

Responding to Planning Applications

Notes for councillors, 18 March 2026

Types of Planning Applications

There are 2 main types of application:

- [full planning permission](#) comprising everything needed to start development (subject to conditions) once approved; and
- [outline planning permission](#), establishes the principle of a development without the need to provide all plans/documents. Once the outline application has been approved, a 'reserved matters application' is required to provide all the details.

Key Matters to Focus on at Outline Stage

1. **Principle of development:** Whether the proposed use of the land is acceptable in planning terms. For example, whether housing is appropriate in that location having regard to the local and national planning policies.
2. **Amount of development:** The scale of development proposed, typically expressed as a maximum number of dwellings or total floor space. This effectively sets the overall intensity of development on the site.
3. **Access and highway safety:** The proposed access point(s) to the public highway and whether the local road network can safely accommodate the development. Although it can be a reserved matter, access is frequently determined at outline stage and can be difficult to change later.
4. **Housing mix and affordable housing:** The proposed type and tenure of housing, including the proportion of affordable housing. These matters are often secured through planning conditions or a Section 106 agreement.
5. **Landscape and visual impact:** The effect of the development on the wider landscape, particularly if the site is within or near a designated landscape such as the Cotswolds National Landscape.
6. **Flood risk and drainage:** Whether the site can be safely developed without increasing flood risk and how surface water drainage will be managed.
7. **Biodiversity and ecology:** Impacts on habitats and protected species, and how biodiversity will be protected or enhanced.
8. **Impact on neighbouring amenity:** Potential effects on existing residents, including overlooking, loss of privacy, noise, or general disturbance.
9. **Infrastructure and planning obligations:** What supporting infrastructure is required and what contributions will be secured through a Section 106 agreement, such as affordable housing, public open space, or community facilities.

Matters Normally Addressed Later

A **reserved matters application** will usually deal with detailed design matters such as:

1. **Access** (unless already determined): the accessibility to and within the site, for vehicles, cycles and pedestrians in terms of the positioning and treatment of access and circulation routes and how these fit into the surrounding access network.
2. **Appearance**: the aspects of a building or place which determine the visual impression the building or place makes, including the external built form of the development, its architecture, materials, decoration, lighting, colour and texture.
3. **Landscaping**: the treatment of land, including fences, walls, trees, hedges, or grass; banks, terraces or earthworks; gardens, water features, sculpture or public art, etc.
4. **Layout**: the way in which buildings, routes and open spaces within the development relate to each other and to buildings and spaces outside the development.
5. **Scale**: the height, width and length of each building proposed within the development in relation to its surroundings.

These are defined in the [Town and Country Planning \(Development Management Procedure\) \(England\) Order 2015](#).

Responding to the application

For a response to carry weight, it must provide clear reasons. Simply stating “Support” or “Object” is not sufficient; the rationale behind the decision must be explained.

Issues which can be taken into account by the local planning authority when dealing with planning applications are called “[material planning considerations](#)”, such as impacts on highways, landscape, residential amenity, flood risk, biodiversity and infrastructure.

Focusing comments on relevant planning issues ensures that the council’s representation carries greater weight in the decision-making process. Matters that are not material planning considerations cannot influence the planning decision and will be disregarded.

Examples of invalid planning grounds:

- Devaluation of property
- Loss of view
- Contended legal rights e.g. ownership (the applicant does not have to own the land)
- Possibility of future problems
- Business or moral issues relating to the applicant
- The fact that the development has already started (retrospective).

Further reading

[Planning Aid: How do I comment on a planning application](#)

CPRE resources: [How to Respond to Planning Applications: An 8-step guide](#)