

# Pre-Application Advice COVID-19 Lockdown



Whilst Covid-19 has created practical challenges for LPAs in determining and responding to pre-application advice requests, many have reported that their pre-app service has successfully adapted to recent challenges, with officers now able to offer virtual/telephone meetings or written responses to requests if appropriate. See our online tracker of local authorities for more information.

## Lockdown challenges

- Conducting Site Visits
- Face to Face discussion not possible
- Shortages of Planning Staff
- Delays to Pre-app Response Times

**For more information please contact your local Lichfields Office.**

## Getting ahead

The key challenge will be the expected delays to pre-app response times as a result of lockdown and staff redeployment. Unlike planning applications, there is no statutory timeframe for responding to a pre-app request. We anticipate that determining applications by their statutory determination date will take priority over pre-app requests. However, LPAs will be under pressure to keep on top of requests to prevent a backlog.

Whilst pre-app site visits and meetings have been delayed indefinitely, some LPAs have reported that their pre-app service remains 'business as usual', the offer of virtual meetings or telephone calls providing applicants the opportunity to discuss their proposals with officers. In lieu of site visits, additional photographs and/or videos of the site should be used to provide a virtual insight of the site (only when in line with current guidance).

Lockdown may enable the refinement of proposals and engagement in more effective, early discussions based on a more detailed submission, ensuring schemes are in a stronger position to be submitted once things return to normal. Conceivably speeding up the planning process post-submission.

## How can Lichfields assist?

Given it is unlikely we will completely revert to the old way of working – exemplified in the GLA's announcement that they will continue meetings via video – Lichfields is keen to diversify and adapt to new methods of engaging with LPAs. We are well placed to connect with LPAs virtually and can arrange meetings/presentations and Q&A style discussions with officers.

We can continue to prepare written pre-app submissions, undertaking desk-based policy appraisals, reviewing development schemes and advising on the best way forward. Lichfields can offer a front-loaded and collaborative pre-app process and align our core planning services with our in-house specialist teams across our full suite of planning and development services (for example, heritage, townscape and visual impact, neighbourly matters and economics) to support any pre-app submission.

Pre-apps can and should continue during this period and there is real scope to ensure that schemes move forward and that time is well used during this period.

**LICHFIELDS**

