

West Somerset Accredited Agent Scheme

CODE OF PRACTICE

Introduction

West Somerset Council (WSC) is introducing its Accredited Agent Scheme as of February 2013 as a means to foster its already good working relations between the council and planning agents. West Somerset Council recognises that the development management process is as much about the inputs into that process both on behalf of the council and you as agent as it is about the decision. With this in mind it is important to promote the submission of planning applications that are of a professional and suitable standard. When applications are made in this way, decisions can be made quicker which results in positive benefits for agents, applicants and the council.

West Somerset Council wishes to appropriately recognise those agents that consistently submit applications to a high professional standard. The council, as outlined below, agrees to provide a higher level of service to accredited agents.

Code of Practice

This Code of Practice aims to clarify the role and responsibilities of both the council and accredited agents. West Somerset Council is committed fully to work with accredited agents to ensure that the development management process is conducted in a professional manner with all parties working together to deliver appropriate development.

It is important to note that by signing the declaration the agent confirms that they will abide by all of the terms and conditions as outlined in this document. Failure to adhere to these requirements may result in an agent being removed from the scheme. As a result all benefits under this scheme will also cease.

Role of the Council

West Somerset Council will:

- Admit agents to the scheme providing they have submitted three consecutive valid applications (valid at the time of submission, without need of additional information or amendment);
- Aim to register and validate scheme compliant applications within two working days of receipt;
- Target the prompt determination of applications within six weeks (unless an application is due to be determined by the planning committee or would be subject to a S106 agreement);
- Inform the agent of the results of the site visit advising of any concerns within a few working days of the site visit;
- Provide an update to the agent within a few working days of the end of the consultation period advising of any concerns/issues;

- Communicate with the agent of any issues raised by the consultation process as soon as reasonably practicable and take a positive proactive approach when dealing with consultee concerns;
- Allow the agent to advertise themselves as an Accredited Agent;
- Provide a list of Accredited Agents with their contact details on the council's website including a web page to explain the accredited agent scheme;
- Reserve the right to withdraw agents from the scheme, who fail to adhere to this code of conduct, including those who submit two applications within a six month period where validation errors are found; and
- Monitor the applications by Accredited Agents to ensure that the quality level is maintained.

Role of Accredited Agents Code of Practice

Agents accredited by this scheme agree to:

- Submit valid applications in accordance with West Somerset Councils Local Validation Checklist¹;
- Ensure that all plans and drawings are of a suitable quality and are accurately drawn to a metric scale;
- Provide plans and drawings that are fully labelled with a drawing number, date and the site address;
- Provide good quality up to date photographs of the site (conformed to have been taken within the last 3 months);
- Submit all components of an application in one go via the same method i.e. Planning Portal, post or hand delivered (except for the fee²);
- Where possible communicate with officers by email to help avoid delays;
- Attend at least one Agents Forum a year to keep up to date on local issues;
- Recommend to their clients to:
 - Make full use of the council's pre-application service; and
 - Avoid submitting schemes, which are clearly unacceptable from the outset.
- Act in a professional manner and not bring the council's reputation into disrepute;

¹ The council will continue to provide advice to agents on local validation requirements particularly where thresholds for the requirement is not clear.

² It is acknowledged that application fees are sometimes paid directly by the applicant rather than agent. No penalty under this scheme will be levied against an Accredited Agent for the late payment of a fee.

- Only publicise the Accredited Agents status in a way that is agreed with West Somerset Council.

When the Accredited Agent Scheme applies

The Accredited Agent Scheme applies to all applications submitted by accredited agents with the exception of the following:

- Applications for major schemes (10 dwellings +/- 1000sqm of floor space +/- 0.5ha+);
- Applications for Hazardous Substance Consent;
- Applications for prior approval applications (telecoms, agricultural, demolition etc);
- Applications for Lawful Use certificates; and
- Any application accompanied by an Environmental Statement.

In exceptional circumstances West Somerset Council reserves the right to withdraw any application from the scheme that in its opinion is likely to be locally controversial or deals with complex planning issues. Should this be the case the accredited agent will be informed of the Council's intention at an early stage.

Renewal of membership

Membership of the Accredited Agent Scheme will last for 12 months from the date of registration. To renew membership for a further 12 month period you must have attended an agents forum within the previous 12 months and demonstrate continued compliance with the code of conduct.

How to apply?

If you wish to become an accredited agent please complete the application form at the end of this document and send it either by e-mail to planningemail@westsomerset.gov.uk or by post to:

West Somerset Council
Development Management
West Somerset House
Killick Way
Williton
Taunton
Somerset
TA4 4QA

By joining the scheme you confirm that you, and any member of staff employed by you, will adhere to all of the terms and conditions as outlined within this code of practice. An accredited agent may be removed from the scheme if they fail to comply with this code of practice and the terms and conditions contained within.

Upon receipt of your application WSC will review the three most recent planning applications that you have submitted to the Council. This is done in order to check the quality of submissions in line with the Council's validation checklist. You will be notified of the result of your application within 10 working days of receipt.

