



Guide to the Use of Planning Processing Agreements (PPAs)

Shetland Islands Council

1. Introduction

This guidance explains how Shetland Islands Council (SIC) uses Planning Processing Agreements (PPAs) to manage the handling of planning applications. PPAs are an important project management tool which support the efficient, transparent and collaborative determination of planning applications, particularly for larger or more complex developments.

The Scottish Government has encouraged the use of PPAs as part of wider reforms to modernise the planning system. These reforms aim to improve efficiency, provide greater certainty for applicants and communities, and promote early and meaningful engagement between planning authorities, developers and stakeholders.

This guidance reflects SIC's commitment to working constructively with applicants to deliver high-quality development that supports sustainable island communities, respects Shetland's distinctive natural and built environment.

2. What is a Planning Processing Agreement?

A Planning Processing Agreement is an agreed framework for how a planning application will be prepared, assessed and determined. It sets out:

- The key stages in the planning process
- The information required to support the application
- Who is responsible for providing that information
- Agreed timescales and review points

A PPA does not change statutory procedures or remove the need for a formal planning decision. Instead, it provides clarity and structure to the process and helps all parties work together more effectively.

The use of a PPA can help deliver:

- Greater transparency in decision-making
- Improved certainty around timescales
- More efficient handling of applications
- Clear lines of communication
- Early and effective engagement with key stakeholders

PPAs should also identify potential risks to agreed timescales and set out how the programme can be reviewed and adjusted if necessary. This helps minimise delays and keeps applications progressing where issues arise.

3. When a PPA is Required

A PPA will normally be required for all national and major development proposals, as defined by the Town and Country Planning (Hierarchy of Developments) (Scotland) Regulations 2009.

SIC may also consider the use of a PPA for local development proposals where:

- The proposal raises complex planning issues
- An Environmental Impact Assessment is required
- The development is significant in terms of economic, social or infrastructure impact

In such cases, early and detailed pre-application discussions are strongly encouraged. Once key issues and information requirements have been identified, a draft PPA can be prepared with input from the relevant parties.

4. Timing of a PPA

For national and major developments, applicants are required to undertake statutory pre-application community engagement. This includes submitting a Proposal of Application Notice (PAN) at least 12 weeks before the planning application is lodged.

A PPA should ideally be prepared as part of early pre-application discussions and, where possible, before the PAN is submitted. Where this has not occurred, the PPA should be agreed at the PAN stage to ensure that expectations, information requirements and timescales are clear from the outset.

5. Purpose of a PPA

A PPA should provide a clear and shared understanding of how the planning application will be managed. It should:

- Set out the main stages of the planning process
- Identify statutory requirements and consultation stages
- Clarify what information is required, by whom, and when
- Support effective coordination between the applicant, the Council and consultees

The overall aim is to ensure that applications are progressed in a proportionate, efficient and well-managed way.

6. What is Expected of Shetland Islands Council

SIC encourages early engagement with applicants, ideally before the submission of a PAN. Once a pre-application enquiry is received for a development requiring a PPA, a case officer will be appointed from the Development Management team.

The case officer will:

- Identify relevant Council services and external consultees
- Coordinate internal input across Council services
- Act as the main point of contact for the applicant

For most developments subject to a PPA, the case officer will act as the Council's lead officer and may establish a project or steering group. This group may include relevant Council officers, the applicant's project team, and key stakeholders such as statutory consultees.

The lead officer's responsibilities include:

- Preparing and maintaining the project plan and programme

- Coordinating Council input
- Liaising with elected members, where appropriate
- Communicating with the applicant and stakeholders
- Identifying and managing risks to the agreed timetable
- Ensuring consultees receive the necessary information in good time

All Council officers will act in the wider public interest and provide professional advice to help shape high-quality development that aligns with planning policy. Advice provided during the PPA process does not bind the Council to a particular outcome, nor does it prejudice the formal determination of a planning application.

SIC will use reasonable endeavours to meet the agreed programme set out in the PPA.

7. Role of Statutory Consultees and Service Providers

Statutory consultees and service providers play a key role in the planning process, particularly for major and complex developments. Where a PPA is in place, consultees will be expected to:

- Clearly identify information requirements at an early stage
- Provide timely responses at both pre-application and application stages
- Engage constructively with agreed timescales

Where possible, consultees should confirm their ability to meet agreed deadlines as part of the PPA process, helping to avoid unnecessary delays.

8. What is Expected of the Applicant

Early and proactive engagement with SIC is essential to the success of a PPA. Applicants are expected to:

- Take a collaborative and transparent approach
- Share information openly and at an early stage
- Appoint suitably qualified and experienced consultants
- Provide agreed information to the required standard and within agreed timescales

Meeting these expectations is critical to ensuring that the planning process runs smoothly and efficiently.

9. Preparing and Agreeing a PPA

For national and major developments, SIC expects applicants to enter into a PPA with the Council as planning authority. Other Council services and relevant consultees will also be involved in shaping the agreement.

The process will normally include:

- Early pre-application meetings
 - Identification of key planning issues and information requirements
 - Formation of a steering or project group
 - Preparation of a draft PPA setting out responsibilities, key dates, risks and review points
 - Circulation of the draft PPA for comment and confirmation
 - Formal signing of the PPA by the applicant and the Council
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10. Reviewing the PPA

A PPA is a live document and should be reviewed regularly as the project progresses. Review points may include:

- Completion of the pre-application stage
- Submission of the planning application
- Completion of consultation periods

Any party to the agreement may request a review if circumstances change or unforeseen issues arise. Where necessary, the PPA can be amended to ensure that timescales remain realistic and achievable.

11. Format of a Planning Processing Agreement

PPAs will normally include:

- Details of the proposed development and planning application
- Key contacts for all parties
- Agreed milestones and review dates
- Information to be provided by the applicant and deadlines
- Information to be provided by consultees and deadlines
- Matters to be addressed through planning obligations, where relevant
- Signatures of the parties to the agreement

SIC provides a template PPA to guide the structure and content of agreements. The final format will be tailored to reflect the scale and complexity of each proposal.

12. Signatories

PPAs will be signed by the applicant and Shetland Islands Council as Planning Authority. Prior to signing, consultees will be asked to confirm that the agreed timescales are realistic.

The agreement will normally be signed on behalf of the Council by an appropriate officer within the service.

13. Contact Details

For further information on Planning Processing Agreements, please contact:

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Planning Service
8 North Ness Business Park
Lerwick
Shetland
ZE1 0LZ
Email: development.management@shetland.gov.uk

For aquaculture developments, please contact marine.planning@shetland.gov.uk