

Planning Performance Agreement (PPA) charter



Credit: Tom Davies

Foreword

Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service is a strategic partnership between Cambridge City and South Cambridgeshire District Councils.

The Councils are committed to supporting the sustainable development of the area by encouraging new investment and ensuring that this benefits our communities.

We want to ensure that major planning applications are dealt with in an efficient and effective way. The Councils understand that the grant of a planning permission is only a stage in the process and the full benefits are only achieved once a quality development is delivered.

We recognise that the successful delivery of strategic and complex development projects benefits from structured communications between developers, the Council, the community, and other organisations. This can help reduce delays and increase certainty for project timelines. We will work in partnership with the development industry and community and this will enable us to maximise the potential benefits which a development can bring and critically to ensure that all development is sustainable and deliverable.

We already use Planning Performance Agreements (PPAs) on many of our largest development sites and know the benefits that they can bring. We hope that this refreshed approach to Planning Performance Agreements continues to benefit those involved.



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Getting the best outcome for major applications

Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service is committed to dealing with major planning applications in an efficient and effective way, recognising that this benefits all parties involved.

The Planning Service promotes the use of pre-application discussions for all proposals. However, for some major application proposals, entering into a Planning Performance Agreement (PPA) is the best solution as it provides bespoke ongoing advice for the duration of the agreement. Further details of PPAs are outlined in this document but an initial meeting with a senior planning officer will determine whether a PPA or a pre-application submission is appropriate for the proposal. This document outlines how the process works, the benefits to all parties and details of the costs involved when entering into a PPA.

Range of proposals best suited to a Planning Performance Agreement

Planning Performance Agreements are a useful approach to good development management and can be applied to any development. However, we would normally seek their use for the following types of development:

- Schemes above 100 residential units or above 10,000 sqm of commercial development
- Individual developments and development programmes of major strategic importance to the area for regeneration, job creation and investment
- Developments that are a corporate priority and may therefore require wider Council involvement
- Developments eligible for large-scale time-limited public funding
- Proposals for larger sites that include a variety of land uses
- Proposals requiring an Environmental Impact Assessment
- Proposals for sites where there are many constraints
- Proposals involving significant non-standard planning obligations or numerous planning conditions
- Other major and/or complex proposals that are considered unique to Greater Cambridge.

Bespoke PPAs can be used for clients where there is a need for a single case officer or where there is a grouping of potential applications.

The benefits of a Planning Performance Agreement

Following best practice laid out by the Planning Advisory Service, we have identified that Planning Performance Agreements provide a number of distinct advantages on complex sites. These include:

- Better overall management of pre-application and post-application stages
- Identification of key issues and relevant consultees at an early stage
- Setting more realistic and predictable timetables, with a structure of deadlines and action points
- Improved input by elected members
- Greater accountability, transparency and communication
- Where permissions are granted, development is easier to implement
- Improved partnership working
- Continuity and dedicated advice from our officers and consultees.

We will monitor the success of our PPAs to ensure that they continue to provide value for money and add value to the process.



Credit: University of Cambridge / Paul Hughes

Time scales

A Planning Performance Agreement (PPA) includes the ability to agree a timescale in which to carry out all stages of the planning process including pre-application, application, and post-application stages.

Where a PPA is not in place, the Planning Service needs to determine the majority of major schemes within 13 weeks (16 weeks for developments requiring an Environmental Impact Assessment), so the scope for negotiation once the application is made and registered is limited. This can result in refusals even when there might have been scope to resolve the objections. The use of a PPA allows longer or shorter determination periods to be agreed. For example, where a pre-application process including public consultation is satisfactorily completed, recommendations are handled effectively and any concerns ironed out, there is no reason why a decision could not be issued in advance of the normal target 13-week period. Similarly, where a development is particularly complex it may be desirable to allow more than 13 weeks to determine the application.

A PPA provides a framework for local authorities and planning applicants to agree the management of development proposals through the planning process. They are

especially useful for agreeing a shared purpose, promoting positive joint working, and providing a more realistic and predictable timetable for the project. A PPA thereby encapsulates good development management in an agreed document, while providing room for flexibility to incorporate changes on site.

To succeed, all parties must play a part. If the advice in this guide is followed, it will help us deliver an efficient service and make decisions in a timely manner. For applicants, it will provide more certainty on the programme and ongoing advice on proposals. However, the use of a PPA does not guarantee a planning permission as any application must still be suitably assessed regarding its acceptability. Planning legislation requires that decisions on planning applications must be taken in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The Planning Service recognises that material planning considerations can include a broad range of matters, including development viability and market factors.



Credit: Bonnie Kwok

Pre-application discussion and community engagement

An important process of the planning system is involvement with the local community and stakeholders. For all parties to elicit maximum benefit from a Planning Performance Agreement (PPA), it is essential that there is engagement between developers, the community, and relevant stakeholders.

The level of community engagement will be dependent on the type of development proposal and will be identified in the PPA. Our officers would be happy to provide further assistance on this as part of the PPA engagement, as they have local knowledge and are well placed to advise on local groups that would be likely to show an active interest in the development proposal under consideration.

Guidance can also be provided in relation to presentations to design quality panels, disability panel and other advisory bodies if agreed within the scope of the PPA.

Charges

A PPA sets the project's tasks and timetable and provides an anticipated cost for expected work. In terms of resource within the Planning Service, this is predominantly planning and other specialist officers' time and we will seek to recover costs based on each officer's hourly rate plus overheads. Therefore, the estimated fee for entering a PPA varies according to negotiation of scope between all parties and will be dependent on the project tasks and meetings agreed at the initial inception meeting.

The PPA may also include a range of discretionary services such as:

- Design review panel meeting
- Technical briefings for members
- Community engagement.

The power to charge for discretionary services and recover costs is provided by the Local Government Act 2003, Section 93. Discretionary services include pre-application as well as all non-statutory functions during the planning application process and post-decision stage.

Planning Performance Agreement Framework

This charter promotes the use of a Planning Performance Agreement (PPA) as a project management tool, especially for large scale major applications. This section summarises the key elements that should be incorporated within a PPA.

For smaller schemes, a more straightforward PPA can be used that focuses more on programme and procedural arrangements. However, the key principle behind a PPA, to agree a way of working between developers, the Planning Service, the community and stakeholders, applies to all schemes. The key components of a PPA can be broken down into the following stages:

Stage 1: Initial contact and screening

The initial contact stage is critical and will include a meeting with planning staff and the developer to discuss the proposal. The planning officer will send confirmation to the developer within 10 working days to advise if a PPA can be offered or if the pre-application service should be used. If a PPA can be used, a programme for the PPA will be agreed prior to an application pertaining to the PPA being submitted.

Stage 2: Scoping and inception

The scoping and inception stage will include the following:

- Scope out the vision and objectives
- Agree timetable for project delivery
- Identify key issues, for example, transport, landscape, biodiversity, heritage, design
- Agree the PPA fee estimate and payment schedule
- Advise on the level of community engagement required, including potential member involvement
- Outline the roles and responsibilities of the developer and Council teams.

Specifying milestones is critical as these will allow both the developer team and the Planning Service to ensure that resources are available on the required dates. Both parties will need to commit to the timeline specified.

The initial meeting and all work done in formulating the PPA is chargeable at officers' hourly rates plus overheads.

Stage 3: Formalisation and implementation

The formalisation and implementation stage will generally form the bulk of the work done on the PPA and will include the following:

- Formal agreement and signing of the PPA by Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service, the developer, and key stakeholders where appropriate
- Delivering the PPA and addressing the key issues and tasks specified
- Regular payment of invoices by applicant

Setting up a Planning Performance Agreement

If you would like to discuss setting up a Planning Performance Agreement please contact us via the website with the site address, a brief description of the proposal and why you consider a PPA to be beneficial.

➤ www.greatercambridgeplanning.org/planning-performance-agreements



