



RTPI

mediation of space · making of place

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23rd October 2009

Publicity Applications
Communities and Local Government
Floor 1, Zone A1
Eland House
Bressenden Place
London SW1E 5DU

Email response sent to: publicity.applications@communities.gsi.gov.uk

Dear Sir/Madam,

RESPONSE TO CONSULTATION PAPER: PUBLICITY FOR PLANNING APPLICATIONS

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the above consultation. The Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) is a membership organisation representing over 22,000 spatial planners. It exists to advance the science and art of town planning for the benefit of the public.

This response was drafted by the RTPI Development Management Network following an internal consultation. Thanks are due to members of the networks and the National Association for Planning Enforcement (NAPE) for their substantial contribution in reviewing the document.

General comments are set out below and more detailed responses to the consultation questions are attached.

The RTPI supports an inclusive and more consistent approach to publicity for planning applications.

In principle we support the aim of saving councils' advertising costs by removing the requirement for councils to advertise applications in local newspapers. However as the RTPI has previously stated in its response to the [Killian & Pretty Review Call for Solutions in September 2008](#) we feel that before the requirement to publish application lists in newspapers is abandoned, research should be undertaken to determine whether this would exclude particular sections of the population from the process. This research should determine whether groups currently excluded from the planning process would be better served by local newspapers, the internet, a combination of the two, or some other alternative.

If you require any further assistance, please contact Rhian Brimble, RTPI Network Manager on 01443 229852 or email rhian.brimble@rtpi.org.uk

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Matt Thomson', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Matt Thomson
Acting Director Policy & Partnerships

Q1 What are your views on making web publication mandatory for a period of 21 days for planning notices where there is currently a requirement to advertise in a newspaper?

The RTPI supports this proposal as there is a greater reliance on websites as a source of information. We feel it would also allow councils to deliver improvements to the planning process.

As pointed out in the consultation document this option should be pursued whether the government changes the arrangements for newspaper advertisement or not. (See below for views on the appropriateness of removing the requirement for local newspaper notices.)

The regulations should stipulate that application lists must be easily accessible on websites. The government-approved standard website format for local authorities makes planning information unnecessarily inaccessible by burying "planning" under "environment" – which does not match actual structures in most councils, let alone the services most people access online. Regulations or guidance should also stipulate that weekly lists should be available through subscriptions feeds such as RSS or Atom, as well as by email subscription, so that regular users do not have to repeatedly visit individual council websites.

Q2 Do you think it should be mandatory for notices for all planning applications to be made available on a local authority website?

The RTPI would support this in the interests of open government and a transparent process. It would be relatively simple for most authorities to adhere to this as the information exists in the form of the weekly list. Where the local authority chooses to publicise the entirety of applications, those subject to notices should be clearly identified as such to avoid ambiguity.

Q3 The requirements to advertise in newspapers for certain types of planning applications and consents, and possible amendments to these, are identified in Table 1 (of the consultation document at page 13). What are your views on these possible amendments?

The RTPI recognises the benefits in terms of reduced costs for local planning authorities, we are also aware that not all areas, particularly rural ones are well served at the present time by local newspapers. We therefore support the changes in principle providing further research is undertaken to determine whether this would exclude particular sections of the population from the process. For example, elderly people are often less conversant with the internet, yet frequently read the local press. Similarly, people in deprived neighbourhoods may generally have lower access to IT and the internet.

Consideration should be given to ensure that such groups are not excluded from the planning process, for example local libraries could be engaged to support access to planning information for those without IT access. Also adverts in local newspapers by a local planning authority could refer readers to a source where further application details can be viewed, rather than listing applications individually.

Detailed research into the success of local newspapers in getting information meaningfully to residents and communities is needed. While it can be argued that local newspapers are, in theory, available to everybody, whereas the internet is not, there is a question as to whether newspapers do in fact get information to people that would not have internet access.

Q4 Do you consider that the period for publicising site notices for listed building and conservation area consent should be increased to 21 days?

The RTPI supports this proposal. This would be consistent with the other 21 days period for publicising statutory notices. It would be beneficial in making the process less complicated and more understandable to the public.

However, consistency aside, there is a broader question about whether 21 days is sufficient to enable proper engagement in the planning process, especially when holiday periods are involved.