

# **HBF Planning Conference 2023**

**20th September 2023**

# **Pre-apps and PPAs Project 2023**

**Shelly Rouse, Principal Consultant**



UNIVERSITY OF  
GLOUCESTERSHIRE

CR I

## Pre-applications and PPAs project

This year we did something on Pre-apps and PPAs. We wanted to understand what councils charge for this and why

- ▶ The [University of Gloucestershire](#) and [Countryside and Community Research Institute](#) in partnership with [Hyas Associates Ltd](#) were appointed to deliver a package of work focused around:
  1. Reviewing of existing approaches to pre-application fees and associated service formats
  2. Researching current views (multi-stakeholder) and evidence concerning pre-application and PPA service provisions and impacts
  3. Identifying current examples of good practice in pre-application and PPA provision / engagement
  4. Identifying opportunities for service provision, stakeholder partnership, and outcome enhancement
  5. Creation of PPA products to support use

# Objectives for the project

- ▶ The primary objective for PAS support was to provide a **greater quality and consistency** of pre application and PPA
- ▶ Enable LPAs with the **tools to negotiate** pre application advice and PPAs that will help LPAs better meet their **actual costs** in delivering the service.
- ▶ **Improve the quality and robustness of the PPA agreements** that are negotiated between LPAs and applicants
- ▶ The **sharing of best practice** in delivering PPAs that lead to faster and better quality decisions
- ▶ **Generate a methodology** to be used by LPAs to establish a pre application fee charging schedule that meets the actual costs for the LPA and other consultees whilst also providing a service that is needed by an applicant
- ▶ **Improve the quality of community and councillor engagement** in the pre application process

## Questionnaire and interviews

- ▶ A questionnaire was circulated via the PAS bulletin, Chief Planner's newsletter and through other social media sources. In addition a councillor focused questionnaire. In total 139 main questionnaires were completed alongside 52 questionnaires by councillors.
- ▶ A total of 34 in-depth interviews were carried out that included 59 individuals in total. In addition there was a councillor workshop that was attended by 5 councillors.

## Desk top research

- ▶ A review of websites was undertaken and this alongside other intelligence gathered from questionnaires, interviews and the LPA forum

## Fees research

- ▶ A detailed analysis of fees from 87 councils was prepared alongside data spreadsheets

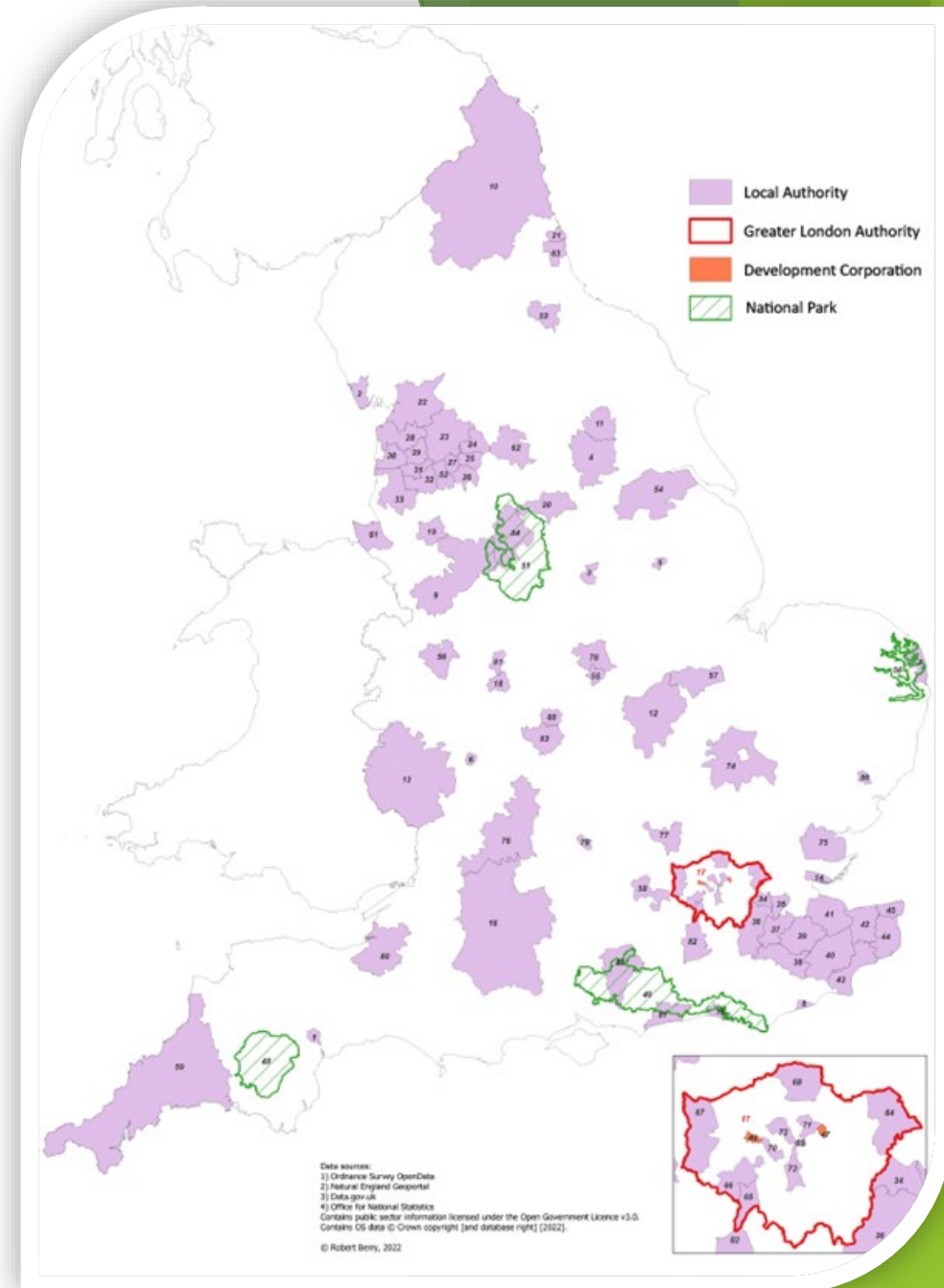
## Officer Forum

- ▶ Over 150 LPAs had representatives on the LPA forum circulation list

# Who did we look at

## LPA identification and interrogation:

- ▶ Geography
- ▶ Structure:
  - ▶ District (County), National Park Authorities, Unitary Authorities, London and Metropolitan Borough
  - ▶ Strategic (GLA)
  - ▶ Development Corporations (x2)
- ▶ Fee model:
  - ▶ No fee levied
  - ▶ Scale of Development
  - ▶ Staff Resource
  - ▶ Scale of Development and Staff Resource



## Outcomes of the research - Pre-Apps usage

- ▶ Charging rates vary significantly;
- ▶ Charging models (scaling) vary significantly;
- ▶ Fees vary between hourly and fixed;
- ▶ Response types vary, between and within LPA;
- ▶ Duration of service delivery is variable, but most significantly varied by the scale of development being proposed and/or the format of interaction (written/meeting) requested;
- ▶ The involvement of specialist advice is variable and not always clear:
  - ▶ Delay in response from statutory consultees impacts on the delivery of service;
- ▶ Significant variation of fee levels exist, including a minority of LPA still not levying any fee on their pre-application services;
  - ▶ No clear pattern is evident between LPA type, or indeed between second tier LPA associated with the same upper-tier authority;
  - ▶ No strong geographical pattern is present;

## Outcomes of the research - PPA usage

- ▶ Charging rates vary significantly; however full cost recovery is rare
- ▶ Limited experience of use in some cases and not as well-used
- ▶ Some lack of knowledge and understanding of the PPA process
- ▶ A project management tool but being used for resourcing?
- ▶ Inconsistency of approach (service offered) and in relation to the cost of PPAs and how they are calculated
- ▶ Increasing lack of a cohesive team approach from professionals inputting into the consideration of pre-applications and planning applications is lengthening processes, effectiveness, and experience;
- ▶ PPAs are not used regularly due to a lack of knowledge in how to put in place, concerns about ability to deliver due to resources and a perception they can take a long time to put in place;

# Things we learnt

Everyone does it differently

Nobody is charging enough for full cost recovery

Developers/agents - happy to pay for it, or a bit more

Everyone see the value in providing a service -its about the relationship building

Getting the value of doing pre-app needs 'buy-in' and championing by leaders

Resource pressures lead to difficulties in delivering a quality pre-app service;



# Key Insights

- ▶ A good pre application or PPA service relies on having the right staff with the right skills to deliver a quality service
- ▶ There is a balance to be struck between appropriate charges that meet the cost of the council's input and that applicants need
- ▶ Councils and applicants need to better communicate the benefits of pre-application services and Planning Performance Agreements (PPAs)
- ▶ It is really important to have a proper collaborative approach with statutory consultees
- ▶ Pre-applications and PPA engagement can be greatly improved with effective community engagement
- ▶ Staff involved in pre-applications and PPAs need to have great project management skills so that they really add value to the engagement with the applicant
- ▶ Better review and monitoring of pre app services is needed

# Overall Opportunities

- ▶ Making the best use of resources
- ▶ Understanding (and communicating) the benefits of PPA/pre apps (frontloading)
- ▶ Best practice is a clear service offer that is flexible
- ▶ Greater involvement of Councillors in pre-applications would improve the service and outcomes
- ▶ There are opportunities to improve working relationships, partner involvement, and outcomes
- ▶ Pre-app and PPA can lead to better built development, quicker decision making and overall better process for all involved
- ▶ Getting the best application and ultimately the best development out of the process

## What resources have we made

- An overview of the research, including making the raw data available for councils to use to benchmark what they charge for and how much
- Guidance and a toolkit on how to set pre-application charging schedules and estimate officer time accurately
- Top tips on what to include in pre-application charging schedules
- Guiding principles of a good pre-application service
- Guidance on doing PPAs and a template to use

The latest from PAS

### Local Plan Gateway Review

Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) are required to have an up to date local plan in place by the end of 2023 or face government sanction/intervention. The planning system is in the middle of substantial change and PAS has created a "[Gateway Review](#)" - to help LPAs weigh up the best options for getting their local plan 'to the line'.

### Infrastructure Funding Statements - [A step-by-step guide and sample template](#)

In December 2020 councils have to report for the first time on Section 106 contributions, and for those that charge the Community Infrastructure Levy the reporting requirements have changed slightly too. We have put together a guide and

### Upcoming Events

Find out about our new series of events that are focussed on developing the skills you need to be a better planner or councillor involved in planning.

### Keep in touch

The Planning Advisory Service bulletin  
Sensible people do not volunteer to get more email. But 8,000 people including planners from every planning

## Subscribe to our bulletin

It is where we announce new materials and events.

See also @pas\_team

[Shelly.rouse@local.gov.uk](mailto:Shelly.rouse@local.gov.uk)