



DEPARTMENT OF THE ENVIRONMENT  
2 MARSHAM STREET LONDON SW1P 3EB  
01-212 3434

CB5  
CB1

My ref:

Your ref:

Prime Minister (2)

Andy Bearpark Esq  
Private Secretary to the  
Prime Minister  
10 Downing Street  
London SW1

To see that Barnet are still  
not doing very well in handling planning  
applications.

13<sup>92</sup> October 1986

15/10

Dear Andy

HANDLING OF PLANNING APPLICATIONS BY LOCAL AUTHORITIES

The Prime Minister is aware that we have a wide range of initiatives under way to speed up the planning appeals process. However, the number of appeals made is small by comparison with the number of applications made to local planning authorities. It is therefore one of the Department's objectives to encourage local authorities to handle planning applications as expeditiously as possible.

One method we use is to publish a league table showing the worst (and best) performers. The next Departmental Press Notice, which we plan to issue on Thursday 16 October, covers the performance of local authorities in deciding applications in the last quarter of 1985.

I am writing at Mr Tracey's request to forewarn you that the London Borough of Barnet is a very long way down the league table. In the quarter concerned they decided only 38.2 per cent of applications within the statutory 8 week period. I am sorry to say that only 13 authorities returning figures for the quarter reported a worse performance.

We write to those authorities showing the poorest performances. We wrote to Barnet on 7 February 1986 and received a substantive reply on 12 June (copies of both letters are attached). The authority have agreed to review their practices and procedures, and we have asked them to keep us informed of the outcome. Recent returns from Barnet for the first two quarters of this year show signs of a moderate improvement.

Yours,

Paul Heron

P J HERON  
Private Secretary

CCBG



Room C13/08  
Department of the Environment  
2 Marsham Street London SW1P 3EB  
Telephone 01-212 3434 3207

E M Bennett Esq  
Chief Executive  
London Borough of Barnet  
Town Hall  
Hendon  
London NW4 4BG

19 June 1986

*Dear Mr Bennett,*

PERFORMANCE IN HANDLING PLANNING APPLICATIONS

Thank you for your letter of 12 June in response to mine of 7 February and 29 April about the Council's performance in handling planning applications.

I note the review of the Council's procedures and practices which is to be undertaken. I would be grateful if you could let me have the details of its outcome, and any decisions which the Council takes as a result, in due course.

*Yours sincerely*  
*N W Summerton*

N W SUMMERTON

208/25

E.M. BENNETT, B.A., LL.B. (Cantab.)  
Chief Executive and Town Clerk

J. O'CONNOR, LL.B.  
Controller of Legal Services &  
Deputy Town Clerk

M.J. SIMMONS, B.A., M.B.I.M.  
Chief Personnel Officer



# London Borough of Barnet

Chief Executive and Town Clerk's Department

Town Hall,  
Hendon, London NW4 4BG  
Telephone: 01-202 8282  
Ext. 28

All correspondence on this matter should be addressed to the  
CHIEF EXECUTIVE AND TOWN CLERK

quoting reference BTP.28.10.2.JJH/IH

Your reference .....

when telephoning or  
calling ask for Mr. J.J. Herring .....

12th June 1986

Dear Mr. Summerton,

## Performance in Handling Planning Applications

Further to my letter of 29th April, I enclose a copy of the report on this subject which the Controller of Development Services and I submitted to the Town Planning and Research Committee on 11th June.

The Committee adopted the recommendation on Page 3 of the report. Accordingly, the Controller and I will be reviewing the procedures and practices which the Council follows and, in due course, will be submitting a further report to the Committee.

I will keep you informed.

Yours sincerely,

Chief Executive and Town Clerk

/encl..

Mr. N.W. Summerton,  
Department of the Environment,  
Room C13/08,  
2 Marsham Street,  
London, SE1P 3EB

COPYRIGHT RESERVED

LONDON BOROUGH OF BARNET

Town Planning  
and Research Committee  
11th June, 1986.  
AGENDA ITEM 7(b)

JOINT REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE AND TOWN CLERK AND THE  
CONTROLLER OF DEVELOPMENT SERVICES.

PERFORMANCE IN HANDLING PLANNING APPLICATIONS:

(a) Proposal/Request

To review the manner in which planning applications are dealt with.

(b) Relevant Previous Decisions

1. On 20th June 1984 (item 12) the Committee decided to implement some of the provisions of DoE Circular 28/83 and the accompanying Code of Practice. This dealt with the need for improvements in local authority procedures to facilitate speedier and more efficient decision making on planning applications, and the recommendation for the publication by local authorities of information about the handling of planning applications.
2. The Council on 17th July, 1984 (T.P. & R. Cttee. Rpt. 20/6/84) agreed to extend the former Borough Planning Officer's executive powers to enable him to deal with the planning applications for developments in conservation areas which would have been permitted development but for the existence of a Direction under an Article 4 of the Town and Country Planning General Development Orders, 1977 to 1981.

(c) Justification/Officers' Comments

The implementation of the DoE Circular and Code of Practice involved minor changes in procedure and the publication of the quarterly statistics dealing with the time taken to process different types of planning applications, by which the Department of the Environment monitor local authorities' performance.

The statistical returns which are reported quarterly to the Committee are a crude measure of "performance" and do not reflect the standard of the Council's planning service generally. In particular, it is the Council's practice to concentrate on improving, where necessary, the quality of submitted proposals and comprehensively to consider local residents' views before determining applications. Accordingly, a great deal of time is devoted to negotiations with applicants, local consultation procedures and re-consultation on amended plans, with 21 days allowance for reply on each occasion. This approach, together with the length of the Committee cycle, represents the main reason for the delay in determining applications.

In the past, Barnet was able to maintain a good average performance in relation to other London Boroughs with the above approach. It now appears that other authorities have simplified their procedures in response to the Department's advice, and Barnet's performance no longer compares favourably. The general position is reflected in a letter dated 7th February, 1986, and its enclosure from the Department of the Environment to the Chief Executive and Town Clerk which is an appendix to this report. The 'performance table' does not however, give a true comparative picture because there is a lack of consistency in the way in which different local authorities complete the statistical returns.

Over the last six months a comprehensive review has been undertaken in the Planning Group of the Council's procedures in dealing with planning applications which has resulted in a number of changes in administrative procedures. These have produced some marginal benefit in the time taken to determine planning applications, but we consider that more fundamental changes are required if the Council's performance is to be improved significantly.

The particular areas that we consider require further examination are:-

1. The Planning Committee structure and the length of the Committee cycle.
2. The Executive Powers of the Controller of Development Services.
3. The extent of public consultation on planning applications and the period allowed for reply.
4. Reporting procedures.
5. Post Committee procedures.

6. Staffing implications - in this connection, a review of the Planning Group establishment is to begin towards the end of this year and the results of the review will be reported, both to the Establishment and this Committee in 1987.

(d) Cost/Financial Effect

None at this stage.

(e) Recommendation

1. That the Chief Officers concerned be instructed to consider further the procedures and practices currently followed, identify changes which could be expected to lead to an improvement in the Council's performance in dealing with planning applications without detriment to the quality of the decisions made, and report on the outcome to a future meeting.
2. That the Chief Executive and Town Clerk be instructed to inform the Department of the Environment of the present position.

(f) List of Background Papers

Letter from Department of the Environment to the Chief Executive and Town Clerk dated 7th February, 1986.

Anyone wishing to inspect these papers should telephone 01-202-8282 Ext.28 or 25.

E. M. BENNETT,

Chief Executive and Town Clerk.

D. J. BUCKMAN,

Controller of Development Services.

Room C13/08

Department of the Environment

2 Marsham Street London SW1P 3EB

Telephone 01-212 8434 3207



M Bennett Esq BA LLB  
Chief Executive and Town Clerk  
London Borough of Barnet  
Town Hall  
The Burroughs  
London  
NW4 4BB

*JJB*  
*Copy letter to*  
*Ch... W*  
*W*

44

7 February 1986

*Dear Mr Bennett*

PERFORMANCE IN HANDLING PLANNING APPLICATIONS

Ministers continue to be concerned that planning applications should be decided within the period of 8 weeks to which Article 7 of the General Development Order 1977 refers, unless in the particular case a longer period has for good reason been agreed between the applicant and the planning authority. For their part, representatives of local planning authorities recognise that delay in deciding applications is a brake on economic activity and on the creation of jobs.

In 1979 the local authority associations set up the National Development Control Forum (NDCF) to improve the efficiency of development control procedures. Since then most authorities have succeeded in speeding up decisions on planning applications with no detriment to the quality of decision. With the agreement of the NDCF recommendations on measures to improve efficiency were made in Circular 28/83.

Ministers would be grateful if you would give your personal attention to the figures in the enclosed table which show the proportion of cases decided within 8 weeks by your authority is considerably lower than the average for local planning authorities in London and in the country as a whole.

Ministers are concerned that such a small proportion of applicants are able to receive decisions within the period which Parliament has accepted as the normal maximum and believe that the position is such as to warrant special consideration by the Council's committee responsible for planning matters in order to identify measures to improve the Council's performance. I should be grateful for your comments and details of the measures which the Council decides to take.

*Yours sincerely*  
*N W Summerton*

N W SUMMERTON

PROPORTION OF APPLICATIONS DECIDED WITHIN 8 WEEKS

	2/83	3/83	4/83	1/84	2/84	3/84	4/84	1/85	2/85	3/85
BARNET	55.7	48.2	40.6	40.5	43.4	28.3	29.4	34.7	40.5	36.3
LONDON	51	49	51	47	49	49	50	47	58*	-
ENGLAND	69	68	70	68	71	69	69	66	70*	-

\* Provisional