



11.09.2020

Dear Sir/Madam,

Re: Gwynedd Council Planning Service and (Gwynedd and Anglesey) Joint Planning Policy Service

Further to my letter dated 12 May 2020 regarding the above, I would like to update you further about the way Coronavirus is affecting Gwynedd Council's Planning Service.

Following the UK Prime Minister's statement on 23 March, it was resolved that ensuring attendance in the office or undertaking site visits were not essential for a temporary period. Since the statement, the First Minister of Wales has made further statements which are specific for Wales and also guidance has been received from the Welsh Government Planning Inspectorate asking for the efforts of the Planning Service to focus on issues that contribute towards the response to Coronavirus. The Service has been giving urgent priority to this in order to facilitate temporary developments for essential services.

Since 23 March 2020, officers of the Service have been working from home and dealing mainly with planning applications, requests for pre-application advice, enforcement issues and enquiries, as far as this was possible. As a result, the ability of the Planning Service to register new applications and to make decisions on applications received over the past few months has been challenging and limited. Throughout this period, the information submitted to the Service has been monitored with priority being given to urgent matters, such as matters that facilitate essential services mainly and possibly urgent enforcement matters where it has been practicably possible and necessary. We are continuing to encourage everyone to submit information electronically to the Service and to hold virtual meetings in order to avoid the need for officers and Service users to visit offices where this is not essential.

Advice and guidance have also been received from Welsh Government's Chief Planner outlining how we can act to try to maintain an operational planning service during this time. In the context of planning applications, there is specific advice about undertaking site visits, site notices and other publicity arrangements. There is also clear recognition that visits etc. only take place when it is appropriate to do so, and where we can ensure that we protect the health of everyone involved and that we comply with the relevant regulations, namely the Health Protection (Coronavirus Restrictions) (Wales) Regulations 2020.

The Planning Service has been reviewing its work arrangements regularly and in accordance with the guidance of the Welsh Government's Chief Planner we have been acting on and determining some applications as well as responding to some requests for pre-application advice where possible, whilst also ensuring that this is done in accordance with the restrictions of the Coronavirus Regulations. This of course is dependent on the circumstances



of the applications and the ability to operate safely, consideration and assessment of any risks and that appropriate work arrangements are in place.

This means that currently we will not be able to deal with every planning application, requests for pre-application advice, enquiry or enforcement issue as we cannot undertake a site visit or comply with advertising or publicity requirements. As a result, the ability of the Service to deal with individual cases will rely entirely on the unique circumstances of that case and the ability to operate safely. However, even if it is possible to deal with applications and make decisions on them, you should be aware that this may not be as quick as we would like due to various restrictions and challenges with our current work arrangements.

The Planning Committee has now been held virtually with several meetings held successfully since July this year.

In terms of the (Gwynedd and Anglesey) Joint Planning Policy Service, as this is not a front line field of work, work relating to the Local Development Plan, for example the monitoring work, preparing the Annual Monitoring Report (2019-20), preparing the Housing Land Availability Report, preparing Supplementary Planning Guidance, is currently ongoing, with all officers working from home. The Service is also currently available to provide advice on planning applications / enquiries for Gwynedd (not including the Park) and Anglesey, and to respond to other general enquiries relating to planning policy. Since my previous update, a virtual meeting of the Joint Planning Policy Committee was held on 4 September 2020, where it was decided to undertake a public consultation on two Supplementary Planning Guidance. Anyone who wishes to submit information or make an enquiry is encouraged to do so electronically and the Service is also holding virtual meetings for users where required.

This of course is frustrating for you but the main priority of the Council at the moment is to protect public health and maintain essential services and I am sure that you will understand and support this logic. There is a possibility of course that officers from the Planning Service and the Joint Planning Policy Service (and from other services) will need, in due course, to be diverted to provide support to the Council's essential services that deal more specifically with public health matters.

In order to respond to any further changes in the crisis situation or new information, we will review the situation regularly. Following discussions with other Local Planning Authorities, it is noted that they also operate in a similar way under the circumstances.

We greatly appreciate your understanding, patience and co-operation during this very challenging time. If you need to discuss anything further or if anything is unclear, please do not hesitate to contact the Planning Service via the usual methods. You can do so by e-mailing Cynllunio@gwynedd.llyw.cymru or by telephoning Galw Gwynedd on 01766 771000.



If you need to contact the Joint Planning Policy Service then do so by e-mailing PolisiCynllunio@gwynedd.llyw.cymru

Yours sincerely,

Councillor Gareth Wyn Griffith
Cabinet Member - Environment