

## **Subject: Updates from Wychavon and Malvern Hills Planning Teams**

The following provides you with an update about planning, planning decision making and planning enforcement in Wychavon and Malvern Hills Districts over the coming period. If and when things change, we will of course update you further:

### **Planning Team Capacity**

Wychavon District Council and Malvern Hills District Council offer a wide range of key services to the community, most of which are provided through shared services. We are also supporting a number of partner organisations in the delivery of their key services. In order to ensure critical services continue, we will redeploy staff to different parts of our business. It is extremely likely that redeployment will impact on the ability of the Planning Service to process applications and respond to customers at both authorities in its usual form. It is also possible that statutory consultees may also be redeployed, further impacting on service delivery. As the situation develops, and if capacity begins to impact our ability to operate, we will let you know.

The team are now working remotely and can be contacted by email (the most effective method) or by phone.

### **Pre-Application Advice**

Our pre-application service is continuing. Please contact us in the normal way to take advantage of this service.

### **New Applications**

For new applications submitted, electronic applications are easy to review and validate, with us all working from home.

For the time being we have limited access to our office, however this is subject to change at short notice. Any further limitations to access will mean that it will be difficult to deal with paper applications— so we would be grateful if everything is done electronically.

We are asking applicants to put up site notices (with instructions). Neighbour letters and media advertising will happen as normal.

### **Site Visits**

We are now avoiding site visits unless absolutely necessary (for example for urgent enforcement matters) – we do not want our customers and staff to be exposed to situations which could spread disease nor do we wish to place additional demands on emergency services. The following will occur for 'site visits':

- Site visits are an important (but not necessarily essential) part of the planning process.
- Where possible our officers will rely on photos and web-based images to make decisions.
- Where this is not possible, officers will speak to customers to seek more photos or provide video evidence.

- If photos are insufficient, officers may arrange virtual site visits (e.g. WhatsApp video call) with applicants, and direct applicants to the parts of a site the officer needs to see.
- If a site visit is still required, we will seek extensions of time for those applications as opposed to visiting sites.

Inevitably this is likely to have an impact on our ability to process some applications.

**Decision Making and Planning Committee** It has been agreed that Planning Committee meetings will be suspended for the foreseeable future. Through both Council constitutions we have the ability to make urgent decisions on some planning applications that would normally be reported to planning committee.

All other decisions will be made in the normal way using long established delegated authority.

### **Enforcement**

We have decided to temporarily suspend enforcement of planning legislation and planning conditions associated with those businesses providing services to the community in response to the coronavirus (where they are operating in line with current guidance on limiting the spread of the virus) at both authorities. This includes relaxing restrictions on these businesses such as:

- Hours of operation (i.e. increasing opening hours)
- Change of use (i.e. allowing pubs to operate as hot food takeaways)
- Additional service provision
- Delivery hours (allowing deliveries for extended hours)
- Temporary advertising providing information related to coronavirus

This suspension will last for the foreseeable future, unless withdrawn prior.

When there is more to update people on, we will send further communications.