

APPENDIX D

Service / New Charge

We are proposing a new administrative charge for invalid planning applications will come into effect in April 2025.

Around 60% of all planning applications received by the service are invalid. This has a significant impact on time and resources and puts pressure on the technical team and causes delays for our clients.

The new charge aims to improve the quality of applications submitted to the planning service and increase the number of valid applications at first submission. This will help to focus resources on the processing of valid applications rather than managing invalid submissions.

The following charges will be applied if an application is made invalid and a satisfactory response to an invalid letter is not received within a 28-day period, and the application is returned to the applicant, or an invalid application is withdrawn after notification that it is invalid.

- Major applications – £225
- Minor applications – £80
- Householder and other application types – £55

This new charge is part of an improved service offer regarding planning application validation. To coincide with the introduction of the above processing fees, the Service will imminently update its Planning Application Validation Guide to help applicants and agents submit a valid application. There are several resources to support applicants through the submission process, including validation guides and checklists.

The proposed administrative fees are designed to act as a deterrent and encourage applicants to ensure their applications are submitted 'right first time' and will reduce wasted time and expense.

Charging Policy

The proposed charging will be on a fair charging basis.

The charges are reasonably-priced when compared to other Councils who have introduced similar fees.

One Lancashire-based authority is Blackburn with Darwen Council, who charge a £270 administrative fee for Major applications; £91 on Minor applications; and £56 on others.

Comparison with a district council (Hyndburn) is not straightforward. Hyndburn typically receive fewer planning applications compared to Lancaster, but have still introduced fees at £120 for a Major application, £60 on a Minor application and £36 on all other applications.

Whilst the proposal may deliver a very modest income, the main rationale for the new charge is to encourage 'right first time' submissions. This will reduce waste including officer time, and will help support applicants and agents to make high-quality planning applications.

Comparative Information

The above examples of two other Lancashire authorities demonstrate that the proposed administrative fee structure is reasonable.

It is important to note that this charge will not be automatically levied if a planning application is invalid. There are safeguards in place (see Financial Information and Impact Assessment sections).

Financial

Information Required	Description
Level of charge	<p>The level of charge would be dependent on the type of planning application:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Major applications – £225 • Minor applications – £80 • Householder and other application types – £55 <p>The administrative charges can be applied for the following reasons:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. If an application is made invalid; 2. If a satisfactory response to an invalid letter is not received within the 28-day expiry period (the expiry date will be stated on the invalid letter); 3. If an invalid application is withdrawn after notification that it is invalid (this charge will be deducted from any refund)
Start date	April 2025
Budgeted income	Circa £10,000 to £15,000 per annum (current 2024-2025 rates would be in the region of £75,000 but it is anticipated that the introduction of the charges would act as a deterrent for many invalid submissions).
Surplus/deficit as a percentage of cost	N/A

Surplus/deficit per usage	N/A
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Impact Assessment

The criteria for levying the charge (see Financial Information, above) will ensure that those who accidentally submit an invalid application will not be penalised, providing that they act promptly to remedy matters.

The proposal should, over time, act as a deterrent thus reducing wasteful planning submissions. The discretionary fee will help the Service cover costs that it incurs to ensure we have the right resources in place to provide support for all our service users.

Impact on Other Areas

There will be time and resources required namely in terms of the invoicing for the additional costs. However, these invoices can be templated to reduce impacts upon this area of the Service. Comparatively, the costs of time and resources for invoicing will be less than those associated with the current situation (i.e. chasing applicants and agents for valid applications, and the usual drip-feed of documents that accompanies this chain of correspondence).

Method of Collection

It would be collected via the current Civica payment system, much the same way as the existing planning pre-application proposals are collected.

Alternatives

The only alternative is to do nothing. We consider the approach advocated will maximise the efficiency of the service and provide a better experience for service users.

Consultation

We would look to consult with applicants/agents at the same time as we consult on the revised Planning Application Validation Guide in early 2025.

We would propose that in early 2025, an informative note is published on the Council's webpage advising applicants and agent about the Council's intentions from April 2025.