

**Report to:** Lead Member for Strategic Management and Economic Development  
**Date of meeting:** 7 April 2017  
**By:** Director of Communities, Economy and Transport  
**Title:** Planning application fees  
**Purpose:** To respond to the Department for Communities and Local Government on the consultation on planning application fees.

---

**RECOMMENDATIONS:** The Lead Member is recommended to:

- (1) To inform the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) that the County Council welcomes the ability to increase planning application fees by 20%.**
  - (2) To recommend to Full Council that the increased planning application fees are applied from the date they are confirmed for implementation by DCLG.**
- 

## **1. Background Information**

1.1 Planning application fees are set nationally through The Town and Country Planning (Fees for Applications, Deemed Applications, Requests and Site Visits) (England) Regulations 2012. All fees have remained the same following an approximate 15% increase back in 2012. Current planning application fees start at £195, and depending upon the type and size of the proposal can go up to £250,000. The majority of applications the County Council receives will attract a fee of between £195 and £10,000.

1.2 In February 2017, the Government published the Housing White Paper, entitled 'Fixing our broken housing market'. Part of the White Paper focusses on boosting the capacity and capability of local planning authorities, in order to help facilitate the ability for developers to deliver new homes and businesses, along with the supporting infrastructure and services. Recognising that current planning application fees often do not cover the cost of processing and determining the applications, the White Paper states that the Government "will take steps to secure the financial sustainability of planning departments". In turn, the Paper proposes that "local authorities will be able to increase fees by 20% from July 2017 if they commit to invest the additional fee income in their planning department."

1.3 Following the publication of the Housing White Paper, the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) wrote to all Local Planning Authorities to ask whether or not they would wish to apply the increased planning application fees. DCLG require a reasonable level of assurance on the position of each authority on this matter by early April. This is in order to inform the draft Regulations that will eventually be introduced to bring about the higher fees.

1.4 Any final decision whether to increase the Council's planning application fees will be made at a subsequent Full Council meeting.

## **2. The impact of increased application fees on the County Council**

2.1 The amount of income that the County Council's Planning Department receives from planning application fees varies on a year by year basis and depends upon the number and type of planning applications submitted. The income in 2016/17 has been comparatively low (due to a lack of large-scale minerals and waste proposals) at around £75,000. Hence, a 20% increase in fees would result in income of a further £15,000 per annum based on the 2016/17 applications. With some large-scale applications generating an application fee in excess of £25,000, the amount of additional income generated from the higher fees could be considerably higher than £15,000.

2.2 It is recognised that a proportion of this fee income is generated from the County Council's own development proposals. In 2016/17, approximately £30,000 of the fee income has come from applications for County Council development proposals. Based on these figures, a 20% uplift in fees would be an extra burden of £6,000 to those parts of the Council that wish to take forward developments and changes of use. Recognising that budgets for 2017/18 have been set, consideration could be given to maintaining the 2012 fees for County Council applications, even if the higher application fees are agreed. This would be on the basis that whatever fee is charged for County Council applications, it will not have a net impact upon the Council's overall budget.

2.3 In deciding whether to increase application fees, consideration needs to be given to whether the higher fees may possibly dissuade developers submitting applications and/or seek to regularise development, and, in turn, lead to an increased need for monitoring and enforcement action. In almost all cases the planning application fee only represents a small part of the cost of preparing and submitting an application. The majority of the costs incurred are through the plans prepared and the supporting evidence (e.g. Transport Assessments, Environmental Impact Assessments, Design and Access Statement, site surveys, etc). Hence the impact on developers, in terms of their overall application costs, will be minimal.

2.4 As recognised in the Housing White Paper, much of the lobbying to Government for higher planning application fees has been made by representatives of the development industry. At a local level, representatives at Developers/Agents Forums have generally expressed support for paying higher planning application fees, provided that the higher income received is reinvested back into planning departments. It is therefore considered unlikely that the development industry will see the increase in fees as an extra burden, or dissuade them from submitting planning applications to the County Council (particularly as almost all planning authorities in the south east have already indicated their intention to apply the higher application fees).

### **3. Views of the Planning Committee on the proposed increase in fees**

3.1 The proposal to increase planning application fees has been put to all members of the Planning Committee. No views/opinions have been expressed that are opposed to the 20% increase. Both the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Planning Committee have expressed their support for the proposal.

### **4. Conclusion and reasons for recommendations**

4.1 Taking into consideration the rationale behind the proposed increase in fees, the low level of risk that the increase could give rise to, and the support of the Planning Committee for the proposal, the Lead Member is recommended to agree to inform the Department for Communities and Local Government that the County Council welcomes the ability to increase planning application fees by 20%.

RUPERT CLUBB  
Director of Communities, Economy and Transport

Contact Officer: Edward Sheath  
Tel No. 01273 481632  
Email: [edward.sheath@eastsussex.gov.uk](mailto:edward.sheath@eastsussex.gov.uk)

#### LOCAL MEMBERS:

All

#### BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:

None