

Getting planning permission for your oak framed house.

Interviewer: I've heard of different approaches to getting planning permission. Can you explain when each would be used and why?

Andy: Yes, it can be confusing and the lines aren't always clear but I'll do my best. Perhaps the first thing to say is that if you are going to build a new house you will at some point have to have detailed planning permission. No question! So outline planning permission and a pre-planning application are things you might do before you submit a full planning application.

Interviewer: So when would you apply for an outline planning application

Andy: We would use outline planning permission where we want to establish the principle of being able to build a house on a plot before the client has to start to bear the cost of the detailed design of the house and thereby minimising the financial risk for the client before they know if they can build on the plot or not. To give you an example, if your plot is outside a recognised development boundary, let's say in open countryside, then planning policy is likely to be against you building a house on it. However in some circumstances one can make a good case for planning permission to be granted. But as we're just trying to establish the principle of building on the plot we can submit a very simple site layout indicating the approximate position and size of the house. Where one puts far more effort in an outline is in putting the case for permission to be granted, and that means showing a thorough understanding of the relevant planning policies and demonstrating in a well-articulated document how the scheme mitigates the issues raised by those policies.

Interviewer: So if outline planning permission is granted will I be able to build on the plot?

Andy: Yes you will. Now outline planning permission will always have something called reserved matters. But all that really means is that the LPA reserve the right to control all the things they would normally control with a full planning application such as the size, height, mass, external appearance, materials and so on. So as we said earlier, having got outline planning permission you will still need detailed planning permission. But having got outline you can progress with confidence that the money you will now spend on getting the house well designed is money well spent.

Interviewer: OK, so when would you use a pre planning application?

Andy: We would use a pre planning application where we were confident that a house could be built on a plot but felt that some of the aspects of the

design might be contentious. So a pre app can help to ensure that the design submitted with a full planning application addresses any concerns that the planning office might have. I suppose you could say that a pre app is used to draw their fire and allows us to build up sufficient defences in the design to mitigate against issues they raise. So whilst a pre app will cost time and money it is used to make the detailed application a smoother ride and increase the chances of approval first time around.

Interviewer: Does that mean that on some occasions you might use an outline permission to establish the principle of building on a plot, and then a pre planning application to test the planners response to a specific design and then a detailed planning application?

Andy: It's rare but yes. It is entirely possible that that would represent the best route for a particular project, minimise financial risk for the client and maximise the chances of getting planning permission.

Interviewer: So where do planning consultants play a role?

Andy: Think of a planning consultant as an expert in planning policy. So whilst an architect will have a general knowledge of planning policy a planning consultant will have specific knowledge. So we might use our planning consultant for a specific purpose. A bit like a GP calls on the services of a specific consultant. What the planning consultant will often do is help to make the case for a specific design or scheme where we think that policy is not entirely in its favour. For example if we want to replace an existing house with one that is larger than might readily be allowed under policy.

Interviewer: I've heard of you talk about sometimes having a specific planning strategy for a scheme. What is a planning strategy?

Andy: If you have a scheme that is likely to be contentious it may be prudent to establish the planning route that will give you the greatest chance of success. So as well as determining whether we go for outline or pre app before detailed planning there are other types of issues to consider. For example, we had a house where the client wanted to replace an existing house with a new house with a basement. The plot was in green belt and the local planning policy limited the increase in useable floor area of the new house as a percentage of the old house. Had we submitted the first planning application with the basement, it is highly likely that it would have been approved because it would have exceeded that limit. So we got the scheme approved without the basement and then made a second application with a basement. On determining the second application the planners could only refuse if they could demonstrate that the basement would be detrimental to the green belt, which of course they couldn't, so the second scheme was then approved.

Interviewer: So it can be really important to understand planning policy if you're going to be successful in getting planning permission.

Andy:

Indeed, it can be as important as submitting a well thought through design that's appropriate for the plot. To summarise, outline planning is used to establish the principle of being able to build, a pre app is used to draw the planners on contentious aspects of a scheme and every new build needs full planning permission. We use a planning consultant to address specific policy issues and some schemes which will benefit from a clear planning strategy.