



Doncaster
Metropolitan Borough Council



Annual Planning Performance Report 2015 - 2016



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Introduction

Planning Services

The statutory planning function in Doncaster sits within the Development Service section. The Development service consists of 5 teams, namely, Development Management, Technical Support & Improvement, Built and Natural Environment, Policy and Building Control.

All teams play a key part in delivering many Borough wide and corporate objectives: Helping to create a strong local economy; healthy, safe and vibrant communities; Ensuring the quality of Doncaster's built and natural environment is enhanced and protected; the number and quality of homes in Doncaster meets housing needs. Also delivering a modern, efficient and flexible workforce providing modern business and customer interactions.

Planning - Our Purpose

“To grant good development quickly without any unnecessary cost or delay”

To achieve our purpose and to adhere to our Borough wide and corporate objectives Doncaster Council has conducted a review of its current system, looking at the service demands, removing waste and ensuring we are adding value.

To measure this, Doncaster Council's Planning Department has made a commitment to the Planning Quality Framework (PQF), a Government backed initiative.

The PQF measures how successfully we deliver our service and is a catalyst to drive forward service improvement and evidence the effect of previous improvement / change decisions.

As Local Authorities we are very target driven. Targets are important, but opportunities are often missed to improve the customer experience, create more consistency and certainty and to avoid duplication and waste.

Our Commitment

To ensure we are delivering a quality, value for money service and ensuring that we are delivering what our customers want.

We may not be there yet, but the PQF is providing us with the vital information which is required to enable us to improve our service.

How are we performing?

Planning application and decision statistics

Local Planning Authorities report to Central Government on a quarterly basis in relation to the number of planning applications made and permissions decided.

Applications are categorised in to Major, Minor and All Other Developments.

The statistics demonstrate if the Local Planning Authority has decided applications within the statutory time period or within an agreed extension period.

Doncaster's statistics for 2015-16

	Major	Minor	Other
No. Of Decisions Issued	74	474	810
No. Issued Within Target or Agreed Extension	65	340	651
Government Target	60%	65%	80%
Percentage Issued Within Target	87.84%	71.73%	80.37%

For more detailed information relating to Local Planning Authorities performance please follow the web link below:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/planning-applications-statistics>

What are the statistics?

Adhering to Government Targets is important but we need to ensure that we understand all aspects of our work that contribute to delivering our service.

The following statistics derive from the Planning Quality Framework (PQF).

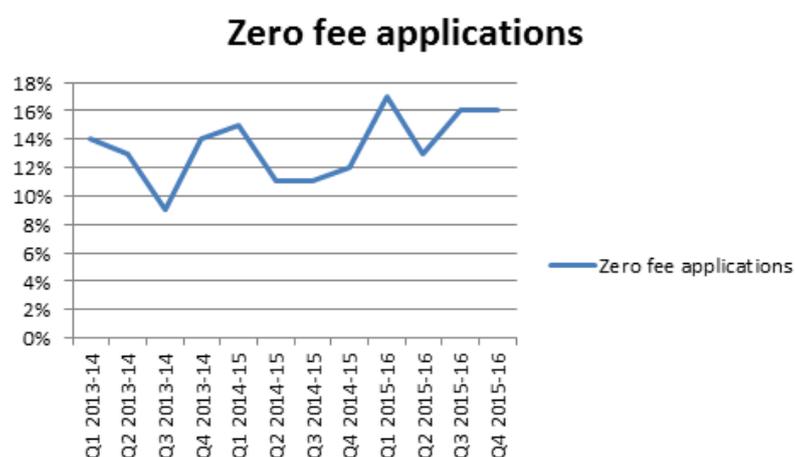
The information from the framework enables us to understand our work, learning from the statistics, providing us with a real rounded performance story, knitting together useful pieces of information. Challenging ourselves in how we deliver our service.

The framework is an ongoing statistical and feedback process, providing a continual assessment and improvement tool which aids our service areas business planning process.

Key statistics for Doncaster 2015-16

Zero fee applications

This statistic looks at the work involved in processing potentially avoidable zero fee applications (excluding heritage and tree applications). These zero fee applications are a 'waste' indicator and as an Authority we are looking to reduce the number of zero fee applications we receive.



Zero fee applications have fluctuated with a low of 9% and a high of 17%. These applications exclude heritage and tree applications in which no fee is incurred although it doesn't exclude new prior approval applications in which Government have not set a charge for all categories.

It can be seen later on in the report from the Withdrawn applications that the Department are working towards keeping the unnecessary 'free go' applications to a minimum.

Withdrawal Rates

This statistic indicates withdrawals as a percentage of all decisions. Rates of withdrawal are a 'waste' indicator, where possible should be reduced to near zero.

Withdrawals as a % of all decisions



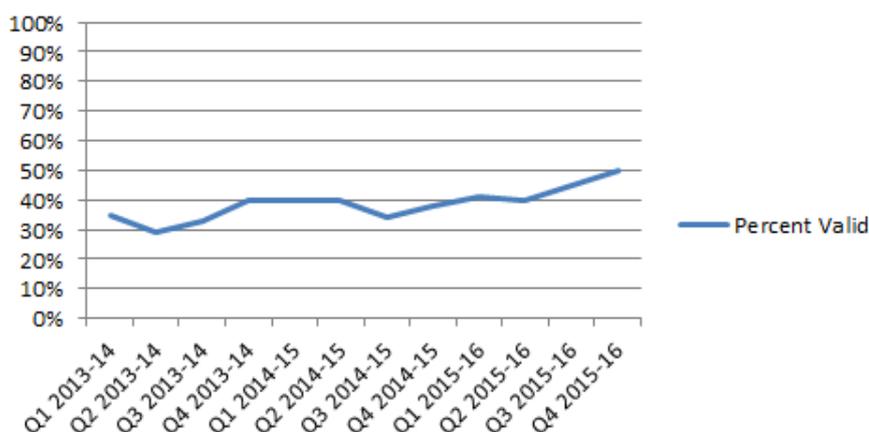
From Quarter 1 2015-16 we are showing a 3% drop in withdrawn applications heading in the right direction and achieving a 0% withdrawal rate in the last quarter of 2015-16.

How much work is valid on Day 1

This graph shows the proportion of applications that are valid on receipt and could therefore be worked on straight away.

Invalid applications cause unnecessary delay to the applicant and to the Local Planning Authority. This is avoidable time and cost associated with making them valid.

Percent Valid on Day 1



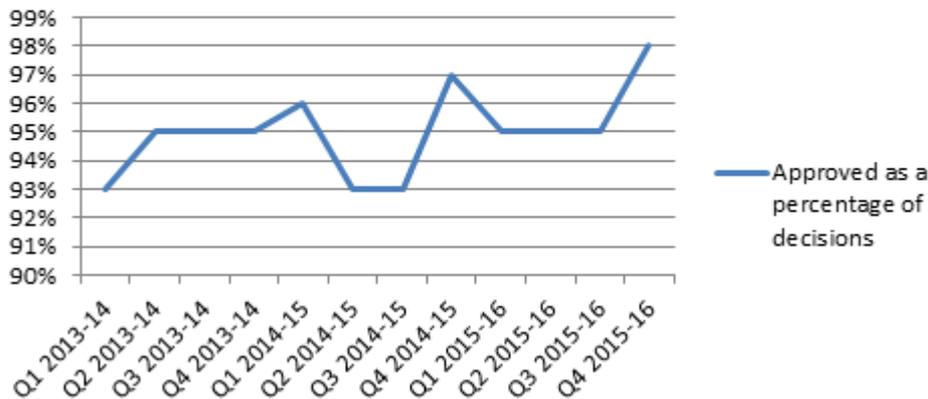
From Quarter 1 2015-16 we have achieved a 10% increase of applications valid on Day 1.

Approval and Refusal Rates

How often are we saying 'yes'?

Approved as a percentage of decisions

Approval rates ranging between 93% & 98%.

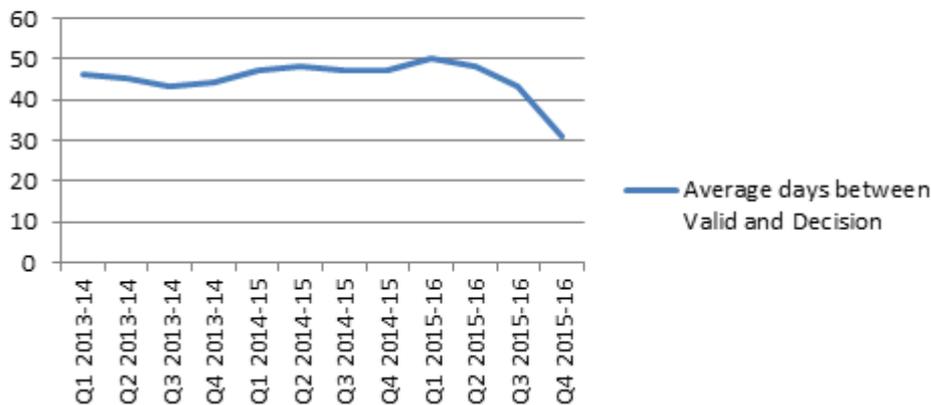


Days from declared valid to decision issued

This shows the average number of days between applications being declared valid and a decision notice being issued.

Average days between Valid and Decision

Since Quarter 1 of 2015-16 there has been a clear improvement in applications being determined quicker. Quarter 1 was an average of 50 days, Quarter 4 being 31 days.



What our customers are saying?

Feedback is at the heart of the PQF. Alongside the performance information the Council take into consideration survey information provided by people that use the planning process allowing us to build a more rounded picture of performance and quality.

Surveys have been sent to Applicants, Agents and Neighbours (people who have commented on a planning application) since March 2016. The surveys are electronic, are application specific and are about the customers experience on that particular application, not a general satisfaction survey. The questions on the survey differ dependent on the category of customer, providing the Council with vital information to aid improving the service.

As the surveys have only been active for a short while the feedback is limited, although the information received so far is really useful and is being taken into account when planning how we deliver our service.

What you told us!

A selection of responses received from our customers.

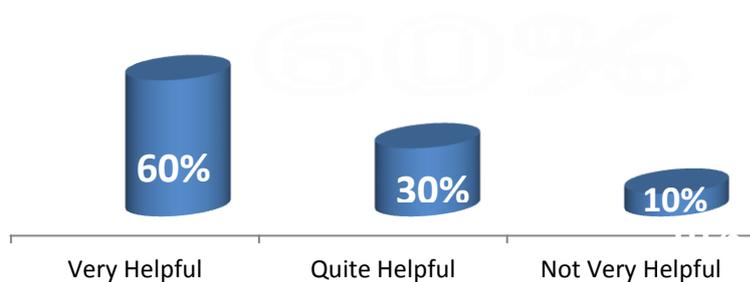
What our Planning Agents said....

60

Customers took part in the survey, which is a response rate of:

15%

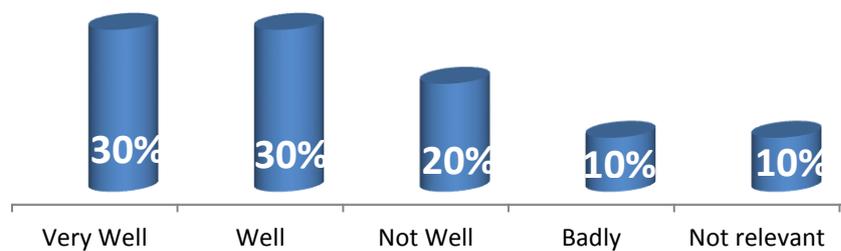
How helpful were the Council?



"An Extension of time was required to allow further consultation."

How well did the Council manage the time taken to make a decision?

"Decision on time"



60% of agents felt the Council managed the time taken to make a decision well

We asked the Planning Agents how we can improve our service.

“I have no objections at all to the way the Department handles my applications. However, one or two of my applications have run over time by several weeks. I think this should be addressed.”



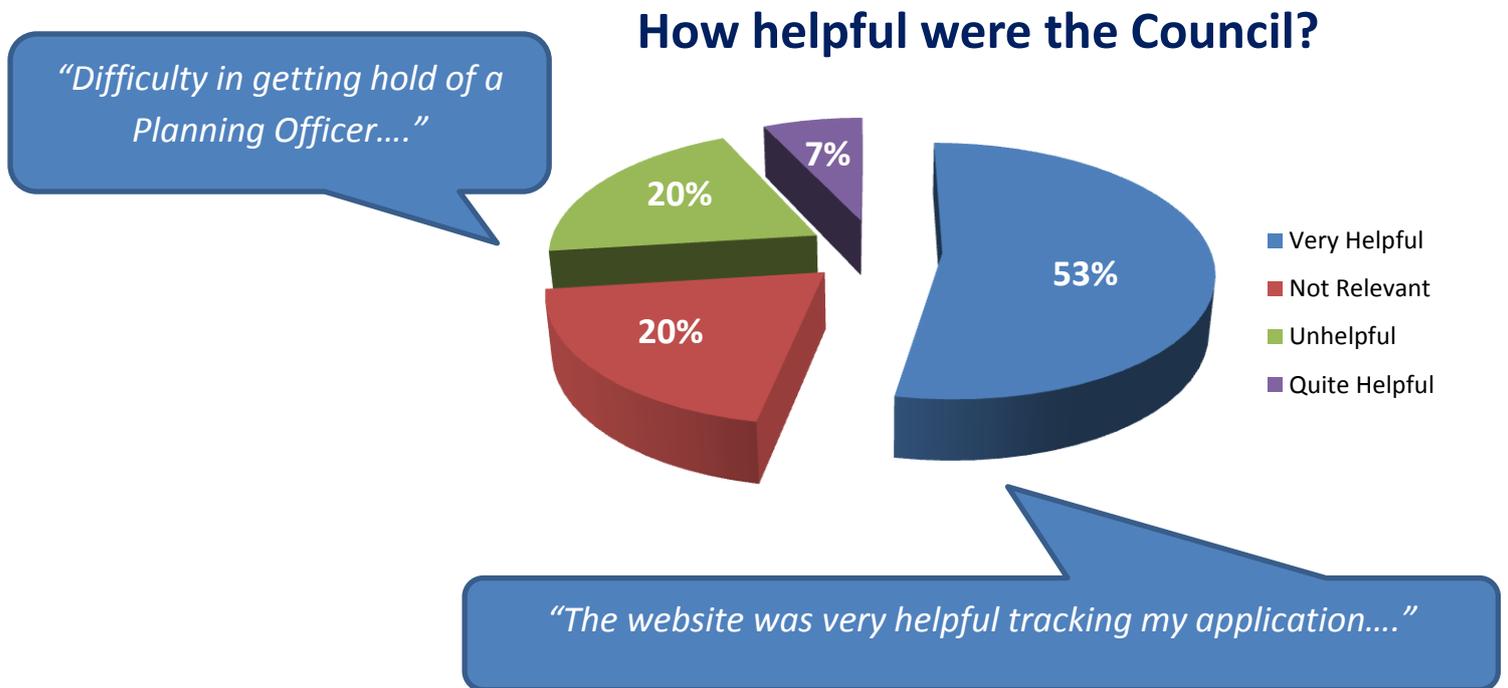
“...meet agents face to face sometimes...”

“Determine applications in less time than available”

“I would suggest that the service you provided does not need to be changed email response was prompt, planning officer was very good and advised where required overall very satisfied with the service”

“Improvements needed between a decision being issued and information available online.”

What our Planning Applicants said....



60% of applicants felt the Council managed the time taken to make a decision ‘Very Well’

67% of applicants felt the Council explained the decision very clearly

We asked the Planning Applicants how we can improve our service.



“....there was very little communication from the Planning Department....”

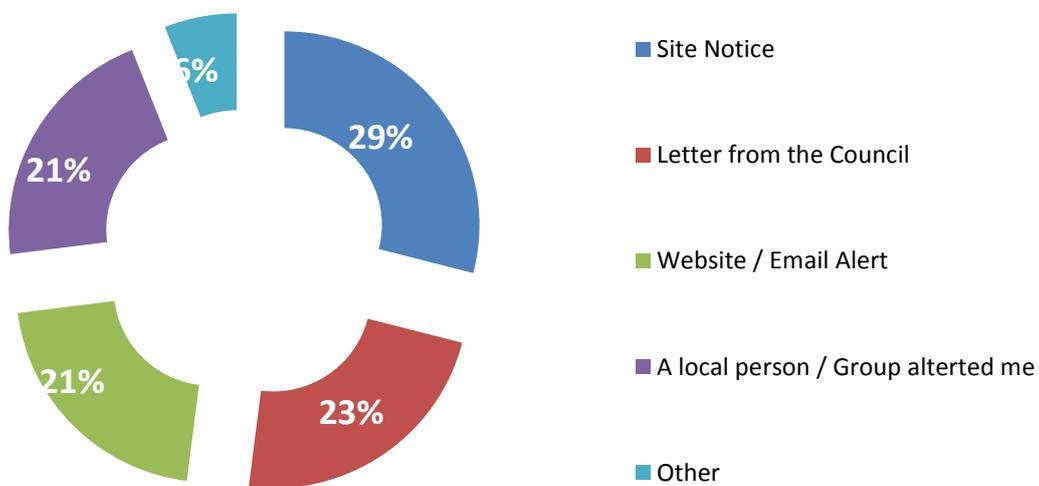
“...other than submitting the application (an easy process) I had no cause to contact the Council. I received an acknowledgement, then a decision 7 weeks later”

“Specialist Tree advice was relevant and helped to resolve my queries”

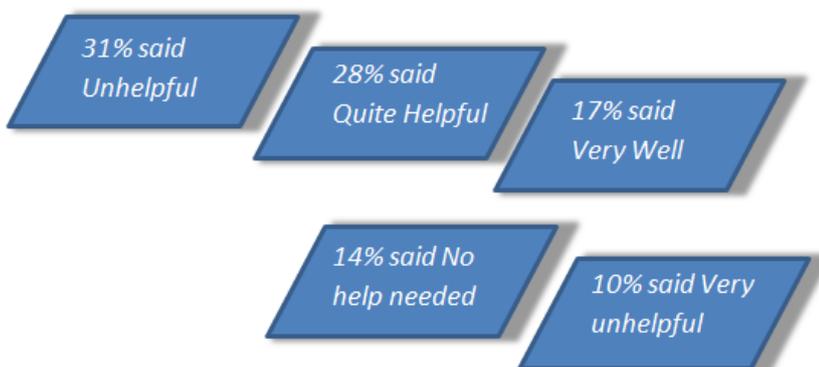
The views of Neighbours (people commenting on a planning application)

It is important for the Council to understand how people affected by a planning application feel. Asking the question of whether they felt they were engaged in the process and how they found out about Planning Applications.

How did you find out about the planning application?



How we assess planning applications can sometimes be difficult to comprehend. How well did we help you understand the planning process and engage with you?



55% of neighbours felt we got the balance right in making a decision quickly but also listening to people's views. **45%** state there is room for improvement.

69% of neighbours said the documents published on our website helped them to understand the proposal

We asked the people who commented on planning applications how we can improve our service.

“Can you provide a planning application guideline in plain English so that anyone commenting on the application is aware of what the next steps should be?”



“Notification about progress of the application was poor.....”

“Contributors should be made aware of the decision”

“Unclear whether objectors can speak to the planning officer to have an exploratory discussion”

“Found the website easy to navigate”

“The decision was not widely known”

“No idea whether comments were listened to”

Service Improvements 2015-16

Since embarking on the PQF in March 2015 the Council has been assessing our performance. Celebrating success and also identifying areas of improvement.

In respect of performance there were 4 Key headlines:

Rate of work valid on Day 1

At the start of the 2015-16 financial year only 41% of applications were valid on Day 1.

Rate of Withdrawals

At the start of the 2015-16 financial year 3% of applications were being withdrawn.

Number of Zero Fee Applications

At the start of the 2015-16 financial year 17% of applications were entitled to a 'free go'.

Valid to Decision time period

At the start of the 2015-16 financial year the average days for an application to be decided was 50 days.

So, what have we done about it?

Rate of work valid on Day 1

Rather than working on a checklist “one size fits all” approach to validating an application, the Planning Officer is now assessing whether they have what they need to make a decision and is driving the application forward from Day 1.

Work has been carried out on the Councils website to improve the literature surrounding what information is required when submitting a planning application.

Rate of Withdrawals

Based on a 10% sample check, 90% of those applications were withdrawn at the Local Authorities request.

Planning Officers now assess and validate their own application, checking for any amendments or additional information required, front loading the process preventing delays further down the line.

Efficient use of Extension of Times. Preventing the need for a new application, yet still hitting mutually agreed timescales.

Number of Zero Fee Applications

Number of Zero fee applications is heavily linked with the Rate of Withdrawals. If applicants are withdrawing their application they are then entitled to a free go within the next year.

The introduction of additional prior approval applications which do not attract a fee has also had an impact on this figure.

Valid to Decision time period

In reality applications were being dealt with dependent on the Government target. Officers are now driving forward applications from Day 1, making the professional judgement in respect of the publicity of the application and how this needs to be consulted. This is then enabling the Planning Officer to determine the application as soon after the publicity expiry as possible.

The delegated powers of Officers has been reviewed enabling more officers to “sign off” decisions ensuring a quicker turnaround of decisions.

Action Plan for 2016-17



The Planning Quality Framework is not a one off exercise. It's an on-going service improvement tool which will aid the Local Planning Authority to plan how it delivers its service.

Doncaster Council has made clear strides towards improving but there is still work to be done. We need to build more customer survey information to form a clearer representation although the information received so far has been instrumental in identifying our priorities moving forward.

Action Points for 2016-17

➤ Improving the customer experience

Reviewing our customer / business interactions, looking at how we can improve the customers experience at the first point of contact.

Ensuring that we are putting the customer at the centre of everything we do.

Delivering value for money – high quality service at low cost

Working in partnership

Having a passionate 'can do', open and 'one council' attitude.

Improve and expand on our website delivering what our customers are saying need to improve.

Customer feedback received so far has provided invaluable information in respect of what is working well and what further improvements are required. This will be a priority for 2016-17.

➤ **Permitted Development and Pre-application enquiry forms online**

Improving the customer experience ensuring all application forms are available to submit and pay online. Providing a modern, high quality and efficient integrated front office with all services on-line.

➤ **Continued Re-evaluation of our services**

Continue the programme of continuous improvement, responding to performance information, customer feedback and Government changes. With an ongoing assessment ensuring we are adding value to the purpose of our service and the customer experience.

➤ **Improvement to the Pre-Application process**

Responding to our customers. A good pre-application service is key to helping shape proposals or to identify early on schemes that may have fundamental planning concerns.

➤ **Building on existing working relationships**

Engaging with our partners and developers, going beyond the transactional approach.



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