. In some cases, a Design and Access Statement is required. Applications for Major development require a Pre-Application Community Consultation report following mandatory pre-application community consultation.

3.2	The Planning Service's Planning *Application Checklist* provides guidance to customers on the additional information they need to submit with a planning application to address policy requirements and help the Council make a positive decision on the application. The additional information requirements vary depending on the type of proposal, its scale and location (whether particular planning constraints apply such as the site being with a Conservation Area, flood risk area etc).
3.3	The Application Checklist was first published in November 2018 and Belfast City Council remains the only Planning Authority in NI that publishes such comprehensive guidance to customers. Applicants are strongly encouraged to provide the additional information at the outset when they make their application. If the information is not provided within 14 days of it being requested then the application, along with the planning fee, is returned and the applicant is advised to submit the application at a later date once they have all the information available. Should the additional information not be provided then the applicant is advised that there may be a risk that their application will be refused due to lack of information and the planning fee will not be returned.
3.4	The Planning Service undertook a review of the impact of the Application Checklist in February 2021. The review concluded that the checklist has had a very positive impact on the quality of applications, helping to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the service. The Application Checklist is now culturally embedded in the application process, particularly for larger scale and more complex planning applications.
3.5	However, unlike in other jurisdictions, the Application Checklist remains non-statutory due to legislative limitations and councils in Northern Ireland are unable to compel applicants to provide the information at the beginning of the process. This is a serious disadvantage to the process as it can mean that councils receive applications without all the information they need to make a positive determination. The need to improve the quality of application submissions were key recommendations of both the NI Audit Office and Public Accounts Committee reports in February and March 2022 respectively.
3.6	The Department for Infrastructure has subsequently formally consulted on proposals to introduce statutory *Planning Application Validation Checklists* to require the additional information by law at the beginning of the application process. This was reported to the Planning Committee in December 2022 (item 25) when the Committee resolved to fully support the proposals. DfI is still to report the outcome of the consultation.
	Previous updates to the Application Checklist
3.7	The Planning Service has taken a progressive approach to implementation of the Application Checklist as set out below. • Initial publication – November 2018 • Phase 1 Implementation – from January 2019, the checklist was initially applied to large-scale Local applications only • Phase 2 – from May 2019, this was extended to include Major applications • Phase 3 – from September 2021, the checklist was applied to all remaining applications except householder and advertisement proposals **Phase 4 of the Application Checklist**
3.8	The Planning Service recently launched Phase 4 of the Application Check to coincide with adoption of the Plan Strategy and reflect its new policy requirements. The checklist now applies to all Major and Local applications, including householder proposals, but excludes applications for Advertisement Consent.

3.9	The updated Application Checklist includes the new information requirements listed below, as well as updates to the previous guidance. • Adaptable and Accessible Accommodation Statement **(Policy HOU7)** • Affordable Housing Proposal Form **(Policy HOU5 and SPG)** • Climate Change Statement **(Policies ENV2, ENV3, ENV5, GB1 and TRE1)** • Community Cohesion and Good Relations Statement **(Policies CGR1 and CGR2)** • Health Impact Assessment **(Policy HC1)** • Householder Design Statement **(Policy RD2 and SPG)** • Housing Mix Statement **(Policy HOU6 and SPG)** • Masterplanning Statement **(Policy DES2)** • Specialist Housing Statement **(Policy HOU8)** • Tall Buildings Design Statement **(Policy DES3)** • Wind Energy Statement **(Policy ITU4)**
3.10	A copy of the updated Application Checklist is provided at **Appendix 1**. It is also available on the [Council's website.](#)
3.11	The Planning Service has written to customers to publicise the updated checklist and encourage its use.
3.12	The Application Checklist will be subject to further continuous improvement. The outcome of the Department for Infrastructure's consultation on Planning Application Validation Checklists will be reported following publication.
4.0	**Financial & Resource Implications**
4.1	The updates to the Application Checklist will help the Planning Service process applications more quickly and efficiently.
5.0	**Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessment**
5.1	No adverse impacts identified.
6.0	**Appendices – Documents Attached**
	Appendix 1 – Updated Planning Application Checklist