

NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE COUNCIL

PLANNING COMMITTEE

**IMPLEMENTATION OF AN AGENTS
ACCREDITATION SCHEME**

1. OBJECT AND KEY POINTS IN THIS REPORT

- 1.1 There is a continual desire to improve the quality of submission and overall efficiency of application processing. This report sets out the basis and background to an Agents Accreditation Scheme where, in order to acquire accreditation, agents will have to sign up to a Code of Practice based on the quality of information submitted with a planning application.

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 2.1 The planning department still receives a high percentage of planning applications which do not contain sufficient detail to be able to validate them immediately upon receipt. Considerable staff time then has to be utilised contacting agents to request additional documentation. This invariably leads to delays on the outcome of the application as the period for consultation/determination cannot start until the application is complete and has been validated.
- 2.2 Common examples of reasons for incompleteness are:
- (i) forms not completed correctly;
 - (ii) certificates not completed;
 - (iii) missing details on drawings;
 - (iv) no site location plan;
 - (v) incorrect fee;
 - (vi) no design and access statement;
 - (vii) lack of information required by validation checklists.
- 2.3 A scheme for the accreditation of planning agents was a recommendation of the Killian Pretty Review final report published in November 2008.

‘Recommendation 13 – Local planning authorities and other bodies should provide greater encouragement and recognition to those agents who prepare good quality applications on behalf of their clients, in order to drive up the standard of applications submitted.

This could be encouraged by:

- RTPI, RICS and RIBA identifying opportunities to encourage good practice for large scale applications;
- the introduction of an “Accredited Agents” scheme by local planning authorities for householder and other minor development schemes. Early indications from a pilot study suggest such schemes can encourage higher quality applications, which in turn lead to faster decision times and more efficient use of local authority resources.’

2.4 Agents wishing to join the scheme and who have successfully undergone the accreditation process could expect to see the following benefits:

- a) Applications registered on the council’s planning application system would be sent directly to the case officer within 24 hours of receipt of the application by the council.
- b) North Lincolnshire Council will endeavour to determine these applications within six weeks as long as they remain as a delegated application under the council’s approved scheme of delegation.
- c) Agents would receive a formal certificate of accreditation which could be used to encourage applicants to select them. It could also be placed on their letter heads, business cards etc and a list of accredited agents could be displayed in the Planning reception area.

2.5 If such an approach was supported and it was decided to proceed with an Agents Accreditation Scheme it could be based on schemes currently used successfully by other local authorities. Appendix 1 sets out the basic details of the scheme currently operated within Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council.

3. OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

3.1 Contact local agents to ascertain the level of interest in becoming accredited and implement the scheme according to a strict agreed accreditation process.

3.2 Carry on with the validation process in its current form.

4. ANALYSIS OF OPTIONS

- 4.1 The possible introduction of such a scheme was discussed with a group of agents at a recent Development Control Customer Forum. It was felt that the scheme would be of benefit to both sides and lead to a closer working relationship. In return for signing up to the Code of Practice, the Development Control support team will ensure that applications are received by the case officer within 24 hours of receipt and they will endeavour to determine the application within six weeks, as long as they remain applications that can be determined under delegated powers. At no stage during the process of accreditation are there guarantees for agents on the scheme that applications will be given preferential treatment. In terms of consideration/policy etc they will be treated exactly the same as any other application.
- 4.2 Agents would benefit from such a scheme as they would be able to market/advertise themselves as being Accredited Agents by the local authority. Any application submitted by an Accredited Agent will still be subject to normal assessment/consideration against council and national planning policies and does not mean the scheme will always be recommended for approval.
- 4.3 Initially, only householder applications would be used for the scheme. In order to become accredited, agents would have to submit three householder applications to be validated in the normal way by the support staff. If all three applications conform fully to the checklist then the agent will be given accreditation status.
- 4.4 Agents would be removed from the scheme if:
- they ceased to trade or operate;
 - on two occasions within any one year the householder applications submitted under the terms of the scheme were found to have significant errors in them in relation to the agreed list;
 - the accredited agent is deemed to have brought the Fast Track Accreditation Scheme into disrepute.
- 4.5 Pre-application discussion with case officers plays an important part in the whole process (as with any type of application) and errors and omissions can often be dealt with at a very early stage before an application is submitted. The Accreditation Scheme should encourage agents to use pre-application meetings to help them avoid an invalid application being received which would threaten their accreditation.
- 4.6 Invalid applications have always been a very time-consuming part of the application validation process, using valuable staff time which could be better used working on valid applications. Not implementing an Accreditation Scheme would allow the current situation to continue and

an important opportunity to be able to work more constructively with agents for the benefit of both parties would be lost.

5. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCIAL, STAFFING, PROPERTY, IT)

5.1 Financial

5.1.1 The implementation of a successful Accreditation Scheme should help to make the processing system more efficient, thereby resulting in some staffing cost savings.

5.2 Staffing

5.2.1 Use of staffing resources should be more effective with less invalid applications needing to be processed/resolved.

5.3 Property

5.3.1 No implications.

5.4 IT

5.4.1 No implications.

6. OTHER IMPLICATIONS (STATUTORY, ENVIRONMENTAL, DIVERSITY, SECTION 17 – CRIME AND DISORDER, RISK AND OTHER)

6.1 Statutory

6.1.1 No implications.

6.2 Environmental

6.2.1 No implications.

6.3 Diversity

6.3.1 No implications.

6.4 Section 17 – Crime and Disorder

6.4.1 No implications.

6.5 Risk

6.5.1 No implications.

6.6 Other

6.6.1 No implications.

7. OUTCOMES OF CONSULTATION

7.1 None.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 8.1 That the introduction of an Agents Accreditation Scheme be agreed in principle.
- 8.2 That local agents be consulted to ascertain their interest in taking part in the scheme.
- 8.3 That the results of the agents consultation be reported to the Committee together with final details of the proposed scheme before being implemented.
- 8.4 That any agreed scheme be reviewed 12 months after initial introduction.

HEAD OF PLANNING

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Background Papers used in the preparation of this report

The Killian Pretty Review – Final Report published November 2008

Doncaster Accreditation Scheme

Entry Requirement And Terms And Conditions For The Fast Track Accreditation Scheme

Agents wishing to join the scheme must firstly undergo the following accreditation process:

- three householder applications are to be submitted with plans and information that adhere to the requirements of the Fast Track checklist, each application must be accompanied by a signed checklist.
- each of these first three applications will be validated in the normal way by the technical support team. If all three applications conform to the checklist then the agent will be given accreditation status under the Fast Track Scheme and be informed in writing of this achievement
- on achieving accreditation, but before being accepted into the Scheme, the agent must agree in writing to the terms and conditions set out below.

Errors Found During The Accreditation Process

If, during the accreditation process, an application does not meet the requirements of the checklist the agent will be informed of this fact by the technical support team and the necessary information sought. The application will then be processed in the normal way without inclusion in the Fast Track Scheme.

Successful Accreditation

Having successfully undergone the accreditation process, any subsequent applications submitted under the scheme will be registered onto the Council's planning application system and then sent directly to the Planning Case Officer within 24 hours of receipt of the application by the Council. Doncaster Metropolitan Council will endeavour to determine these applications within six weeks as long as they remain as a delegated application under the Council's approved scheme of delegation. A supply of checklist cover sheets will be supplied to the agent.

Terms and Conditions

- Each householder application that is submitted under the Fast Track Scheme must be accompanied by a signed checklist confirming that all documentation has been prepared in accordance with the stipulated criteria. Further supplies of the checklist can be obtained from the Council either in paper or electronic form.
- Having agreed to meet the requirements of the checklist it is unlikely that errors will occur. However, if errors are found in an application following registration, the file will be returned to the technical support team who will contact the agent. The application will be withdrawn from the scheme.



Removal of accreditation

Accreditation will be removed if:

- the accredited agent ceases to trade or operate
- on two occasions within any one year the householder applications submitted under the terms of the scheme are found to have significant errors in them in relation to the signed checklist
- the accredited agent is deemed to have brought the Fast Track Accreditation Scheme into disrepute.

The decision to remove accreditation shall be taken by the Principal Planning Officer – TSI in discussion with the Head of Development Management.

If accreditation is to be removed, the agent will be informed in writing. The correspondence shall clearly indicate why accreditation has been removed and the date from which this takes effect.

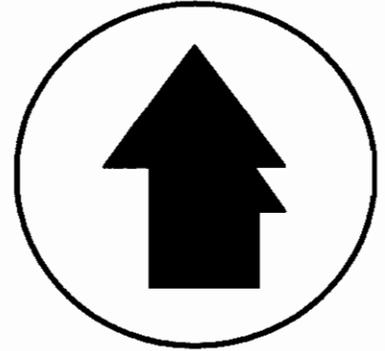
By signing this acknowledgment, you agree to abide by the terms and conditions set out above for so long as you are recognised as an accredited agent under the Fast Track Scheme.

Signed.....

Company.....Date.....

Fast Track

Planning Agents Accreditation Scheme



We are introducing a new scheme to help both planning professionals and the local Planning service to speed up the registration and processing of householder applications.

How does the Fast Track Scheme Work?

The scheme works on the basis of 'accredited' planning agents who have agreed to abide by a code of practice when submitting householder applications. The code is basically a checklist of items which we regard as essential to the efficient processing of applications. Some of the items are statutory whilst others are just useful for the planning service. You will find a copy of the checklist accompanying this leaflet.

In return for submitting the applications in accordance with the code of practice we will:-

- **register your application without it going through the normal validation stage**
- **ensure that it reaches the Case Officer's desk within 24 hours**
- **endeavor to determine your applications within six weeks (as long as they can be determined under delegated powers)**

This will guarantee that your application is never held up in a queue at peak periods or times of staff shortage.

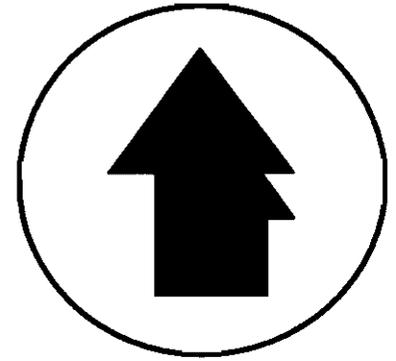
How To Join The Scheme

You simply have to agree to the code of practice and submit three applications in accordance with the checklist. Each of these initial applications will be checked in the normal way. Having undergone a successful trial run with these first three applications you will then become an 'accredited' planning agent under the Fast Track Scheme.

The Rules of the Scheme

Having become an 'accredited' agent we would expect the quality of submitted applications to remain high. However, if errors are found in applications they will be returned to the Technical Support Team and they will not be treated as Fast Track applications. If two or more applications have significant errors in them, accreditation status will be withdrawn and your applications will be processed in the normal way.

Fast Track



Planning Agents Accreditation Scheme Checklist For Site Address:-

I confirm that the following details have been completed, please tick all boxes.

Applicant Name and Address	<input type="checkbox"/>	Forms Signed and Dated	<input type="checkbox"/>
Agent Name and Address	<input type="checkbox"/>	Description of Work	<input type="checkbox"/>
Address of Property to be Developed	<input type="checkbox"/>	Description of Materials	<input type="checkbox"/>
Certificate of Ownership	<input type="checkbox"/>	Any changes to Access	<input type="checkbox"/>
Correct fee			<input type="checkbox"/>
4 location plans, A4 sized, OS based, up to date and at a scale of 1:2500			<input type="checkbox"/>
A red line has been drawn to show the extent of the development			<input type="checkbox"/>
A blue line has been drawn to show ownership of any other land			<input type="checkbox"/>
4 site block plans, A4 sized, at a scale of 1:500 and showing position of extensions in red and all surrounding properties			<input type="checkbox"/>
4 sets of plans showing full existing and proposed elevations at a scale not less than 1:100			<input type="checkbox"/>
4 sets of plans showing full existing and proposed floor layout at a scale not less than 1:100			<input type="checkbox"/>
All dimensions are in metric			<input type="checkbox"/>
All maps, plans and drawings are North orientated			<input type="checkbox"/>
A tree survey (if there are trees and hedgerows on the site) to BS 5837:2005			<input type="checkbox"/>
Assessment for the treatment of sewage (if the site is on non mains drainage)			<input type="checkbox"/>
Design and Access Statement (if applicable)			<input type="checkbox"/>

Signed

Date

Company Name

Last Updated 01/11/06