

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought unprecedented challenges to both the planning system and the economy of the UK. Conscious of the Government's letter of March 2020 from its Chief Planning Officer, Sefton Council seeks to encourage and assist continued development in the borough. Therefore, the Council's Planning Services intends to proceed with the following measures, some of which will be temporary and reviewed regularly, to help in the fight against COVID-19 and to assist in economic recovery within Sefton:

- 1. Free Meetings for Investors and Developers** – We will facilitate meetings with developers and investors who wish to promote schemes in Sefton and to discuss their projects and ideas at an early stage. We will ensure that the relevant technical experts from the Council are present, with the aim of providing sufficient guidance and advice for developers and investors to make informed decisions on how to proceed. This can also include hosting meetings using platforms such as Microsoft Team, Skype and Zoom etc. in order to speed up the process and ensure restrictions on unnecessary trips are observed through the immediate lock down and any subsequent prolonged social distancing.
- 2. Free Pre-Application Advice** – We will provide free pre-application advice for schemes that can demonstrate to the satisfaction of the Local Planning Authority that they will bring reasonable benefits to the local economy of Sefton. This provision will remain in place until 31 October 2020 and will be reviewed at that time as to whether it is necessary to extend this period.
- 3. Refund the planning application fee for schemes that seek a renewal of consent, and commence development within 12 months of approval** – We recognise that COVID-19 has delayed some projects, and in cases permissions are likely to expire as a result of this, as an incentive to encourage applicants to make up for lost time, we will refund the planning application fee on schemes that commence development within 12 months of a renewal of consent. This provision will remain in place until 31 October 2021. and will be reviewed at that time as to whether it is necessary to extend this period.
- 4. Speedier Decision Making** – We will undertake to determine all planning applications within Statutory timeframes or sooner, where with supporting evidence, they can demonstrate to the satisfaction of the Local Planning Authority they will bring reasonable benefits to the economy of Sefton. This provision will remain in place until 31 October 2021 and will be reviewed at that time as to whether it is necessary to extend this period.
- 5. Longer Timeframes to Commence Development on New Permissions** – We will attach a 5 year timeframe on all new consented schemes to help combat lost time due to COVID-19 restrictions.

6. **Flexible Approach to Temporary Schemes** – We will take a flexible approach to uses which may be required to adapt to circumstances presented by COVID-19, and in particular, in helping in the fight against it. The Council is aware of emergency PD rights granted by central government to development for the purposes of preventing, reducing, controlling or mitigating the effects of an emergency or taking other action in connection with an emergency. However, such development must be on land owned, leased, occupied or maintained by a local authority or health service body. The Council will take a flexible approach where such development is proposed that pursues this goal on non-local authority/health service land. This measure will remain in place until April 2021 and will be reviewed at that time as to whether it is necessary to extend this period.
7. **Flexible Approach to Breaches of Planning Control** – Whilst the Council takes breaches in planning control seriously, it will be unlikely take action against breaches of planning conditions and other breaches where they relate to activities necessary to respond to the challenges of COVID-19, and provided they do not result in significant nuisance or impact on neighbouring users.
8. **Temporary Use of Development Orders** - we will consider the use of temporary Development Orders to allow greater flexibility for businesses to carry out works such as change of use to adapt to COVID-19 and where this will assist with economic recovery. Such Orders will run for a period of 12 months and be reviewed annually.
9. **Discharge of Conditions** – ensuring applications to discharge conditions are handled within 21 days where there is sufficient information to reach a decision
10. **Providing advice to developers on construction sites** - on relaxation of hours of working, and the Council's approach to this.