

Divisions – N/A

**DELEGATED DECISIONS BY CABINET MEMBER TRANSPORT
MANAGEMENT**

27 February 2025

**Standing Advice - Transport Development Management for
Minor Planning Applications**

Report by Director of Economy and Place

RECOMMENDATION

The Cabinet Member for Transport Management is Recommended to:

- a) Approve the decision for the Highway Authority to provide Standing Advice for use by Oxfordshire's local planning authorities when determining Minor Planning Applications with five or fewer residential dwellings / units.**
- b) Delegate the approval of the Standing Advice document to the Director of Economy and Place in consultation with the Cabinet member.**

Executive Summary

1. In its role as the Local Highway Authority, the Council is a Statutory Consultee to the six Oxfordshire local planning authorities (Cherwell, Oxford City, South Oxfordshire, Vale of White Horse, West Oxfordshire and the County Council (for Mineral, Waste Planning and the council's own developments). Each year the Highway Authority is consulted on in connection with approximately 4,300 planning applications, ranging in scale from home improvements / extensions to major / strategic employment and residential developments. Unless agreed with the local planning authority the council has 21 calendar days to provide a response to an application that is consulted on.
2. An increased automation of the consultation process by local planning authorities has placed an additional burden upon the Highway Authority to locate applications, reproduce any hard copy material, respond to consultations online and store material electronically. All this activity impacts upon officer time and resources. To help alleviate the tension between increasing application numbers, limited staff resources in the Highway Authority and increased time required to process applications, it is proposed to introduce a Standing Advice document for use by planning officers at the local planning authorities. This document will provide concise technical guidance to enable planning officers to

carry out the necessary assessment of smaller applications (residential developments with five or fewer units) without always having to formally consult the Highway Authority.

3. This approach is used nationally by other highway authorities and whilst not ideal for all development proposals, it provides a pragmatic solution to alleviate the pressure on officer resources dealing with low risk planning applications and enabling focus on more larger and complicated development proposals, bringing an additional resilience to the Transport Development Management function.
4. It is proposed that the addition of the Standing Advice process will be supported by a programme of training, delivered by the Highway Authority, to the local planning authorities in advance of the Standing Advice approach being implemented. The Highway Authority will continue to provide technical advice for the smaller development sites where they are contentious or when the planning officers are in doubt as to whether the standard criteria can be met; this will enable any element of risk to be managed but will also help build up the knowledge and skills transfer to the local planning officers.

What is Standing Advice for Minor Planning Applications?

5. The Standing Advice for Minor Planning Applications document is intended to provide the necessary information and advice to local planning authority officers to assist them in the determination of minor applications. It will also provide a point of reference and advice for other stakeholders in the pre-application and planning process, without the requirement to formally consult the Highway Authority.
6. Where relevant this document will refer to national design guidance and Highway Authority guidance and when these documents should be referred to along with Standing Advice. Copies and links of these documents will be available through the council's website.

Why is this needed?

7. Highways Officers spend significant hours assessing and commenting on hundreds of Minor Planning Applications annually where quite often comments given to the local authority officer are minimal or in some instances require no comment at all. This detracts from Highways Officers being able to focus time and resources to other priorities that would be served better without these occurrences.
8. It has been identified, that if this council adopts a Standing Advice approach (as other Local Authorities in the UK currently do and have seen great success with), the time and resource saved can be allocated to other priority workstreams, such as assessing Major and Strategic Planning Applications, junior staff development and improving resilience within the teams.

9. In addition, for each occurrence where the local planning authority must ask for the Highways Team for comments, they must wait up to 21 days for a response. During this time, an application's determination period process will be impacted on, and in some cases may be unable to proceed without highway comments.

Who will be affected?

10. In addition to the Highway Officer resource that will be freed with the implementation of the Standing Advice document, this approach will enable planning officers to assess and determine Minor Planning Applications in a quicker and more efficient manner.

When would this come into action?

11. It is officers' intention to implement the Standing Advice approach by Q2 2025-26. Initial engagements have been made with District and City officers to promote this intention and so far, all have responded positively. While the Standing Advice document remains in draft, District and City officers have been asked for their inputs to ensure this advice document is suitable for their officers to understand and use before it is brought into use.

Corporate Policies and Priorities

Strategic Plan

12. Introducing Standing Advice for Minor Planning Applications principally supports the following strategic priorities for Oxfordshire:
 - **Priority 1:** Put action to address the climate emergency at the heart of our work – by reducing the number of occurrences in which Transport Development Management Officers are required to visit development sites, this will subsequently help reduce emissions and create a greener and healthier environment.
 - **Priority 3:** Prioritise the health and wellbeing of residents – Same reason as Priority 1
 - **Priority 9:** Work with local business and partners for environmental, economic and social benefits – By working with our districts and allowing for District officers to consult our Standing Advice to make informed decisions against these applications, Highway Officers can increase productivity, innovation and allocate resource to other key projects which in turn will deliver more benefits more efficiently and effectively.

Financial Implications

13. As well as saving officer time and reproduction costs associated with the Standing Advice document, the reduction in the need to inspect smaller development sites and the frequency of visits to local planning authority offices and site inspections will be reduced. As a result, incurred travel costs from these visits will be greatly reduced. In addition, this process change will support managing pressures in future years through reducing the demand on the available Highways Officers.

Comments checked by: Thomas James, Head of Financial Services
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Legal Implications

14. The Highway Authority will continue to fulfil its obligations as a Statutory Consultee in the planning process pursuant to the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015 using a combination of the proposed Standing Advice and individual assessment of other planning applications.
15. The implementation of a Standing Advice document is not expected to have any additional legal implications to our role as a statutory consultee in the planning process.

Comments checked by: Jennifer Crouch, Principal Solicitor, Legal Services
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Social Value Considerations Adoption

16. Introduction of Standing Advice will allow officers to devote more time and energy to applications and other key responsibilities which have a more significant impact upon the community and assist in maintaining the quality and efficiency of service to the public and developers.

Staff Implications

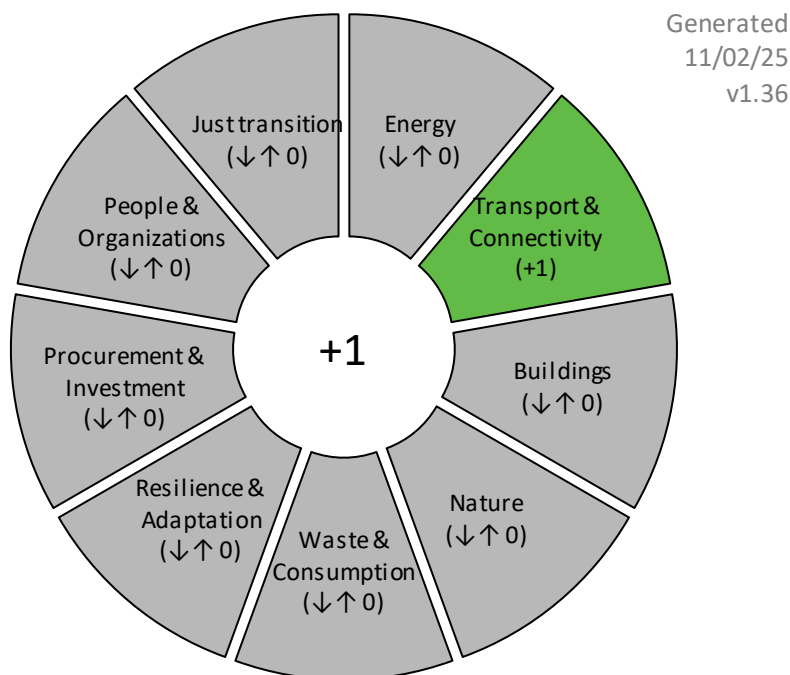
17. If this council adopts a Standing Advice approach, the time and resource saved can be allocated to other priority workstreams, such as assessing Major and Strategic Planning Applications, junior staff development and improving resilience within the teams.

Equality & Inclusion Implications

18. The Equalities Impact Assessment, which can be found at Annex 1, shows that implementing a Standing Advice document will help towards ensuring that new developments come forward more quickly in the planning process and be provided with appropriate highway design (including inclusive mobility and Disability Discrimination Act requirements) and infrastructure for all users of the highway network. This approach will not detract from the character of a place to live, or work that is sought through the planning process.

Sustainability Implications

19. A Climate Impact Assessment has been undertaken and the resultant report can be found in Annex 2. As illustrated in the scoring summary wheel below, the document has been identified as making a positive contribution to climate action.



Oxfordshire Council has committed to being a carbon neutral organisation by 2030 (8 years and 0 months away).

Risk Management

20. There is potential risk through implementing Standing Advice that new developments (and redevelopments) may not be assessed by the local planning authorities to an appropriate level that Highway Officers would have.

21. To reduce this risk, early engagement has taken place with officers at each of the four district councils and the city council to ensure that they are supportive of the document. Appropriate training and support will be provided to local planning authorities officers. If any minor planning applications are contentious or input is required from Highway Officers on technical issues, officers will be available to provide appropriate assistance to our colleagues / customers.

Consultations

22. The Standing Advice document is a technical guidance document to assist the local planning authorities in their determination of minor planning applications (residential developments with five or fewer units) and free up Highway Officer time to focus on other Major and Strategic development sites and other continual improvement projects within the Transport Development Management function.
23. As part of the process of developing a Standing Advice document, an initial engagement exercise was undertaken with internal colleagues and our District and City colleagues to seek their views on this approach. Their written comments and views derived from the discussions held in meetings have been used to inform a first working draft of the document.

Robin Rogers
Director of Economy and Place

Annex 1: Equalities Impact Assessment
Annex 2: Climate Impact Assessment

Background papers: Nil.

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