

Danny Yee – Standing Advice for Transport Development Minor Planning Applications

The use of "standing advice" for smaller planning applications seems like an eminently sensible way to reduce the workload of Transport Development Management, allowing more time to be spent on larger developments. But we have a few concerns and suggestions.

From a transport perspective the amount of motor traffic generated by residential developments is almost always a central concern. A development with four houses and twelve car parking spaces might be of considerably more concern than an eight-unit development with no car parking. So we suggest that the definition of "minor planning application" in recommendation a) be modified to say "with five or fewer residential dwellings or units AND fewer than five car parking spaces" -- or some other number deemed appropriate.

Another concern is, of course, about what goes into the technical guidance that instantiates the "standing advice". The most common way in which small developments affect highways infrastructure is with driveway or parking lot accesses which cross over the footway (and in some cases over a cycle path, when it may be appropriate to refer to the county). We understand that Road Agreements policy is being modified to require the use of entrance kerbs here, allowing the footway to be kept flat. This is a change which we wholeheartedly welcome, and it needs to be incorporated into the technical guidance given to city and district planning officers, and in their training. Maintaining visibility and reducing speeds for vehicles exiting developments is a related concern.

There are also many less predictable possibilities. Perhaps a public path turns around the development, and keeping a corner of it free of walls is important for visibility. Perhaps a previous vehicle access is no longer needed, freeing up space on the carriageway which could be used for cycle parking, seating, or a parklet.

Paragraph 4 suggests that planning officers will have the flexibility to refer applications that are contentious or where standard criteria may not be met, which should help with this. We suggest that planning officers be asked not just to protect the public realm and sustainable travel, but to proactively look out for opportunities to improve them. This may be uncommon in smaller developments, but in some cases significant gains may be possible.