THE VALUE OF PAYING FOR THE RIGHT CONSULTANTS

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The narrative of assembling the ‘dream team’ for a project is something that is continuously advocated across all professions. There is popular notion that behind every success story stands a carefully constructed team, who all strived to achieve the same goal. With the complexity that has tainted the planning system over the years, one would assume that adopting this team ethos would be a given. However, unfortunately, this is not always the case, and more often than not this leads to the project falling short of the finish line.

The scope and limitations of each project are undoubtedly unique. With this comes the unavoidable need to make sacrifices and have a clear strategy, in order to progress from a concept to planning consent. However, appointing the right consultant for the project should not be one of those sacrifices, nor trying to pull the wool over the Local Planning Authorities proverbial eyes as being the strategy.

The intention of this article is not for me to sit here and wag my finger at those who adopt this approach, as I am conscious that there are those that have done so as a result of not fully understand the requirements within the planning process. The intention is to provide some suggestions on how best to assemble the right team for a planning application, and at what stage this needs to be done.

Where to start?

The starting point is to identify the type of application applicable for the development. Local Planning Authorities provide a check list known as a, *validation list.* These lists state what documents and drawings are required for each application type, in order for the Council to validate the application and proceed with making a decision.

It is imperative that the validation list is checked as soon as possible.

This is something that we at Planning Insight will do as soon as a new project lands on our desk. This allows us to advise the applicant at an early stage about the different consultants needed for the application, in order for this to be factored into the feasibility of the project.

However, in order to assemble that '*dream team*', the draft process should not be based solely on adhering to the validation requirements of the Local Planning Authority.

'It is important to look beyond the validation check list and identify aspects of the development that may be flagged by the Council as being contentious.'

By acting proactively bolstering the strength of the application, it affords the applicant the opportunity to either amend a scheme, pre-submission, or help remove any doubt from the Local Planning Authority once submitted. Not only can this approach prevent unnecessary delays in the process, but it can also prevent a weak reason for refusal.

This proactive approach also gives the benefit of having sufficient time to choose the right consultant for the job.

'It is crucial to adopt an understanding that instructing a consultant is not simply a 'tick-box' exercise, and the decision should not boil down to whoever proposes the lowest fee.'

This is going to sound like a cliché, *because it is*, but you will more often than not get what you pay for. Therefore, it is vitally important that you seek handful of fee quotes, understand the scope of work that you are being quoted for, and do a bit of background research before choosing someone to be in the 'starting line-up'.

What are the benefits?

It saves time.

Yes, there may be an initial delay in getting the application submitted whilst instructing the respective consultants. However, allocating the time to get this done at the start will prevent unnecessary delays to the project further down the road.

'By failing to provide a document that is required to support an application or by submitting a substandard document, the

planning process runs the very likely risk of being delayed.'

This delay can arise for a number of different reasons such as:

- the application can be made invalid,
- the case officer having to ask for the document during the course of the application which could lead to an extension to the original decision date, or
- the application is refused, and you end up having to restart the process all over again.

It saves money.

This point directly correlates with the one above.

As it is often the case, delays can have financial consequences for a variety of different reasons. Therefore, it is always advised to absorb the cost required to get the right team together at the start, in order to avoid the costs associated with trying to scramble and salvage a project further down the line.

Send the right message.

Whilst unfortunately I cannot provide you with any empirical evidence to support this point, I unreservedly stand by it. I do believe that there is a level of reassurance installed to Local Planning Authorities when they are presented with a robust and conclusive planning application.

It shows that an applicant is serious about the development, and that they have taken the necessary measures to demonstrate that it is acceptable without the case officer having to chase for clarity.

Strong chance of success.

At the end of the day, the biggest benefit that comes from getting the right team for the job is that it enables the strongest chance of securing a successful outcome.

As mentioned at the start of the article, not all projects are the same, as they all have their own unique challenges.

'By being proactive and understanding the value that comes from assembling the right team, applicants will undoubtably improve their chances of overcoming these challenges.'

Conclusion.

The planning system can be overly complicated, it is draped in ‘red tap’. As frustrating as this can be, it is the reality, and it is not going to change overnight.

However, fortunately for applicants, there are many great consultants within the industry who can be of assistance. Their value just needs to be identified, recognised, and utilised.

If you’re seeking expert advice and would like to speak to us about assembling the ‘right team’ for your planning application, contact us on 0207 993 4539 today.