Belfast City Council

Subject:	Proposed Planning Application Validation Checklist
Date:	18th March 2025
Reporting Officer(s):	Kate Bentley, Director of Planning and Building Control
Contact Officer(s):	Ed Baker, Planning Manager (Development Management)

Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	**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**

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of Main Issues
1.1	The Council has completed consultation on its Draft Planning Application Validation Checklist. The checklist has been amended to take account of consultation responses, where appropriate, and is proposed for adoption by the Council.
1.2	This report provides a summary of the consultation responses and sets out the proposed changes to the checklist, with the proposed Planning Application Validation Checklist appended (**Appendix 3**). The proposed checklist is to be considered by the Planning Committee for notation and comment, the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee for agreement and Full Council for ratification and adoption.
2.0	**Recommendation**
2.1	The report is for notation and comment.

3.0	**Main Report**
3.1	**Background** The Council has completed consultation on its Draft Planning Application Validation Checklist. The Validation Checklist, once adopted, will set out additional statutory information requirements for applications for full planning permission, outline planning permission and approval of reserved matters over and above the current minimum statutory requirements (which remain unchanged).
3.2	The Committee considered the proposed consultation at its meeting on 15th October 2024. The report to that Committee sets out the reasons for the Validation Checklist and background to the consultation, and can be viewed here (item 26).
3.3	The purpose of the Validation Checklist is to ensure that all the information that the Council needs to fully consider an application is provided at the beginning of the process when it is submitted. The checklist will provide certainty and clarity to applicants as to the information that is required and improve the quality of applications on submission, resulting in quicker decisions against statutory KPIs and more efficient consultation responses.
3.4	The Department for Infrastructure (DfI) has recently published Development Management Practice Note 8: Planning Application Validation Checklists, which provides guidance to councils on their preparation and implementation of validation checklists. The proposed checklist is consistent with this guidance.
	Format of Public Consultation
3.5	The public consultation ran from 03 December 2024 to 10 February 2025 (10 weeks). It included the following: • Online survey on the Council's website (promoted directly to customers, in staff email banners and through the Council's various multimedia channels). • Engagement workshops with non-statutory consultees on 22nd January 2025 and statutory consultees on 23rd January 2025 (both online). • Customer workshop with planning agents, architects and applicants on 31st January 2025 (in person in City Hall). • One-to-one meetings with Shared Environmental Services (SES), DfI Rivers and NI Water on 10th February 2025 (online). • Discussion at the Planning Committee meeting on 11th February 2025.
3.6	A copy of the Draft Planning Application Checklist that was subject to the public consultation is provided at **Appendix 1**.
	Consultation Responses
3.7	There were 31 responses to the online survey and eight responses received outside the online survey. A consultation report is provided at **Appendix 2**, which includes: • background to the consultation • overview of the consultation process • summary of the respondents and key themes raised • detailed summary of each response, together with officer commentary and proposed changes to the final checklist.

	3.8	<u>Summary of representations</u> The main themes arising from the consultation included: • Broad agreement that the checklist is relevant and necessary. • No consensus on how user friendly the checklist is – some felt that it was user friendly, others not, and most neither agreed nor disagreed. • Some criticism as to the complexity of the checklist and that the information requirements may be onerous. In contrast, views that the information is needed, provided that it is reasonable and proportionate. • Recognition that the indicative guide as to information requirements by type of planning application is overall very helpful. • Some views that it would be useful to have some best practice examples of some of the requirements • Desire for information requirements to be discussed with the Planning Service through a Pre-Application Discussion (PAD). Also, that information can be discussed and negotiated where appropriate as part of the validation process. • Queries as to whether the various statements and assessments can be provided as part of another document (such as a planning statement or Design and Access Statement) or whether standalone documents are required – officers advise the former. • General view that there should not be additional validation requirements for Householder applications (for example, neither a Biodiversity Checklist nor Climate Change Statement should be required). • Assertion that information should only be required by the Council where it is relevant, reasonable and proportionate • Specific suggestions on how parts of the checklist can be improved to make its implementation clearer and more reflective of planning policy.
	3.9 3.10	<u>Planning Committee</u> The draft checklist was discussed by the Planning Committee at its 11th February 2025 meeting. The Planning Committee suggested that it would be beneficial for the Council to provide an example of a Climate Change Statement to help Householders prepare their applications. As the Committee will note from this report, it is recommended that additional validation requirements for Householder applications are removed. Nevertheless, the Planning Service intends to make available clearer guidance for householders on the planning process generally, including the circumstances when planning permission is required and not needed (permitted development), how to make a planning application and examples of plans and supporting documentation with applications. The Chair of the Planning Committee asked that a glossary be included with plain language explanation of technical terms; this will be included in the final checklist.
	3.11	**Proposed Validation Checklist** In response to the consultation, the following main changes are proposed in the final checklist.

	i. The final checklist makes it clear that information can be provided in different formats, either as a standalone document or part of another document such as a Design and Access Statement or Planning Statement. ii. The final checklist is explicit that information requirements will be assessed on a case-by-case basis and that information will be sought where it is relevant, reasonable and proportionate. Furthermore, that the checklist does not preclude the requirement for further information during the application process. iii. Establishment of service standards around timeliness of the validation process. iv. Removal of specific additional validation requirements for Householder applications. v. Inclusion of a non-technical glossary of terms and use of plain language throughout the checklist where possible. vi. Amendments to the indicative guide of requirements by type of planning application. vii. Various amendments to some of the specific information requirements. viii. Additional information requirement of a Waste Storage Plan.
3.12	The final checklist recommended for agreement and adoption by the Council is provided at **Appendix 3**. The proposed changes to the draft checklist are highlighted in yellow for ease of reference. **Next steps**
3.13	The Planning Application Validation Checklist will be reported to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee on 21st March 2025 for agreement then Full Council on 1st April 2025 for ratification and adoption.
3.14	The Planning Application Validation Checklist will be implemented from its publication on the Council's website, expected to be early April 2025. This will be formally announced through the website, social media and directly to customers on the Planning Service's customer list.
4.0	**Financial & Resource Implications**
4.1	The Council's ability to specify information requirements for particular types of application will have a beneficial impact on efficiency and timely processing of planning applications.
5.0	**Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessment**
5.1	The draft Validation Checklist has been subject to a Section 75 Equality Screening and Rural Needs Impact Assessment. The consultation on these has informed the proposed final Planning Application Validation Checklist.
6.0	**Appendices – Documents Attached**
	Appendix 1 – Copy of Draft Planning Application Validation Checklist (consultation) **Appendix 2** – Consultation Report **Appendix 3** – Proposed Planning Application Validation Checklist (final)