

TUNBRIDGE WELLS BOROUGH COUNCIL

PLANNING AGENTS' SATISFACTION SURVEY

2004

SURVEY PERIOD

OCTOBER 2003 – SEPTEMBER 2004

Prepared for

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Tunbridge Wells
BOROUGH COUNCIL
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Appendix I

The questionnaire

Appendix II

Contact details of Planning Agents interested in taking part / wanting to receive more information about the Agents' User Group.

Appendix III

Contact details of Planning Agents requesting a copy of the leaflet 'Guidelines for involving the community before submitting a planning application'.

Appendix IV

Contact details of Planning Agents requesting of copy of the Planning Services Charter.

1.0 WHAT IS THE RESEARCH TELLING US?

- Fewer Planning Agents are generally making contact across all communication mechanisms.
- Planning Reception staff are dealing with more planning enquiries.
- Planning Agents are satisfied with Planning Reception Staff.
- Satisfaction is highest for the Town Hall Reception compared with Cranbrook.
- Response times to messages, calls, enquiries, applications etc are more likely to be 'Average' than 'Prompt' or even within the required standards as set out in the Customer Services Charter.
- Written responses are clearer and easier to understand if responded to more quickly.
- Planning Agents are more likely to get hold of the person they wanted to by telephoning the Cranbrook Office.
- Fewer applications were valid when first submitted.
- Guidance information given to make applications valid was clear to those that received it.
- Fewer Planning Agents are seeking progress on their planning applications.
- The Planning Department / Planning Officers made fewer changes to applications, and satisfaction with these changes is rising. As a result, inconvenience and delays were also kept to the bare minimum, only affecting one agent.
- More Planning Agents are satisfied with the time taken to process applications than ever before, with fewer dissatisfied.
- More Planning Agents are satisfied with the process of handling applications than ever before, with fewer dissatisfied.
- Fewer Planning Agents are making changes to their approved drawings.
- More agents are satisfied with the time taken to handle amended plans than ever before, with fewer dissatisfied.
- There is continued support and interest from potential new members for the Planning Agents' User Group.
- Voicemail is not popular with all Planning Agents. However, recorded messages are clear.
- It appears that Planning Service Officers are no quicker at making a return call than responding to messages left on their voicemails.
- Few Planning Agents are making use of the Public Access facility. Of those using the facility, satisfaction is high, with downloading application forms and observing progress on an application being the main uses.
- Awareness of the new leaflet 'Guidelines for involving the community before submitting a planning application' is low, as is awareness of the Planning Services Charter with few Planning Agents having seen a copy.
- Planning Agents do not always appear to require additional advice outside of the criteria for pre-application advice.
- Not all Planning Agents think other criteria are required where advice is offered.

- There appear to be mixed views / opinions that the changes to the Delegation Scheme are for the better.
- Planning Agents could not decide whether our delegation scheme was more effective than other Local Authorities or not.
- Few Planning Agents are making use of the revised Householder Enquiry Forms.
- Both the Listed Building and Conservation Area consent forms provided sufficient guidance and information to register and process applications.
- There appears to be a generally mixed series of comments about the overall service, satisfaction v dissatisfaction, staff helpfulness v unhelpfulness and other related circumstances. Some comments were specific to named employees.

2.0 WHAT SHOULD WE DO NEXT?

- Review the services provided / offered to Planning Agents from the Cranbrook Office, and if/where possible encourage them to use that facility more, (ie by appointment), as this may well reduce pressures on the Town Hall services and further balance workloads and resources.
- Improve response times to all written communication to 'Prompt' (within five days) period as this is a commitment stated in the Council's Customer Service Charter.
- Review all means of communication channels offered to Planning Agents, and identify why fewer are making contact. The reduction in those making contact could be attributable to the fact that they [Agents] are experiencing some difficulties contacting the right Officer, facing delays in obtaining information and furthermore through the lack of / or reduced pre-application advice available.
- Give consideration to the comments provided (page 21) on how to improve the quality of our communications with agents as these are fairly superficial, which should be easy to amend / improve and act upon.
- Consideration should be given to reviewing the management of Officer projects and the allocation of work to ensure this is distributed more effectively.
- New opportunities in service delivery may be available now that fewer applications are being amended, fewer agents seek progress on their application, and fewer are generally making contact.
- As a result of the potential above, reinstatement of full time pre-application advice could be considered and shared between both the Town Hall and Cranbrook Offices.
- Improve publicity, marketing and awareness of the Public Access facility available through the website, as this could be a valuable source for Planning Agents information to aid the planning application submission(s), and reduce dependence on officer time.
- It is evident that further marketing and publicity work is required, through Corporate Marketing and Communications to increase awareness for two further publications / leaflets produced by Planning Services (a) 'Guidelines for involving the community before submitting a planning application' the (b) The Planning Services Charter.
- Further consideration could be given to the changes made in our delegation scheme since there were significant proportions unable to decide upon its improvements and effectiveness.
- Ensure all Planning Agents that requested information about the Planning Agents' User Group, The new leaflet 'Guidelines for involving the community before submitting a planning application leaflet' and the Planning Services Charter are contacted and relevant literature sent.

3.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PLANNING RECEPTIONS

- 71.4% did not visit Planning Receptions. 23% visited the Town Hall Planning Reception, 5.6% visited Cranbrook.
- 62.9% of enquiries are dealt with by Reception Staff, 37.1% by Planning Officers.
- 91.4% are satisfied with Planning Reception Staff.

LETTERS / E-MAILS

- 68.8% did not write asking for advice or information.
- Over half of our responses to written communications take 'Average' (5-10 days). 27.5% are slower (over 10 days).
- 89.5% thought replies were clear and easy to understand.
- 23.7% did not receive the information they needed.

TELEPHONE

- 46.4% did not telephone the Planning Receptions. 34.4% telephoned the Town Hall, 19.2% phoned Cranbrook.
- 21.5% did not get through to the person they wanted.
- 15.2% did not get the information or advice they needed.
- Half (50%) of return calls take an 'Average' (5-10 days). 11.1% are slower (over 5 days).

PROCESSING OF APPLICATIONS

- 15.1% of applications were not valid when first submitted.
- 36% are not seeking information on the progress of their application.
- 15.2% indicated it wasn't easy to obtain information about their application.
- Planning Services made changes to 37.3% of applications.
- 31.9% were not satisfied with the reasons given for the need to make these changes.
- Almost one in ten (8.8%) are not satisfied with the time taken to process their application. 76.2% are.
- 14.7% are dissatisfied with the process of handling their application. 81.3% are satisfied.

OUTCOME OF APPLICATIONS

- 11.9% of Planning Applications were refused, whilst the majority 88.1% were approved.

POST-DECISION SERVICE

- 14.7% made changes to their approved drawings.
- 86.7% were satisfied with the time taken to handle these amended drawings.
- Over two thirds (69%) thought the time we took to consider details required by planning conditions to be 'Average', with 29.9% being 'Prompt'.

AGENTS' USER GROUP

- 53.5% are not interested in taking part or receiving information about the Planning Agents' User Group.

VOICEMAIL

- 53.6% have not left voicemail messages.
- 96.6% found the Officers' recorded messages to be clear.
- Over half (58.6%) take an 'Average' (2-5 days) to return a call left on a their voicemail. 6.9% are slower (over 5 days).
- One in ten (10.3%) are dissatisfied with the voicemail service, 31% are undecided. However, the majority (58.6%) are satisfied.

PUBLIC ACCESS

- 62.7% have not used the Public Access facility available through the Internet.
- Agents are mostly accessing this system to download an application form (66%), or to observe progress on an application (55.3%).
- 93.6% found what they were looking for.
- 13% are dissatisfied with the Public Access facility, 15.2% undecided, whilst 71.7% are satisfied.

RATIONALISED COMMITTEE CYCLES

- 20% indicated the rationalised committee cycles improved the service received in processing their application.

PRE-APPLICATION COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT ON MAJOR APPLICATIONS

- 90.7% have not seen the leaflet 'Guidelines for involving the community before submitting an application'.
- Of those that have seen the leaflet, 45.5% did not use the guidance given, only 36.4% did.
- Over half (54.4%) would like to receive a copy.

PRE-APPLICATION ADVICE

- 22.3% had to seek advice on items other than those stated in the pre-application advice criteria.
- The restricted pre-application advice service caused significant inconvenience for 63% of Agents, and slight inconvenience for a further 18.5%.
- 38.8% believe further criteria should be added to the list of instances.
- Over half (52.4%) did not seek advice with the previous criteria. However, 24.3% felt the availability of officers to be 'Average', 18.4% 'Prompt'.
- 15.2% did not find the Planning Officers' requirements to be reasonable.
- 16.4% did not find the pre-application advice consistent with the final recommendations.
- 13.5% rated the advice / guidance given as 'Poor'. 68.9% rated it good / excellent.

PLANNING SERVICES CHARTER

- 88% have not seen a copy of the Planning Services Charter.
- Of those who have seen a copy, 85.7% have not used it.
- 53.2% would like to receive a copy of the Planning Charter.

THE DELEGATION SCHEME

- 50.4% agree with the changes made to the delegation scheme, whilst 42.9% are undecided on changes.
- 47.5% are undecided on how effective our delegation scheme is compared to other local authorities, 46.6% rated it good / excellent.

HOUSEHOLDER ENQUIRY FORM

- 72.4% did not complete a revised householder application form prior to submitting their application.
- Over half (59.1%) rated our service 'Average' in terms of time taken to respond to their enquiry. 9.1% thought it was slow.

APPLICATION FORMS

- 20.4% have used the Listed Building Consent form, whilst 7.1% have used the Conservation Area Consent form.

4.0 INTRODUCTION

In January/February 2005, the third survey of Planning Agents was undertaken to monitor customer satisfaction with service provision and to evaluate the improvements implemented as a result of previous work carried out. Surveys of this kind form part of Planning Services' commitment to ongoing monitoring and evaluating of all customer services and facilities.

The survey targeted agents that have submitted planning applications and where the application received a decision during the period October 2003 to September 2004. Analysis where possible will make comparisons with the 2000 and 2001 survey data to see whether customers' requirements have been fulfilled and improvements to customer satisfaction made.

The objectives of this project were to:

- identify method of contact with the Planning Service
- identify procedures and satisfaction with processing applications
- identify satisfaction with the post decision service
- identify continued support for the Planning Agents' User Group
- identify the levels of use and satisfaction with various service improvements implemented:
 - voice mail services
 - 'Public Access' facility
 - the leaflet 'Guidance for involving the community before submitting a planning application'
 - partial restoration of pre-application advice
 - Planning Services Charter
 - the delegation scheme
 - Householder Enquiry form
 - new application forms
- overall satisfaction with service provided

5.0 METHODOLOGY

The survey form was much the same as that used in previous years, but redesigned to incorporate nine new set of questions to investigate the new improvements as listed in the objectives.

Planning Services and Corporate Marketing and Communications designed the survey to allow returned surveys to be scanned into the computer. The survey was posted week commencing 17 January 2005, with a response date of three weeks.

Reminder mailing was not required following a satisfactory response rate of 25% from the initial mailing.

A copy of the questionnaire is provided in Appendix I.

6.0 RESPONSES

506 questionnaires were mailed; 128 usable completed questionnaires were returned representing a response rate of 25.4%. A sample size of 128 is subject to a maximum standard error of +/- 8.7% at the 95% level of confidence.

It is worth noting at this point that analysis contained in this report excludes non-respondents from all calculations therefore the base sample may vary from question to question.

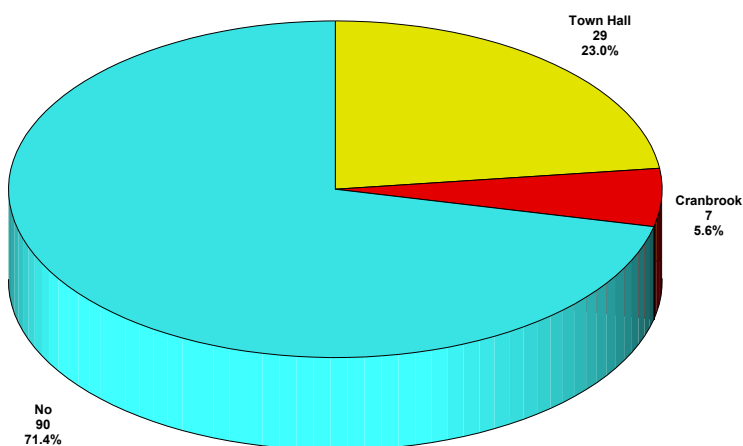
- Respondents were first asked by which method did they make contact with the Council. Options available were calling at the Planning offices, communicating by letter / e-mail or by telephone.
- Depending on which method(s) they used, non-users were automatically directed onto the next set of relevant questions.
- It is therefore worth noting that in places the sample size reduces significantly and therefore will not be truly representative of everybody surveyed. These figures should be treated with a degree of caution.

7.0 COMMUNICATIONS

7.1 VISITING PLANNING RECEPTIONS

- Ninety (71.4%) did not visit the Planning Service Receptions, (Figure 1). 23% visited the Town Hall, and a small minority (5.6%) visited Cranbrook.

FIGURE 1: DID YOU VISIT THE PLANNING SERVICE RECEPTION?



- During 2003-04 the number of Agents visiting the Town Hall increased on those in 2001, (23%) and (19.9%) respectively, (Table 1).
- Fewer visits were made to the Cranbrook Offices, down 49% from 10.9% to 5.6%.

TABLE 1: VISITING PLANNING SERVICE RECEPTION – 2001-2004 COMPARISONS

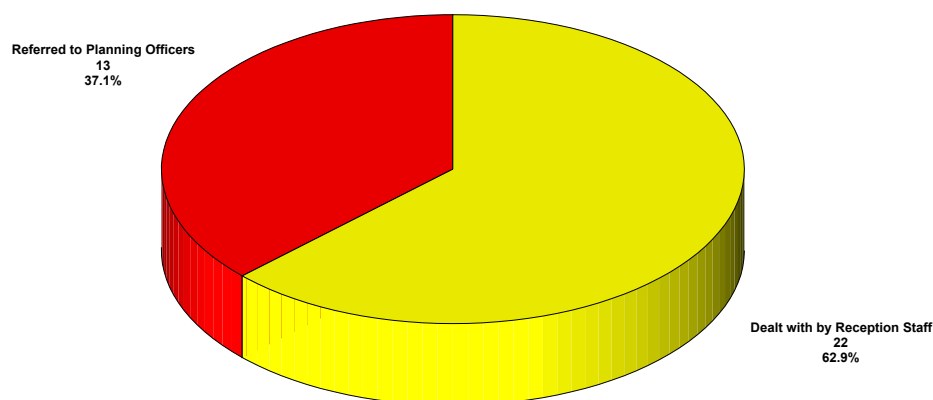
	Jan-Dec 00	Jan - Dec 01	Oct 03-Sep 04
Town Hall	23.8%	19.9%	23.0%
Cranbrook	11.1%	10.9%	5.6%
No	65.1%	69.2%	71.4%
Sample Total	126	156	126

- Those not visiting the offices (71.4%) were asked to go to the next section 'Communicating by letter / e-mail', page 12. Therefore the next two questions are based on a reduced sample of 35 respondents.

7.2 HANDLING OF ENQUIRY

- Reception staff dealt with two thirds (62.9%) of planning enquiries, with less than two fifths (37.1%) being referred to Planning officers.

FIGURE 2: WAS YOUR QUERY DEALT WITH BY RECEPTION STAFF OR REFERRED TO PLANNING OFFICERS?



- Over half (57.1%) of enquiries at the Cranbrook Office were referred to Planning Officers, compared to the Town Hall (32.1%) during 2003-04. This has been the typical trend over the last three years, (Table 2).
- However, the number of queries dealt with by Planning Reception at the Town Hall increased from 2001 51.6% to 67.9%, which further suggests that the resources at the Town Hall Planning Reception are better utilised, (Table 2).

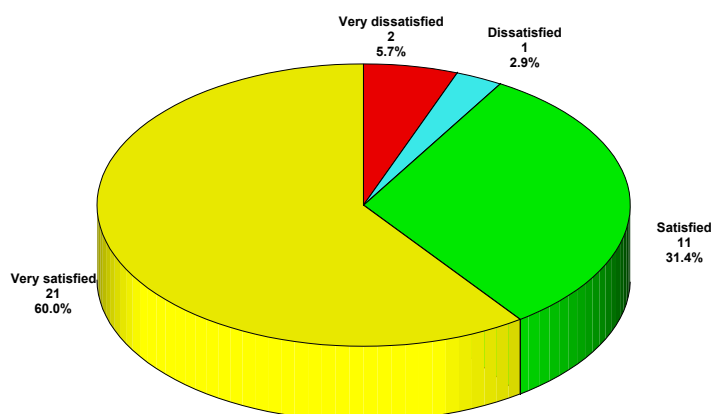
TABLE 2: FINDING INFORMATION - 2000-2004 COMPARISONS

	Jan - Dec 00		Jan - Dec 01		Oct 03 - Sep 04	
	Town Hall	Cranbrook	Town Hall	Cranbrook	Town Hall	Cranbrook
Dealt with by Reception staff	71.4%	65.2%	51.6%	29.4%	67.9%	42.9%
Referred to Planning Officers	28.6%	34.8%	48.4%	70.6%	32.1%	57.1%
Sample total	21	23	31	17	28	7

7.3 SATISFACTION WITH RECEPTION STAFF

- 9 out of ten (91.4%) are satisfied with Reception Staff, (Figure 3), providing a mean rating of 4.37 out of 5. However, 8.6% remain dissatisfied.
- The proportion satisfied represents an increase of 16% on that reported in 2001, from 78.8% to 91.4%.

FIGURE 3: OVERALL, HOW WOULD YOU RATE YOUR DEGREE OF SATISFACTION WITH THE RECEPTION STAFF?



- Satisfaction is highest at the Town Hall (92.9%) compared with Cranbrook (85.5%), during 2003-04.
- Whilst satisfaction has increased year on year at the Town Hall, from 80.6% in 2000, 83.3% in 2001 to 92.9% during 2003-04, satisfaction for the Cranbrook Reception has fallen significantly, from 100% satisfied in 2000, 80.6% in 2001 to a low of 42.9% during 2003-04, (Table 3).

TABLE 3: OVERALL SATISFACTION - 2000-2004 COMPARISONS

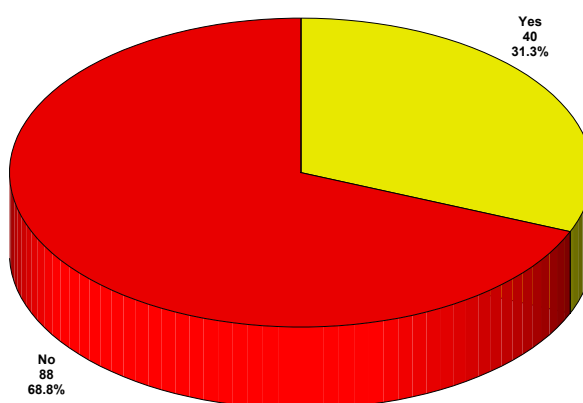
	Jan - Dec 00		Jan - Dec 01		Oct 03 - Sep 04	
	Town Hall	Cranbrook	Town Hall	Cranbrook	Town Hall	Cranbrook
Very dissatisfied	6.5%	-	10.0%	11.8%	7.1%	-
Dissatisfied	9.7%	-	-	11.8%	-	-
Neither	3.2%	-	6.7%	5.9%	-	14.3%
Satisfied	25.8%	26.7%	53.3%	47.1%	28.6%	-
Very satisfied	54.8%	73.3%	30.0%	23.5%	64.3%	42.9%
Sample total	31	15	30	17	28	7

- This next section looks at those that made contact by writing/e-mailing the Planning Service. All respondents were eligible to answer this next question, and dependent on their answer further question routing applies.

7.4 COMMUNICATING BY LETTER / E-MAIL

- Less than a third (31.3%) wrote a letter or e-mail to the Planning Service asking for advice or information, (Figure 4).

FIGURE 4: DID YOU WRITE / E-MAIL THE PLANNING SERVICE?



- Compared with 2000, fewer Planning Agents are writing / e-mailing the Service for advice or information, down from 56% in 2000, 46.5% in 2001 to 31.3% during 2003-04, (Table 4). Over the last 12 months, this represents a fall of 33%.

TABLE 4: COMMUNICATING BY LETTER - 2000-2004 COMPARISONS

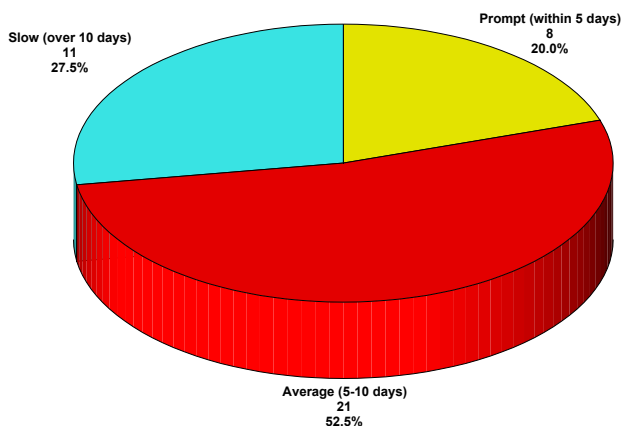
	Jan-Dec 00	Jan - Dec 01	Oct 03-Sep 04
Yes	56.0%	46.5%	31.3%
No	44.0	53.5%	68.8%
Sample Total	125	157	128

- Eighty eight (68.8%) didn't write / e-mail the Planning Service for advice or information and were therefore asked to go to the next section 'By Telephone', page 17. Therefore the next three questions are based on a reduced sample of 40 respondents.

7.5 SPEED OF WRITTEN RESPONSE

- The response time to written communication is five days as set out as a commitment in our Customer Service Charter.
- Compared to previous surveys conducted, clarification was given on the questionnaire as to what 'Prompt', 'Average' and 'Slow' meant in relation to these commitments.
 - Prompt (within 5 days)
 - Average (5-10 days)
 - Slow (over 10 days)
- There appear to be mixed views over the Council's speed of response to written communication.
- Just over a quarter (27.5%) rated the reply service 'Slow', with just over half (52.5%) stating 'Average', (Figure 5).

FIGURE 5: WAS THE SPEED OF OUR RESPONSE?



- A further fifth (20%) rated the reply service 'Prompt'.

- The speed of reply to written communication had improved up until 2001. During 2003-04 this appears to have got worse, with fewer indicating we were 'Prompt', down from 34.7% to 20.0%.
- More Planning Agents indicated we were 'Average' up from 33.3% to 52.5%, which indicates some improvement since there were fewer Agents indicating we were 'Slow', down from 31.9% to 27.5%, (Table 5).

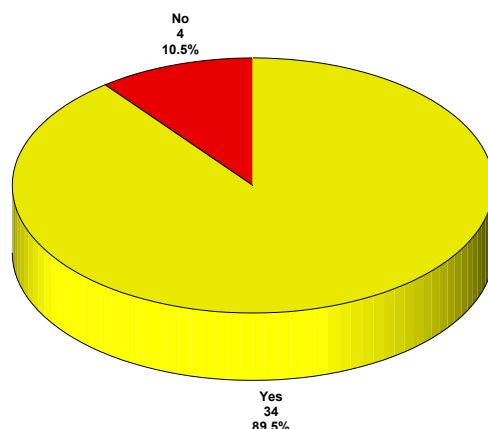
TABLE 5: SPEED OF RESPONSE - 2000-2004 COMPARISONS

	Jan-Dec 00	Jan - Dec 01	Oct 03-Sep 04
Slow	27.1%	31.9%	27.5%
Average	50.0%	33.3%	52.5%
Prompt	22.9%	34.7%	20.0%
Sample Total	70	72	40

7.6 CLEAR AND EASY TO UNDERSTAND

- The vast majority of respondents (89.5%) indicated the Planning Services' response to written letters / e-mails was clear and easy to understand, (Figure 6).

FIGURE 6: WAS OUR REPLY EASY TO UNDERSTAND?



- One in ten (10.5%) was unable to understand reply letters.
- Looking at the past three year survey periods, the standard of response letters in terms of clarity and ease of understanding remains fairly static, but of a high standard, (Table 6).

TABLE 6: EASY TO UNDERSTAND REPLY - 2000-2004 COMPARISONS

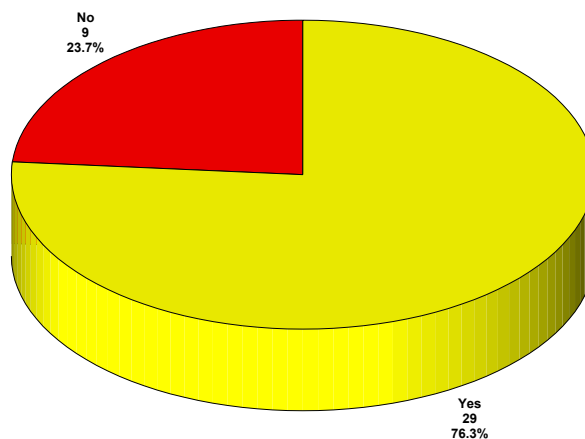
	Jan-Dec 00	Jan - Dec 01	Oct 03-Sep 04
Yes	89.7%	84.1%	89.5%
No	10.3%	15.9%	10.5%
Sample Total	68	69	38

- The majority of letters/e-mails that were clear and easy to understand were responded to within the 'Average' (5-10 days) 58.8%, with 20.6% responded within the 'Prompt' (within 5 days) commitment.
- The more time taken to respond to letters/e-mails does not necessarily result in improved clarity and understanding. 20.6% were clear and easy to understand, yet responded to within the 'Slow' (over 10 day) period.
- Those that were not seen to be clear and easy to understand, (four, 10.5%), were all responded to over ten days.

7.7 INFORMATION NEEDED

- Over three quarters (76.3%) received all the information they needed, (Figure 7).

FIGURE 7: DID YOU GET ALL THE INFORMATION YOU NEEDED?



- Less than a quarter (23.7%) did not receive the information they needed.
- More respondents from the 2003-04 survey appear to be receiving the information needed, 76.3% compared with 71.4% respectively. However, this proportion is still down on those surveyed in 2000, where the proportion was higher at (88.2%), (Table 7).

TABLE 7: INFORMATION NEEDED - 2000-2004 COMPARISONS

	Jan-Dec 00	Jan - Dec 01	Oct 03-Sep 04
Yes	88.2%	71.4%	76.3%
No	11.8%	28.6%	23.7%
Sample Total	68	70	38

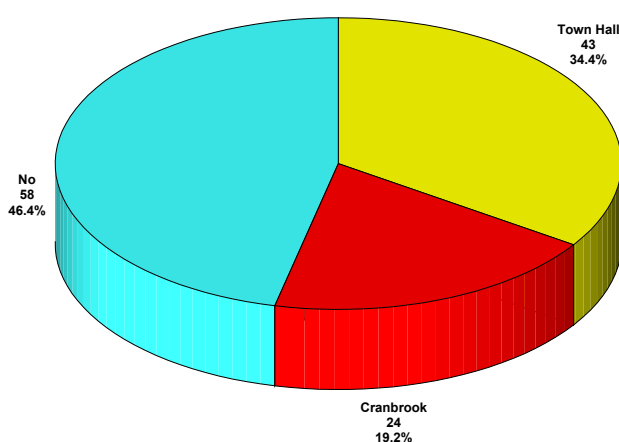
- Three quarters (65.5%) of respondents that received all the information they needed indicated their reply from the Planning Service was 'Average' (5-10 days), with almost a quarter (24.1%) being prompt.
- All Planning Agents that received the information they needed stated the reply was clear and easy to understand.

- This next section looks at those who made contact by telephoning the Planning Service. All respondents were eligible to answer this next question, and dependent on their answer further question routing applies.

7.8 COMMUNICATING BY TELEPHONE

- Just over half (53.6%) telephoned the Council's Planning Service for advice or information. Of this proportion just over a third (34.4%) were to the Town Hall, and less than a fifth (19.2%) telephoned the Cranbrook Office, (Figure 8).

FIGURE 8: DID YOU CONTACT THE PLANNING SERVICE BY TELEPHONE?



- Fewer Planning Agents are making contact compared to those in 2000 and 2001, down from 76.2% in 2000, 75.8% in 2001 to 53.6% during 2003-04, (Table 8).

TABLE 8: COMMUNICATING BY TELEPHONE - 2000-2004 COMPARISONS

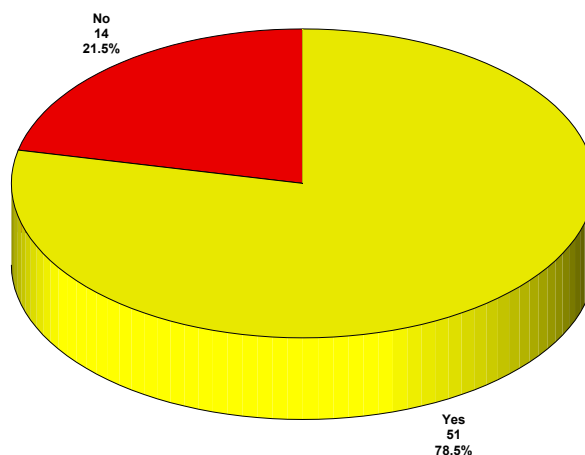
	Jan-Dec 00	Jan - Dec 01	Oct 03-Sep 04
Town Hall	76.2%	49.7%	34.4%
Cranbrook		26.1%	19.2%
No	23.8%	24.2%	46.4%
Sample Total	126	157	125

- Almost half (46.4%) or 58 respondents did not telephone the Planning Service and were asked to go to the next section 'Processing your application' on page 22. Therefore the next four questions are based on a reduced sample of 67 respondents.

7.9 SUCCESSFUL CALLS

- When telephoning Planning Services, over three quarters (78.5%) got through to the person they wanted to speak to

FIGURE 9: DID YOU GET THROUGH TO THE PERSON YOU WANTED TO SPEAK TO?



- Comparing 2001 with 2003-04 the results show for the first time that more Agents could get hold of the person they wanted when telephoning the Cranbrook Office, compared with those contacting the Town Hall, (Table 9).
- Over a quarter, (26.8%) of Agents' calls made to the Town Hall did not get through to the person they wanted, an increase of 312% on the figure reported during Jan-Dec 2001.

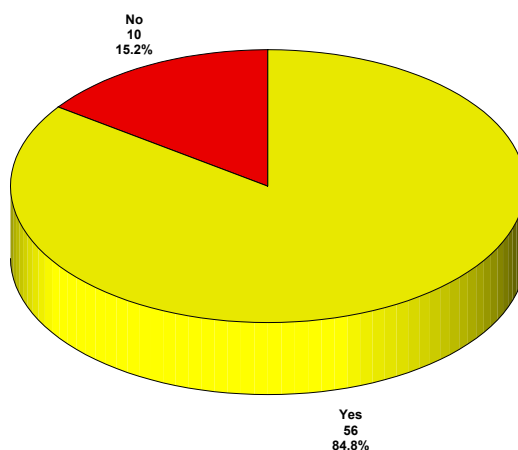
TABLE 9: SUCCESSFUL CALLS – 2000-2004 COMPARISONS

	Jan - Dec 00		Jan - Dec 01		Oct 03 - Sep 04	
	Town Hall	Cranbrook	Town Hall	Cranbrook	Town Hall	Cranbrook
Yes	90.6%		93.5%	85.0%	73.2%	87.5%
No	9.4%		6.5%	15.0%	26.8%	12.5%
Sample total	96		77	40	41	24

7.10 INFORMATION NEEDED

- Over four-fifths (84.8%) received all the information and advice they needed, (Figure 10).
- One in six (15.2%) required further information.

FIGURE 10: DID YOU GET ALL THE INFORMATION OR ADVICE YOU NEEDED?



- Comparing 2001 with 2003-04 the results show for the first time that more Agents received the information or advice they needed when telephoning the Cranbrook Office (87%), compared with those contacting the Town Hall (83.7%), (Table 10).
- 16.3% of Agents did not get the information or advice they needed when contacting the Town Hall. An increase of 39% on those in 2001, (Table 10).

TABLE 10: INFORMATION NEEDED – 2000-2004 COMPARISONS

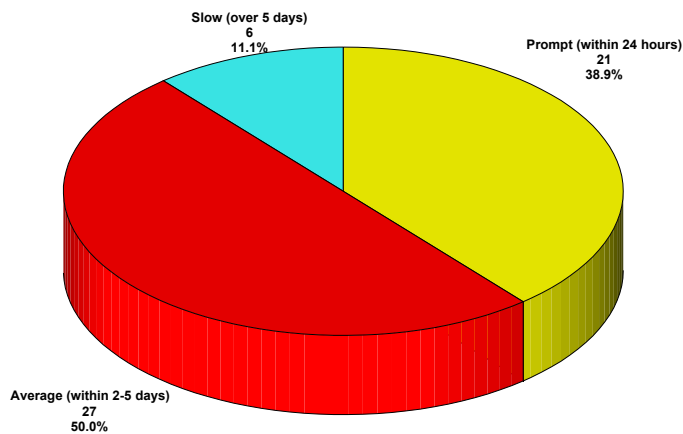
	Jan - Dec 00		Jan - Dec 01		Oct 03 - Sep 04	
	Town Hall	Cranbrook	Town Hall	Cranbrook	Town Hall	Cranbrook
Yes	87.1%		88.3%	75.0%	83.7%	87.0%
No	12.9%		11.7%	25.0%	16.3%	13.0%
Sample total	93		77	40	43	23

- 92.6% of Agents that got the information or advice they needed, got through to the person they wanted.

7.11 SPEED OF RETURN PHONE CALL

- The response time to telephone communication is within 24 hours as set out as a commitment in our Customer Service Charter.
- Compared to previous surveys conducted, clarification was given on the questionnaire as to what 'Prompt', 'Average' and 'Slow' meant in relation to these commitments.
 - Prompt (within 24 hours)
 - Average (2-5 days)
 - Slow (over 5 days)
- If asked for a return call, 50% indicated the speed of response was 'Average' (2-5 days), with almost two fifths (38.9%) 'Prompt' (within 24 hours), (Figure 11).

FIGURE 11: IF YOU ASKED FOR A RETURN CALL, HOW QUICK WERE WE?



- Just over one in ten (11.1%) felt the speed of the return call was 'Slow' (over 5 days).
- More return phone calls made from the Cranbrook Office were rated 'Prompt' (40%), compared to those from the Town Hall (38.2%) during 2003-04.

- The Town Hall appears to be slower at returning phone calls than Cranbrook. However over the period 2001 - 2003-04, the proportion of returned telephone calls that were 'Prompt' from the Town Hall has increased by 64%, from 23.3% up to 38.2%, (Table 11).

TABLE 11: REPEAT CALLS - 2000-2004 COMPARISONS

	Jan - Dec 00		Jan - Dec 01		Oct 03 - Sep 04	
	Town Hall	Cranbrook	Town Hall	Cranbrook	Town Hall	Cranbrook
Slow	21.6%		30.0%	20.6%	14.7%	5.0%
Average	50.0%		46.7%	58.8%	47.1%	55.0%
Prompt	28.4%		23.3%	20.6%	38.2%	40.0%
Sample total	74		60	34	34	20

- The final question asked in the 'Communications' section provided an opportunity for Planning Agents to comment on what else could be done to improve the quality of our communications.
- Respondents were given the opportunity to write in their answers, which were then coded for ease of analysis. The most frequent comments received have been provided below:
 - Enable more meetings, personal contact, pre-application discussions (29.6%, 8 agents)
 - Staff need to be more readily available (11.1%, 3 agents)
 - More prompt, polite, informative, faster, helpful (11.1%, 3 agents)
 - Improve response times to written/telephone communication (11.1%, 3 agents)
 - More regular e-mail contact, phone, fax (7.4%, 2 agents)
 - Improve continuity between staff/officer, job share/part timers (7.4%, 2 agents)
 - Provide direct telephone lines to Planning Officers (7.4%, 2 agents)
 - Introduce guidance notes/booklets for residential extensions/conversions(3.7%, 1 agent)
 - Give name, department, position when handling phone calls (3.7%, 1 agent)
 - Give references, will ease and speed up contact process (3.7%, 1 agent)
 - Same contact officer throughout case procedures/process (3.7%, 1 agent)

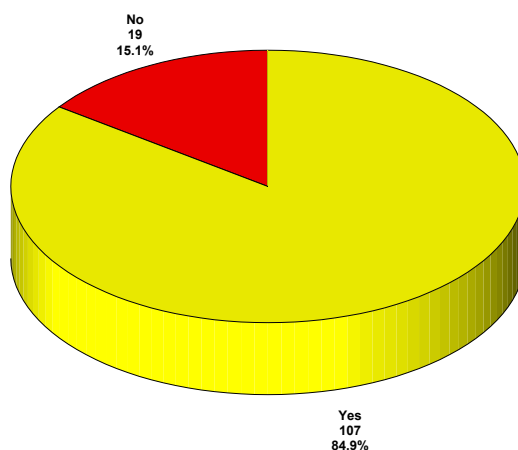
- This next section is about 'Processing Your Application'. All respondents were eligible to answer the first question, and dependent on their answer further question routing applies.

8.0 PROCESSING YOUR APPLICATION

8.1 VALID APPLICATIONS

- The vast majority of applications were valid when first submitted (84.9%), (Figure 20), down 5% on the proportion valid during 2001.

FIGURE 20: WAS YOUR APPLICATION VALID WHEN FIRST SUBMITTED?



- 15.1% found their application was not valid when first submitted, an increase of 48% on those applications not valid in 2001.
- Fewer applications were valid during 2003-04 (84.9%) compared to previous years, 88.7% in 2000 and 89.7% in 2001, (Table 17). This factor could be attributable to the lack of pre-application advice, and difficulties in making contact with officers with generally fewer agents making contact.

TABLE 17: VALID APPLICATIONS - 2000-2004 COMPARISONS

	Jan-Dec 00	Jan - Dec 01	Oct 03-Sep 04
Yes	88.7%	89.8%	84.9%
No	11.3%	10.2%	15.1%
Sample Total	124	147	126

- Respondents whose application was valid (84.9%) were asked to skip the next question, therefore the sample is reduced to 19 respondents.

8.2 GUIDANCE GIVEN

- For respondents whose application was not valid (15.1%), all Planning Agents (100%, or 19 agents) had stated that the guidance given in order to make their application valid was clear.
- It is clear over the three year period that some improvements have been made to the clarity of guidance information given in order to make applications valid, increasing from 92.9% in 2000, falling to 80% in 2001, before rising to 100% in 2003-04, (Table 18).

TABLE 18: GUIDANCE GIVEN - 2000-2004 COMPARISONS

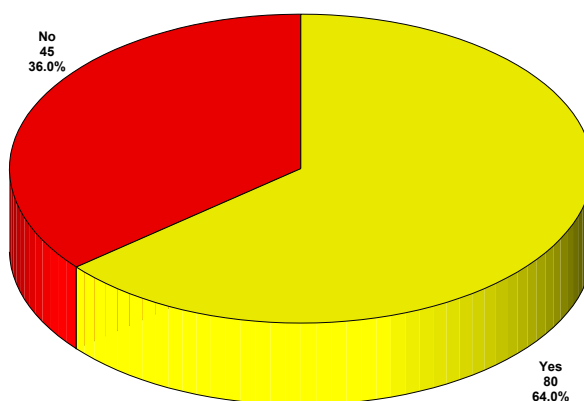
	Jan-Dec 00	Jan - Dec 01	Oct 03-Sep 04
Yes	92.9%	80.0%	100%
No	7.1%	20.0%	-
Sample Total	14	15	19

- All respondents were eligible to answer the next question, based on the sample of 125 respondents.

8.3 PROGRESS OF APPLICATION

- Once a planning application is submitted, respondents have an opportunity to monitor the progress of their application through the system.
- Almost two thirds (64%) sought information about the progress of their application, (Figure 21), with less than two fifths (36%) seeking progress.

FIGURE 21: DID YOU SEEK INFORMATION ABOUT THE PROGRESS OF YOUR APPLICATION?



- The proportion seeking progress on their planning application has fallen over the past three years from a high of 77%, down 17% to 64% during 2003-04, (Table 19).

TABLE 19: PROGRESS OF APPLICATION - 2000-2004 COMPARISONS

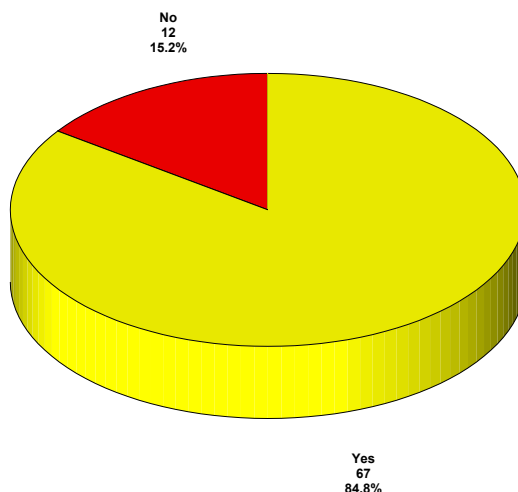
	Jan-Dec 00	Jan - Dec 01	Oct 03-Sep 04
Yes	76.9%	77.0%	64.0%
No	23.1%	23.0%	36.0%
Sample Total	117	148	125

- Again this could be attributable to the availability of Planning Officers and other barriers to communications previously experienced.
- Respondents that did not seek any progress on their planning application (36%) were asked to skip the next question, therefore the sample is reduced to 80 respondents.

8.4 EASE OF OBTAINING INFORMATION

- Over four fifths (84.8%) indicated it was easy to obtain information about the progress of their application, leaving a minority (15.2%) experiencing some difficulties, (Figure 22).

FIGURE 22: WAS IT EASY TO OBTAIN INFORMATION ABOUT THE PROGRESS OF YOUR APPLICATION?



- The ease for obtaining information about the progress of their planning application improved steadily between 2000 and 2001, increasing to an all time high of 84.8% during 2003-04, an increase of 23% on 2001, (Table 20).

TABLE 20: EASE OF OBTAINING INFORMATION - 2000-2004 COMPARISONS

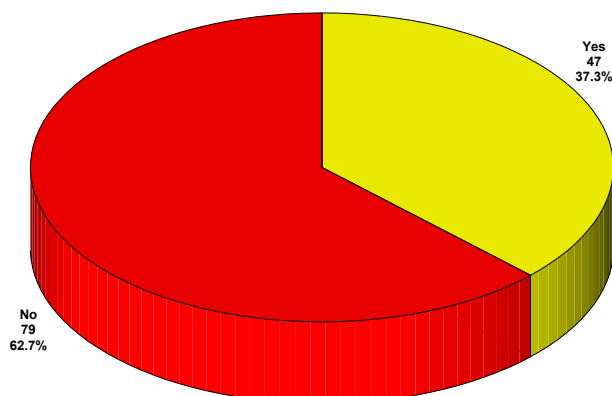
	Jan-Dec 00	Jan - Dec 01	Oct 03-Sep 04
Yes	66.3%	68.8%	84.8%
No	33.7%	31.3%	15.2%
Sample Total	86	112	79

- All respondents were eligible to answer the next question, based on the sample of 125 respondents.

8.5 AMENDMENTS TO APPLICATIONS

- The Planning Department made changes to less than two fifths (37.3%) to planning applications, therefore the majority did not seek amendments, (Figure 23).

FIGURE 23: DID WE SEEK AMENDMENTS TO YOUR APPLICATION?



- The proportion of applications that are being amended by the Planning department have declined year on year since 2000, where just under half were amended (48.7%), falling to 43.8% in 2001 and less still during 2003-04 (37.3%), (Table 21).

TABLE 21: AMENDMENTS TO APPLICATIONS - 2000–2004 COMPARISONS

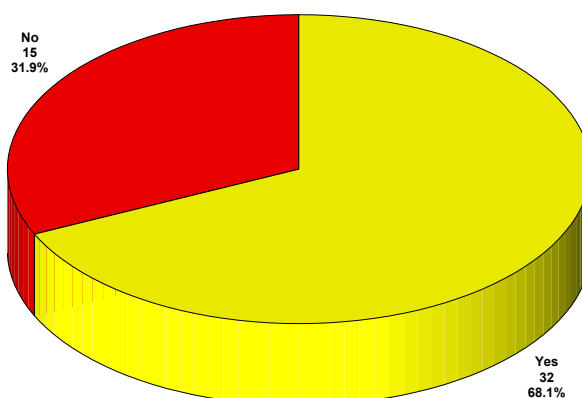
	Jan-Dec 00	Jan - Dec 01	Oct 03-Sep 04
Yes	48.7%	43.8%	37.3%
No	51.3%	56.2%	62.7%
Sample Total	119	146	126

- Respondents whose applications were not amended were asked to skip the next two questions, therefore the sample is reduced to 47 respondents.

8.6 SATISFACTION WITH REASONS

- Over two thirds (68.1%) were satisfied with the reasons given for the need to make changes. However, almost a third, remained dissatisfied, (Figure 25).

FIGURE 25: WERE YOU SATISFIED WITH THE REASONS GIVEN FOR THE NEED TO MAKE CHANGES?



- Compared with those from 2001, the proportion satisfied with the reasons given for the need to make changes to their application has risen from 59.4% up to 68.1%, an increase of 15%, (Table 22).
- Fewer respondents were dissatisfied (31.9%) a fall of 21% on those in 2001.

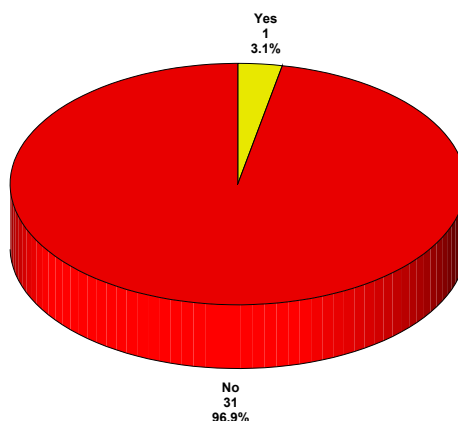
TABLE 22: SATISFACTION WITH REASONS - 2000–2004 COMPARISONS

	Jan-Dec 00	Jan - Dec 01	Oct 03-Sep 04
Yes	66.1%	59.4%	68.1%
No	33.9%	40.6%	31.9%
Sample Total	56	64	47

8.7 DELAYS WITH APPLICATION

- When making changes to planning applications, the vast majority, (96.9%) did not experience any unacceptable delay, (Figure 25).
- Changes caused a delay for one Planning Agent.

FIGURE 25: DID MAKING CHANGES LEAD TO UNACCEPTABLE DELAYS IN DEALING WITH YOUR APPLICATION?



- Delays in making changes to planning applications fell 93% from 2001 to 2003-04, (Table 23).

TABLE 23: DELAYS WITH APPLICATIONS - 2000-2004 COMPARISONS

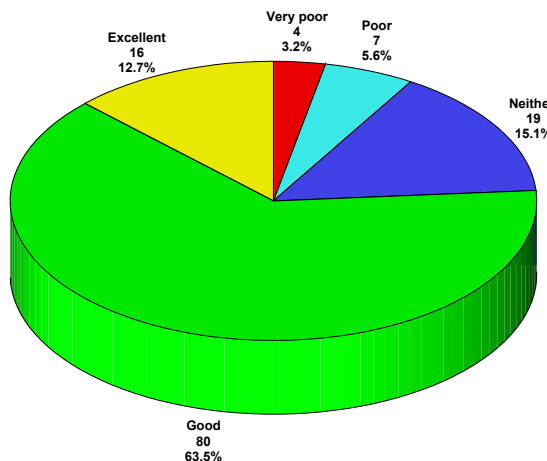
	Jan-Dec 00	Jan - Dec 01	Oct 03-Sep 04
Yes	57.1%	47.6%	3.1%
No	42.9%	52.4%	96.9%
Sample Total	56	63	32

- All respondents were eligible to answer the next two questions in order to gauge their overall level of satisfaction with (a) the time taken to process their application and (b) process of handling their application. These questions are based on the sample of 126 respondents.

8.8 SATISFACTION OF TIME TAKEN

- Just over three quarters (76.2%) rated our service in terms of time taken to process their application Good/Excellent, (Figure 26), providing a mean rating of 3.76 out of 5. However, 8.8% found the service poor.

FIGURE 26: OVERALL, HOW WOULD YOU RATE OUR SERVICE IN TERMS OF TIME TAKEN TO PROCESS YOUR APPLICATION?



- The proportion rating Good/Excellent represents an increase of 41% on that reported in 2000, from 53.9% down to 51.3%, rising to 76.2% during 2003-04, (Table 24).

TABLE 24: SATISFACTION WITH TIME TAKEN - 2000-2004 COMPARISONS

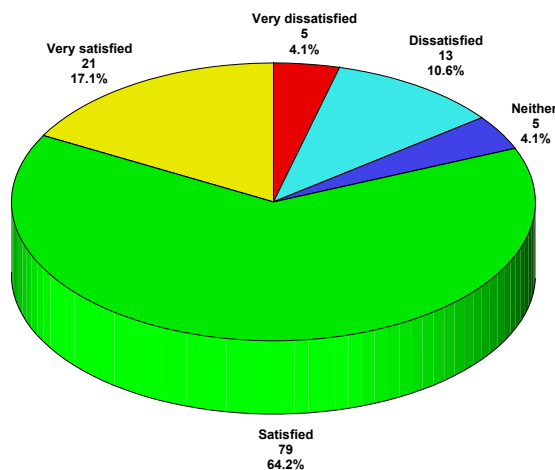
	Jan-Dec 00	Jan - Dec 01	Oct 03-Sep 04
Very poor	13.5%	11.0%	3.2%
Poor	7.9%	9.7%	5.6%
Neither	24.6%	27.9%	15.1%
Good	44.4%	40.9%	63.5%
Excellent	9.5%	10.4%	12.7%
Sample Total	126	154	126

- The proportion rating poor is down.
- The proportion undecided (Neither) is down.

8.9 SATISFACTION WITH HANDLING APPLICATION

- Just over four fifths (81.3%) are satisfied with the process of handling their application, (Figure 27), providing a mean rating of 3.79 out of 5. However, 14.7% were dissatisfied.

FIGURE 27: OVERALL, HOW WOULD YOU RATE YOUR SATISFACTION WITH THE PROCESS OF HANDLING YOUR APPLICATION?



- The proportion satisfied represents an increase of 24% on that reported in 2000, from 65.6% down to 62.3%, rising to 81.3% during 2003-04, (Table 25).

TABLE 25: SATISFACTION WITH HANDLING APPLICATION - 2000-2004 COMPARISONS

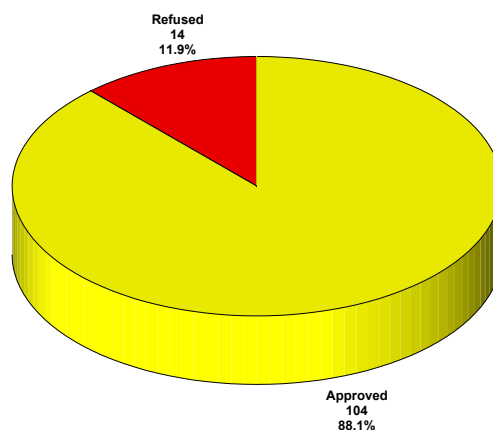
	Jan-Dec 00	Jan - Dec 01	Oct 03-Sep 04
Very dissatisfied	8.6%	6.5%	4.1%
Dissatisfied	10.2%	12.3%	10.6%
Neither	15.6%	18.8%	4.1%
Satisfied	42.2%	50.0%	64.2%
Very satisfied	23.4%	12.3%	17.1%
Sample Total	128	154	123

- The proportion dissatisfied is down.
- The proportion undecided (Neither) is down.
- All respondents were eligible to answer the next question, based on the sample of 118 respondents.

9.0 OUTCOME OF PLANNING APPLICATION

- The vast majority of applications (88.1%) were approved leaving approximately one in twelve (11.9%) applications being refused, (Figure 28).

FIGURE 28: WHAT WAS THE OUTCOME OF YOUR APPLICATION?



- More applications were approved in 2001 compared to 2003-04, 91.4% and 88.1% respectively.

TABLE 26: OUTCOME OF APPLICATION - 2000–2004 COMPARISONS

	Jan-Dec 00	Jan - Dec 01	Oct 03-Sep 04
Approved	88.3%	91.4%	88.1%
Refused	11.7%	8.6%	11.9%
Sample Total	120	152	118

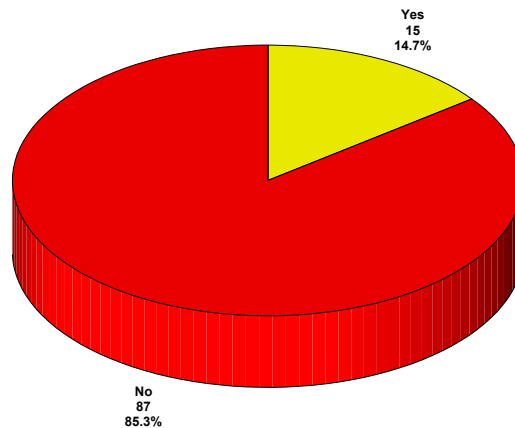
- Respondents whose application was refused were not eligible to answer the next three questions, and were asked to go to the next section 'Planning Agents' User Group' on page 35. Therefore the next question is based on a reduced sample of 104.

10.0 POST DECISION SERVICE

10.1 CHANGES TO APPROVED DRAWINGS

- 14.7% made changes to their approved drawings, leaving the majority (85.3%) making no further changes, (Figure 29).

FIGURE 29: DID YOU SEEK TO MAKE CHANGES TO THE APPROVED DRAWINGS?



- Fewer respondents are making changes to their approved drawings compared to those made during 2000 (22.6%), 19.1% during 2001 and 14.7% in 2003-04.

TABLE 27: CHANGES TO APPROVED DRAWINGS - 2000-2001 COMPARISONS

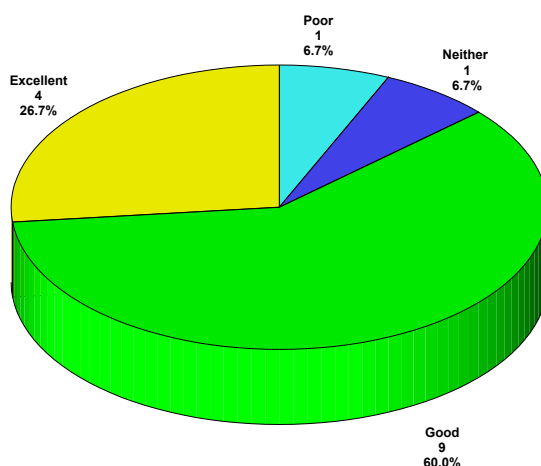
	Jan-Dec 00	Jan - Dec 01	Oct 03-Sep 04
Yes	22.6%	19.1%	14.7%
No	77.4%	80.9%	85.3%
Sample Total	106	131	102

- Respondents who did not seek changes to their approved drawings were asked to skip the next question, therefore the sample is reduced to 15 respondents.

10.2 SATISFACTION WITH TIME TAKEN ON AMENDED PLANS

- Over four fifths (86.7%) who sought changes to their approved drawings rated our service Good / Excellent in terms of time taken to handle the amended plans, (Figure 30), providing a mean rating 4.06 out of 5.
- One Agent (6.7%) was dissatisfied, and one undecided (Neither).

FIGURE 30: HOW DO YOU RATE OUR SERVICE IN TERMS OF THE TIME TAKEN TO HANDLE THE AMENDED PLANS?



- Satisfaction in terms of time taken to handle amended plans has increased steadily over the past three years from 60.8% (2000), 66.7% (2001) up to 86.7% during 2003-04, an increase of 30% over the past 12 months.

TABLE 28: SATISFACTION WITH TIME TAKEN ON AMENDED PLANS - 2000–2004 COMPARISONS

	Jan-Dec 00	Jan - Dec 01	Oct 03-Sep 04
Very poor	17.4%	4.2%	-
Poor	4.3%	16.7%	6.7%
Neither	17.4%	12.5%	6.7%
Good	43.5%	50.0%	60.0%
Excellent	17.4%	16.7%	26.7%
Sample Total	23	24	15

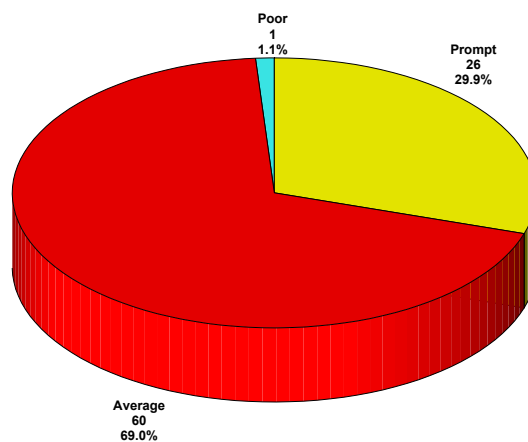
- The proportion dissatisfied is down.

- Respondents whose planning application was refused (11.9% or 14 Agents) were not eligible to answer the next question, therefore the sample is reduced to 104 Agents.

10.3 TIME TAKEN BY PLANNING CONDITIONS

- The majority rated our service 'Average' (69.0%) in terms of time taken to consider details required by planning conditions, (Figure 31).

FIGURE 31: WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT THE TIME WE TOOK TO CONSIDER DETAILS REQUIRED BY PLANNING CONDITIONS?



- Less than a third (29.9%) rated our service 'Prompt'.
- The proportion indicating time taken to consider details required by planning conditions as 'Poor' has fallen significantly over the last three years, down from 14.1% in 2000, 15.7% in 2001 to 1.1% during 2003-04, a fall of 92%,(Table 29).

TABLE 29: TIME TAKEN TO DEAL WITH PLANNING CONDITIONS - 2000–2004 COMPARISONS

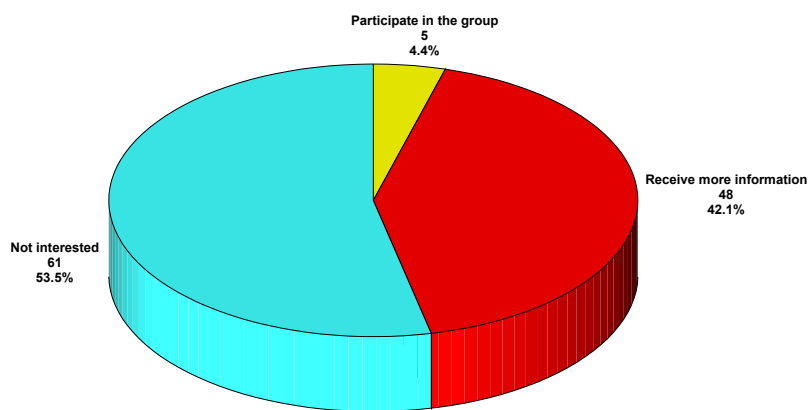
	Jan-Dec 00	Jan - Dec 01	Oct 03-Sep 04
Poor	14.1%	15.7%	1.1%
Average	62.0%	63.5%	69.0%
Prompt	23.9%	20.9%	29.9%
Sample Total	71	115	87

- The proportion rating the service 'Prompt', increased by 25% over the three years.
- All respondents were eligible to answer the next question, based on the sample of 114 respondents.

11.0 PLANNING AGENTS' USER GROUP

- If not currently a member of the Tunbridge Wells Borough Council Planning Agents' User Group, respondents were asked whether they'd like to (a) participate in the group, (b) receive more information, or (c) have no interest.
- 4.4% would like to participate in the group, with a further two fifths (42.1%) wanting to receive further information, (Figure 32).

FIGURE 32: IF YOU ARE NOT A MEMBER, WOULD YOU LIKE TO JOIN THE PLANNING AGENTS' USER GROUP?



- Just over half (53.5%) are not interested in taking part.
- Contact details of Planning Agents that have indicated an interest in participating / or receiving further information about the user group are provided in appendix II.

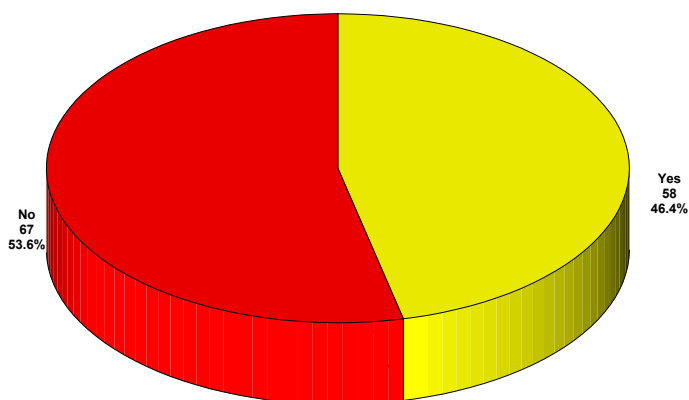
12.0 NEW SERVICES INTRODUCED

- Since the last agents' customer satisfaction survey was conducted in 2002/2003, the Planning Service has introduced many changes to improve customer service and assist all those with an interest in the Service. The following section contains questions on those changes relevant to Planning Agents.
- The next eight sections look at these in more detail to establish the degree of use, satisfaction and usefulness that these have made to the process. Improvements being investigated here are:
 - voice mail services
 - 'Public Access' facility
 - pre-application community involvement on major applications
 - partial restoration of pre-application advice
 - Planning Services Charter
 - the delegation scheme
 - Householder Enquiry Form
 - new application forms

12.1 VOICEMAIL

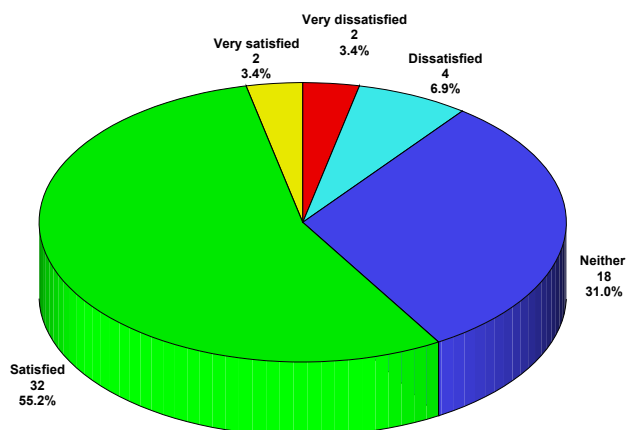
- Just over half (53.6%) have not left a telephone message on a Planning Officer's voicemail system. 46.4% have left a message, (Figure 33).

FIGURE 33: HAVE YOU LEFT A VOICEMAIL MESSAGE ON A PLANNING OFFICER'S TELEPHONE?



- Respondents not leaving voicemail messages were not eligible to answer the next three questions, and were asked to go to the next section 'Public Access' on page 38. Therefore the next series of questions are based on a reduced sample of 58.
- Of the 46.4% or 58 Planning Agents leaving a voicemail message, the vast majority (96.6%) stated the recorded message was clear. A minority, 3.4%, found the message unclear.
- Almost three fifths (58.6%) leaving a message on Planning Officers' voicemails were responded to within the 'Average' time period (2-5 days). Just over a third (34.5%) were 'Prompt' (within 24 hours).
- Albeit no significant difference between the timescales to make a return call and responding to a voicemail message, almost three fifths (58.6%) are satisfied with the voicemail service introduced by the Planning Service, providing a mean rating of 3.48 out of 5, (Figure 34, page 37).

FIGURE 34: OVERALL, HOW SATISFIED ARE YOU WITH THE VOICEMAIL FACILITY INTRODUCED BY THE PLANNING SERVICE?



- Just under a third (31%) were undecided (Neither) about their satisfaction with the voicemail service, with a further one in ten (10.3%) dissatisfied.
- Providing this data according to how quick we were to return their call on leaving a voice message, it is clear that satisfaction is higher for the more prompt return call, compared to those that are slow, (Table 30).
 - Prompt return call = 85% satisfaction
 - Average return call = 47.1% satisfaction
 - Slow return call = 25% satisfaction

TABLE 30: SATISFACTION WITH VOICEMAIL FACILITY ACCORDING TO RESPONSE TIME

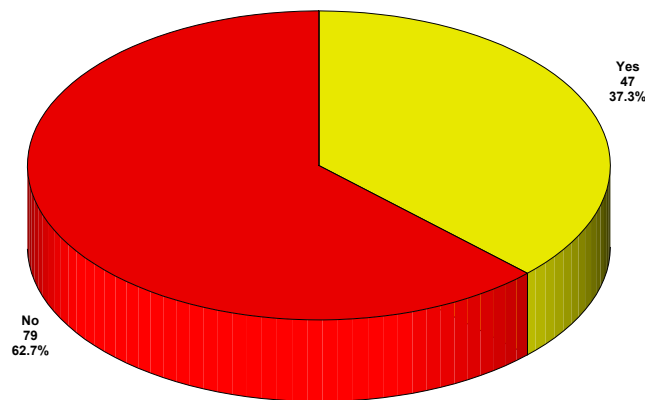
TABLE SAMPLE 58	Very dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neither	Satisfied	Very satisfied
Slow	25%	50%	-	25%	-
Average	-	5.9%	47.1%	47.1%	-
Prompt	5%	-	10%	75%	10%

- All respondents were eligible to answer the next question, based on the sample of 126 respondents.

12.2 PUBLIC ACCESS

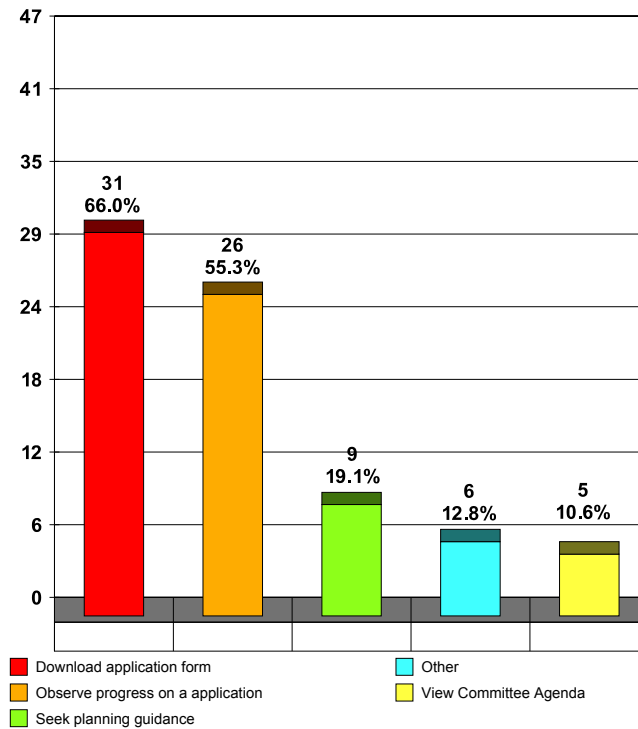
- Almost two thirds (62.7%) have not used the Public Access facility, available through the Internet, (Figure 35). Less than two fifths (37.3%) have used this.

FIGURE 35: HAVE YOU USED THE PUBLIC ACCESS FACILITY AVAILABLE THROUGH THE INTERNET?



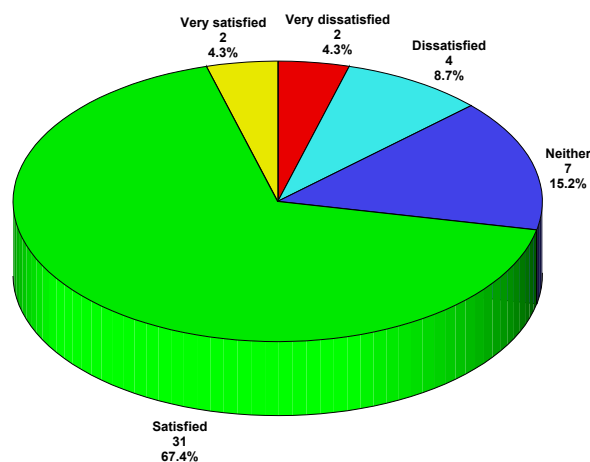
- Respondents not using the Public Access facility were not eligible to answer the next four questions, and were asked to go to the next section 'Rationalised Committee Cycles' on page 40. Therefore the next series of questions are based on a reduced sample of 47.
- Of the 37.3% or 47 Planning Agents using this facility, two thirds (66%) downloaded an application form, followed by 55.3% observing progress on an application, (Figure 36, page 39).

FIGURE 36: WHAT DID YOU USE THE PUBLIC ACCESS FACILITY FOR?



- Those using the facility for 'Other' purposes indicated this was to research other applications.
- The vast majority (93.6%) found what they were looking for.
- Almost three quarters (71.7%) are satisfied with the 'Public Access' facility, (Figure 37), rising to 76.8% satisfaction for those that found what they were looking for.

FIGURE 37: OVERALL, HOW SATISFIED ARE YOU WITH THE PUBLIC ACCESS WEBSITE?



- All respondents were eligible to answer the next question, based on the sample of 115 respondents.

12.3 RATIONALISED COMMITTEE CYCLES

- Planning Committee meetings at the Cranbrook Office (Eastern Team) of the Borough Council are held every three weeks (previously four weeks) to increase the frequency of meetings.
- If applicable in responding to the above statement, 20% indicated this improved the service received in the processing of their application.
- However, this was not applicable for the majority (74.8%).

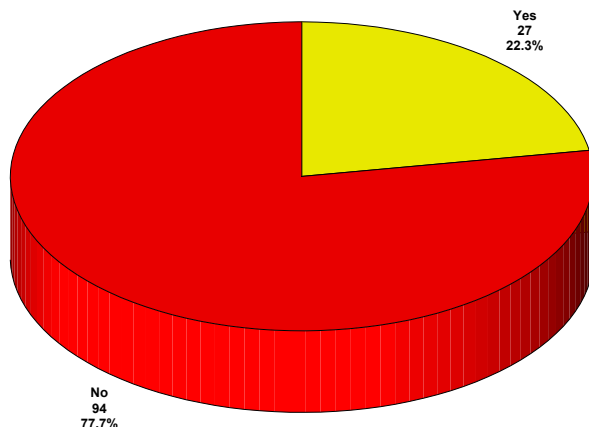
12.4 PRE-APPLICATION COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT ON MAJOR APPLICATIONS

- Fewer than one in ten (9.3%) have seen a copy of the 'Guidelines for involving the community before submitting a planning application' leaflet.
- Those that have not seen this leaflet, 90.7% or 107 Planning Agents were not eligible to answer the next two questions, therefore the sample is reduced to 11 respondents.
- Over a third (36.4%) used the guidance given in this leaflet prior to submitting their planning application, with almost half (45.5%) not using the information. A further fifth (18.2%) indicated the leaflet was not applicable for the type of application.
- All Planning Agents that used the guidance information (36.4%) found the leaflet helpful.
- Of those that have not seen a copy of this leaflet (90.7%), 56 Planning Agents would like us to provide them with a copy.
- Contact details of Planning Agents that requested a copy of this leaflet are provided in appendix III.
- All respondents were eligible to answer the next question, based on the sample of 121 respondents.

12.5 PRE-APPLICATION ADVICE

- Since the last agents' study the Service has introduced partial restoration of the pre-application advice. Advice is offered if a proposal meets at least one of the following four criteria:
 - (1) It relates to a listed building.
 - (2) The scheme is major (defined as ten residential units or more or a site area exceeding 0.5 hectares).
 - (3) The site is an allocated site.
 - (4) A previous application has either been refused or withdrawn.
- Over three quarters (77.7%) of Planning Agents did not need to seek advice on items other than the above criteria, (Figure 38).

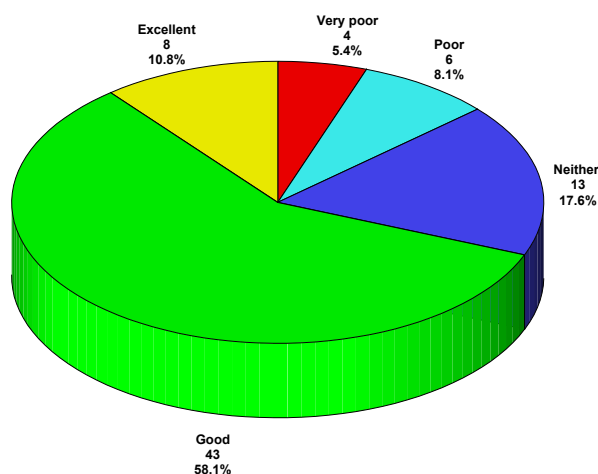
FIGURE 38: DID YOU NEED TO SEEK ADVICE ON ITEMS OTHER THAN THE ABOVE CRITERIA?



- The minority 22.3% sought additional advice and were not eligible to answer the next question, therefore the sample is reduced to 27 respondents.
- For these 27 Planning Agents, this restricted service caused significant inconvenience for 63%, 18.5% experienced slight inconvenience and 18.5% did not cause any problems.

- All Planning Agents were eligible to provide comments as to whether other criteria should be added to the list of instances where advice is offered, yet only 38.8% think other criteria should be added.
- The main criteria being:
 - Pre-application advice, guidance 36.4%
 - All application information 27.3%
 - Conservation area work 15.9%
 - Private sector (domestic and small business clients) 11.4%
 - Sensitive sites, applications 9.1%
 - Appeal projects 6.8%
 - Clarity of planning policy, advice 6.8%
 - Rural diversification proposals 4.5%
 - Green belt, environmentally friendly 4.5%
- Just over half (52.4%) sought advice outside the previous criteria.
- However, for those that did seek further advice, almost a quarter (24.3%) indicated the availability of Planning Officers to discuss their proposals was 'Average', with a further 18.4% indicating it was 'Prompt'.
- According to 4.9%, the availability of Planning Officers was 'Slow'.
- Over four fifths (84.8%) found the Planning Officers' requirements reasonable.
- Over four fifths (83.6%) of Planning Agents found the pre-application advice consistent with the final recommendations on their applications.
- Over two thirds (68.9%) rated the advice / guidance given good/excellent, giving a mean rating of 3.60 out of 5, (Figure 39).

FIGURE 39: OVERALL, HOW WOULD YOU RATE THE ADVICE / GUIDANCE GIVEN?



- A further 13.5% were dissatisfied.
- All respondents were eligible to answer the next question, based on the sample of 125 respondents.

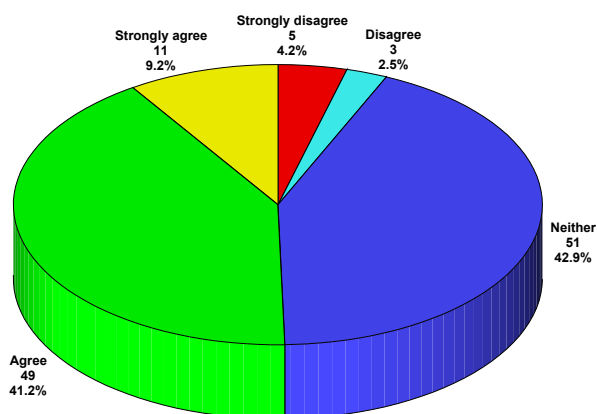
12.6 PLANNING SERVICES CHARTER

- Almost 9 out of 10 (88%) have not seen a copy of the Planning Services Charter.
- Of those that have seen the Planning Charter, (12%), 14.3% (two Agents) have used it, and found it to be helpful.
- Of the Planning Agents that have not seen a copy of the Planning Charter (88% or 111 Agents), just over half (53.2%) would like us to provide them with a copy.
- Contact details of Planning Agents that requested a copy of Planning Services Charter are provided in appendix IV.

12.7 CHANGES TO THE DELEGATION SCHEME

- Changes have been introduced to the delegation scheme, which have resulted in the Head of Planning Services being given delegated authority to determine a greater number and range of applications, and in most cases the three Principal Planning Officers (Team Leaders) being able to determine applications.
- Half, (50.4%) of Planning Agents agree with the changes to the Delegation Scheme, (Figure 40), providing a mean rating of 3.48 out of 5. A further 42.9% are undecided as to whether they agree or not.

FIGURE 40: TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU AGREE THAT THIS HAS IMPROVED THE SERVICE GIVEN BY PLANNING SERVICES?



- Improvements suggested for the delegation scheme are:
 - More consultation, wider scope, longer period 20.8%, 5 Agents
 - Head of Service should not overturn recommendations of case officer, greater autonomy, wider delegation 20.8%, 5 Agents
 - e-mail contact, more communications, promptly 16.7%, 4 Agents
 - Consistency 12.5%, 3 Agents

- Marginally more Planning Agents were undecided (47.5%) as to how effective our delegation scheme is compared with other Local Authorities than those Planning Agents that stated we were Good / Excellent (46.6%).

12.8 HOUSEHOLDER ENQUIRY FORM

- In May 2004 a revised Householder Enquiry Form was introduced to assist people in receiving advice on whether planning permission was required for works proposed.
- Almost three quarters (72.4%) did not complete one of these revised forms prior to submitting their application. Only 6.9% did, with a further fifth (20.7%) stating the form was not applicable for the type of application.
- The form was easy to complete for all that did so, (100%, or eight Agents).
- Our response time to submitted Householder Enquiry Forms was seen by 59.1% of Planning Agents to be 'Average'. A further 31.8% thought we were 'Prompt', and one in ten (9.1%) 'Slow'.

12.9 NEW APPLICATION FORMS

- In January 2004 new application forms were introduced for applications for Listed Building Consent and Conservation Area Consent.
- A fifth (20.4%) used the Listed Building Consent form, with fewer (7.1%) using the Conservation Area Consent form.
- However, the majority indicated these forms were not applicable for their type of application (74.3%).
- 93.1% of Planning Agents using the Listed Building Consent Form indicated it provided sufficient guidance to submit the information necessary to register and process their application.
- All Planning Agents using the Conservation Area Consent Form indicated it provided sufficient guidance to submit the information necessary to register and process their application

13.0 FURTHER INFORMATION

- The final section of the questionnaire was to give Planning Agents the opportunity to provide further information that they felt would help us to improve the quality of service that we provided. Planning Agents were able to write in their answers which were then coded for ease of analysis and have been provided below in descending order of most frequently occurring issue/comment, (Table 31).

TABLE 31: ANY OTHER COMMENTS?

ISSUE / COMMENT	NUMBER OF AGENTS COMMENTING	PERCENTAGE
More guidance, advice, pre-application advice	12	32.4%
Quicker, earlier feedback, more of it, application progress	9	24.3%
Misleading advice, information	8	21.6%
Unhelpful, obstructive, intolerant	7	18.9%
Helpful, constructive, fair	7	18.9%
Satisfactory, very good service, advice	6	16.2%
Likely to / need to speed up process, better relationships	6	16.2%
Difficult to contact Officer	4	10.8%
Inconsistency between Officers	3	8.1%
Dissatisfied	3	8.1%
Problems relate to specific Officers	3	8.1%
Friendly, prompt staff, reception	3	8.1%
No time to consult, lobby opportunities	3	8.1%

14.0 FURTHER RESEARCH

- Further research may be carried out on all data presented in this report to provide you with more detailed information. It should be noted at this point that further detailed analysis could be less representative and not as statistically significant due to lower sample numbers and therefore may not provide value, and/or require health warnings on their reported values. If this is required, please contact the Research Officer to discuss your requirements in more detail.
- Please note any additional analysis will have to be built into the work programme and may not be available immediately.

15.0 FURTHER RESEARCH REQUIRED

- It is worth bearing in mind that research may on some occasions generate further research to identify and answer specific issues raised from a particular piece of work.
- Issues raised in this research that could require further investigation are:
 - Investigating why fewer Planning Agents are making contact with Planning Services. Is there a barrier to communication which can easily be overcome?
 - Investigate further the viability of implementing timed appointments for Planning Agents to meet Planning Officers to discuss their work requirements, and seek advice. The benefits of such a scheme could improve the overall balance of work and officer availability to others.

Appendix I

The questionnaire

Planning Agents Customer Satisfaction Survey

Please place a tick or cross clearly in each box using a black pen.

COMMUNICATIONS

The questions in this section relate to the period in which your application was being considered including any pre-application contact with the planning service. You should relate these questions to the last application you submitted.

PLANNING RECEPTION

- Q1 Did you contact the Planning Service by visiting the Planning Reception?**
- Town Hall Continue with Q2
- Cranbrook..... Continue with Q2
- No..... Go to Q4

- Q2 Was your query dealt with by reception staff, or did they refer you to planning officers?**
- Dealt with by Reception Staff.....
- Referred to Planning Officers.....

- Q3 Overall, how would you rate your degree of satisfaction with the Reception Staff?**
- Very dissatisfied.....
- Dissatisfied.....
- Neither
- Satisfied
- Very satisfied

BY LETTER / EMAIL

- Q4 Did you write to us asking for advice or information?**
- Yes Continue with Q5
- No..... Go to Q8

- Q5 What was the speed of our reply?**
- Prompt (within 5 days)
- Average (5-10 days).....
- Slow (over 10 days)

- Q6 Was our reply clear and easy to understand?**
- Yes No.....

- Q7 Did our reply provide you with the information that you needed?**
- Yes No.....

BY TELEPHONE

- Q8 Did you contact us by telephone for advice or information?**
- Town Hall Continue with Q9
- Cranbrook..... Continue with Q9
- No..... Go to Q13

- Q9 Did you get through to the person you wanted to speak to?**
- Yes No.....

- Q10 Did you get the information or advice you needed?**
- Yes No.....

- Q11 If you asked for a return call, how quick were we?**
- Prompt (within 24 hours)
- Average (within 2-5 days)
- Slow (over 5 days)

- Q12 What could we do to improve the quality of our communications with you, whether at reception, by letter, phone or other means?**

PROCESSING YOUR APPLICATION

Q13 Was your application valid when first submitted?

- Yes *Go to Q15*
No *Continue with Q14*

Q14 If No, was the guidance given in order to make your application valid clear?

- Yes
No

Q15 Did you seek information about the progress of your application?

- Yes *Continue with Q16*
No *Go to Q17*

Q16 Was it easy to obtain information about the progress of your application?

- Yes
No

Q17 Did we seek changes to your application?

- Yes *Continue with Q18*
No *Go to Q20*

Q18 Were you satisfied with the reasons given for the need to make changes?

- Yes
No

Q19 Did making changes lead to unacceptable delay in dealing with your application?

- Yes
No

Q20 Overall, how would you rate our service in terms of time taken to process your application?

- Very poor*
Poor
Neither
Good
Excellent

Q21 Overall, how would you rate your satisfaction with the process of handling your applications?

- Very dissatisfied*
Dissatisfied
Neither
Satisfied
Very satisfied

OUTCOME OF APPLICATION

Q22 What was the outcome of your application?

- Approved* *Continue with Q23*
Refused *Go to Q26*

POST DECISION SERVICE

Q23 Did you seek to make changes to the approved drawings?

- Yes *Continue with Q24*
No *Go to Q25*

Q24 If Yes, how do you rate our service in terms of the time taken to handle the amended plans?

- Very poor*
Poor
Neither
Good
Excellent

Q25 What do you think about the time we took to consider details required by planning conditions?

- Prompt*
Average
Poor

PLANNING AGENTS' USER GROUP

We have a planning agents' group which provides a means of communication with organisations like yours who submit planning applications.

Q26 If you are not a member of this group, would you like to?

- Participate in the group*
Receive more information
Not interested

NEW SERVICES AVAILABLE

Since the last agents' customer satisfaction survey was conducted in 2002/2003, the Planning Service has introduced many changes to improve customer service and assist all those with an interest in the Service. The following section contains questions on those changes relevant to planning agents. Your time in responding to these is appreciated, as this will enable the Service to judge whether these changes have been of benefit.

VOICEMAIL

Q27 Have you left a voicemail message on a Planning Officer's telephone?

Yes Continue with Q28

No Go to Q31

Have not made contact over the phone Go to Q31

Q28 Did you find the Officer's recorded message clear?

Yes

No

Q29 How would you rate our service in terms of the time taken to return your call?

Prompt (within 24 hours)

Average (within 2 - 5 days)

Slow (over 5 days)

Q30 Overall, how satisfied are you with the voicemail facility introduced by the Planning Service?

Very dissatisfied

Dissatisfied

Neither

Satisfied

Very satisfied

PUBLIC ACCESS

Q31 Have you used the Public Access facility available through the Internet?

Yes Continue with Q32

No Go to Q36

Q32 What did you use this for? (tick all that apply)

Download application form

Seek planning guidance

Observe progress on a application

View Committee Agenda

Other

If Other, please specify:

Q33 Did you find what you were looking for?

Yes

No

Q34 Overall, how satisfied are you with the Public Access Website?

Very dissatisfied

Dissatisfied

Neither

Satisfied

Very satisfied

Q35 What other information, if any, would you want to see made available on this facility?

RATIONALISED COMMITTEE CYCLES

Planning Committee meetings at the Cranbrook Office (Eastern Team) of the Borough Council are held every three weeks (previously four weeks) to increase the frequency of meetings.

Q36 If applicable, do you consider this improved the service you received in the processing of your application?

Yes

No

Not applicable

PRE-APPLICATION COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT ON MAJOR APPLICATIONS
(defined as ten residential units or more or a site area exceeding 0.5 hectares)

Q37 The Service has produced a leaflet 'Guidelines for involving the community before submitting a planning application'. Have you seen a copy of this?
 Yes Continue with Q38
 No Go to Q41

Q38 Did you use the guidance given in this leaflet prior to submitting your planning application?
 Yes Continue with Q39
 No Continue with Q39
 Not applicable for the type of application Go to Q40

Q39 Did you find the leaflet helpful?
 Yes
 No

Q40 Is there anything else that you consider should be included in the leaflet?

Q41 If you have not seen a copy of the leaflet, would you like us to provide a copy to you?
 Yes
 No

PRE-APPLICATION ADVICE

Since the last agents' study the Service has introduced partial restoration of the pre-application advice. Advice is offered if a proposal meets at least one of the following four criteria: (1) It relates to a listed building (2) The scheme is major (defined as ten residential units or more or a site area exceeding 0.5 hectares) (3) The site is an allocated site (4) A previous application has either been refused or withdrawn.

Q42 Did you need to seek advice on items other than the above criteria?
 Yes Continue with Q43
 No Go to Q44

Q43 If Yes, to what extent did this service being restricted cause you problems?
 Did not cause any problems
 Caused slight inconvenience
 Caused significant inconvenience

Q44 Do you think there are other criteria which should be added to the list of instances where advice is offered?
 Yes Continue with Q45
 No Go to Q46

Q45 If Yes, please specify:

Q46 If you sought advice within the above criteria, how did you find the availability of Planning Officers to discuss your proposals?
 Prompt
 Average
 Slow
 Not applicable - sought advice outside of the criteria

Q47 Did you find the Planning Officers' requirements reasonable?
 Yes No

Q48 Was the pre-application advice consistent with the final recommendation on your application?
 Yes No

Q49 Overall, how would you rate the advice / guidance given?
 Very poor
 Poor
 Neither
 Good
 Excellent

PLANNING SERVICES CHARTER

Q50 Have you seen a copy of the Planning Services Charter?
 Yes Continue with Q51
 No Go to Q54

Q51 If yes, have you used it?

Yes Continue with Q52
No Go to Q53

Q52 If you have used it, how helpful did you find the Charter?

Very unhelpful
Unhelpful
Neither
Helpful
Very helpful

Q53 In what way, if any, do you consider the Charter could be improved?

Q54 If you have not seen a copy would you like us to provide you with a copy of the Planning Services Charter?

Yes
No

CHANGES IN THE DELEGATION SCHEME

Changes have been introduced to the delegation scheme, which have resulted in the Head of Planning Services being given delegated authority to determine a greater number and range of applications, and in most cases the three Principal Planning Officers (Team Leaders) being able to determine applications.

Q55 To what extent do you agree that this has improved the service given by Planning Services?

Strongly disagree
Disagree
Neither
Agree
Strongly agree

Q56 What do you consider could be done to improve the delegation scheme?

Q57 How effective is our delegation scheme compared with other Local Authorities you deal with?

Very poor
Poor
Neither
Good
Excellent

HOUSEHOLDER ENQUIRY FORM

In May 2004 a revised Householder Enquiry Form was introduced to assist people in receiving advice on whether planning permission was required for works proposed.

Q58 Did you complete one of these revised forms prior to submission of your application?

Yes Continue with Q59
No Go to Q60
Not applicable for the type of application Go to Q60

Q59 Did you find this form easy to complete?

Yes
No

Q60 How do you consider this form could be improved?

Q61 If you submitted a form, how would you rate our service in terms of the time taken to respond to your enquiry?

Prompt
Average
Slow

NEW APPLICATION FORMS

In January 2004 new application forms were introduced for applications for Listed Building Consent and Conservation Area Consent.

Q62 Which of the two forms did you use in submitting your application?

- Listed Building Consent
- Conservation Area Consent
- Not applicable to the type of application

Q63 Do you consider that the form provided you with sufficient guidance to submit the information necessary to register and process your application?

	Listed Building Consent	Conservation Area Consent
Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Q64 What improvements, guidance/information, if any, do you consider could be made/added to the Listed Building Consent Form?

Q65 What improvements, guidance/information, if any, do you consider could be made/added to the Conservation Area Consent Form?

Q66 If you have any other comments, please use the space provided.

Thank you for completing this questionnaire. For your convenience, please return the questionnaire in the enclosed pre-paid envelope. All information given on this questionnaire will remain confidential and will be used solely by Tunbridge Wells Borough Council. No information will be given to any third party.

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