



A Proven Planning Process

Simple steps to a successful planning application

eBook

GF+A
GRAHAM FORD +ARCHITECTS

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About Graham

From my office in West London, I have worked across Southern England since 2006. I know how the planning system works and I have observed planning becoming more complex and challenging.

We specialise in working with sports and hospitality clubs and schools that need to renovate or build a new facility. I have designed a boathouse in Hyde Park, I worked on the London Olympic Games and I co-ordinated a new university with one of the world's leading architects.

My vision is to save my clients money by reducing their energy bills and at the same time reduce their carbon emissions.

I have a post-graduate degree in sustainability. I have taught architectural design in several leading UK universities.



“ **Experienced advice that puts you in control of your project.** ”

Introduction

In this document, we will discuss planning and permitted development and we will take you through what is involved in preparing and submitting a planning application. Your application will undergo some serious scrutiny before, during and after its submission. Interested parties will review the proposed project's impact on neighbouring buildings, its contribution to placemaking and its impacts on local infrastructure. This is the first major risk you will face on your project. The value of your site will significantly increase once planning is granted and for this reason, gaining planning permission is a major milestone when it is achieved.

When you reach this stage you will already have completed a lot of work with your design team developing your brief and interpreting the site. You will need a proven process to make sure your application is successful. We have developed four key steps that have been thoroughly tested over hundreds of applications. The four steps include: analyse; collaborate; storytelling and re-design. To implement these four steps you will need a team of professionals who consult widely and can advise you on both the economic, social and environmental impacts of your project. By comprehensively addressing all these issues the process will be much smoother and you will end up with a better building or masterplan.



GFA's process map with all stages of a project

What is planning?

Introduction

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Canoe Centre, Lea Valley, Haringey

What is planning?

Planning policy is based on a set of principles established by the National Planning Policy Framework. This framework establishes the Government's planning policies for England. These policies are a guideline for local authorities to use when establishing the local plan, spatial development strategies or council supplementary planning guidance. When you submit a planning application your project will be reviewed against the policies contained within these documents.

The planning system is influenced by politics. Most large planning decisions will be voted on by elected councillors who will be influenced by their constituents. If the project is of national interest, it can be taken over or 'called in' by the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government. In London, projects can be reviewed by the Mayor.

In some cases, depending on the borough, where the project is considered to have a substantial impact on the local area, it may be reviewed by the local authority's design review panel who will provide valuable feedback on your scheme. Your consultants will help manage the presentation to the review panel. The feedback from the panel is a 'material' consideration in the planning application process.

If your project was rejected for any reason you are entitled to appeal to the Planning Inspectorate who will determine the outcome. The Planning Inspectorate is not influenced by constituents and local body politics and therefore on occasions it is, unfortunately, necessary to appeal a decision by the local planning authority if you feel the decision has not been impartial.

Types of planning applications:

Full Planning Permission

Full Planning Permission involves an application that includes a full design of the building including the façade, external materials, and landscaping. Full planning permission expires after three years unless work has commenced.

Outline planning and Reserved Matters

Before purchasing land or a building, you may wish to apply for outline planning to find out whether your proposal is likely to get planning consent. The scheme that we put together is indicative and provides information about the building's impact on the surroundings, so the council can make an informed decision on the development in principle. Once outline planning permission is approved, then details of design including appearance, access and landscaping can be submitted to the local planning authority in a separate application, known as Reserved Matters.



Upper Richmond Road, Putney, London

What is Permitted Development?

You can perform certain types of work without needing to apply for planning permission. These are called "permitted development rights". These rights are granted by Parliament. In some 'designated areas' including a Conservation Area or a National Park, permitted development rights are more restricted. Article 4 directions can be introduced when the local council consider that the character of an area of acknowledged importance could be threatened. They are most common in conservation areas and this will mean that you have to submit a planning application for work that would not normally require one.

There are now Permitted Development Right mechanisms that can be used to convert some high street uses into residential use. These Permitted Development Rights contain 'classes' that are tools developers can use to achieve a change of use of office or retail to dwellings for example. We have successfully used a Prior Approval Permitted Development route to assist developers to convert both offices and restaurants into residential apartments in both Kew Gardens and Twickenham.

“ **In the past 15 years, we have observed planning becoming more complex and challenging.** ”

What is Listed Building Consent?

If the building is listed, then there are extra steps you need to go through during the planning process, and listed building consent must be applied for as well as planning permission. During the research and design phase, careful attention must be paid to the impact of removing parts of the existing building or adding on new extensions. You will also need to consider what changes can be made to the way the rooms and circulation spaces are organised.



The Roundhouse, Camden

What is discharge of conditions?

One thing that is critical to bear in mind when renovating or developing a new build, is that once planning permission or listed building consent is obtained, the process is not complete. There will most likely be several conditions that need to be discharged before the project can commence on site, and this process requires research, reports from experts plus a submission through the planning portal to discharge the conditions. Time and resources need to be allocated to allow for this process. It is also important that you get advice from your consultants on what liabilities you are might incur associated with the Community Infrastructure Levy or CIL payments. These are charged by local authorities to support the costs of infrastructure.



Harrow Masonic Lodge

A proven process for gaining planning permission



Without a tried and tested process for management and submission then your application is at risk and rejection costs a lot of time and money. I will make explicit the four-step process we have developed to ensure your application is well planned and presented so it is a success.

Journey to Planning Permission



“ Once planning permission or listed building consent is obtained, the process is not complete.

There will most likely be several conditions that need to be discharged.

Analysis



Analysis involves assessing 'planning risk' so it can be 'put on the table' and mitigated as soon as possible. The planning system should be interpreted in its context as solutions that work well in one area of the borough, may not be acceptable to the local authority in other locations. All submissions should be designed to fit the particular circumstances of your site.

In this stage we review the impact of any potential development upon the neighbouring properties and the 'character' of the site. There will be several issues that you and your design team need to consider in depth including the bulk and size of the development, its impact on the natural light available to neighbouring properties, and any increase in traffic and noise that may impact the area.

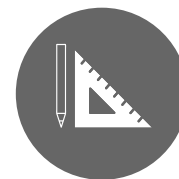
Because the planning system is influenced by precedent, to assess the chances of getting permission we need to know the details of the plot and examine how the local authority has treated similar applications in the past. We need to have knowledge of both the national and local planning guidance including relevant local transport and environmental policies. It is important your team is thorough in the analysis of all policies to ensure something of key importance is not missed.

Part of this step is deciding if we should accept the precedents that have been established or whether we should try and persuade local authorities to move away from their past judgements.



Planning Permission gained for a new house on gap site behind a parade of shops on Upper Richmond Road.

Storytelling



Due to the complexity of the planning system, anyone submitting a planning application is required to make a strong case for their project. Your design team needs to be able to show that they have considered everything that the local planning authority will consider relevant. Your team should use a technique similar to storytelling to help them create a strong value proposition.

The design is backed by evidence presented in a clear and structured way in a written document called the Design and Access Statement (DAS). A DAS is a comprehensive report illustrating the process that has led to the development proposal. It justifies why planning permission should be granted. It is where your team can explain the value of your project in detail including the economic, social and environmental benefits of the scheme. The more information your team provides the better your chances of success.

Collaboration



The fate of your planning proposal is in the hands of planning officers and the planning committee. One of the potential advantages of a system as complex as planning is that through dialogue, empathy and negotiation you can pick up hints, read between the lines and make the changes required to get your project over the line.

Consultation with the local authority is essential in all complex projects so that both you and your design team can fully understand what all the constraints are, and can benefit from the local authority planners knowledge of the area and the local design guides.

To successfully navigate the planning stage you will need a team in place including an architect, a planning consultant, engineers, transport consultant and possibly a heritage consultant depending on the project. You need your architect to build a great team of professionals who have ideally worked together in the past. The team will create a compelling value proposition that makes it difficult for the local authority to reject.



Harrow Masonic Lodge

Re-design



Once we have collaborated, listened and received feedback from all the interested parties, particularly the local planning authority, we then rework and transform the concept design.



Harrow Masonic Lodge

Case Study: Harrow Masonic Lodge



Analysis

The Masonic Lodge project is an extension to an existing Mock Tudor pavilion located in a conservation area in the London borough of Brent. The brief included a large banqueting hall for 350 people, flexible meeting rooms, with independent access, a new bar, and a commercial kitchen. This analysis stage involved 'pulling' the existing building apart to reveal its underlying logic, designing an extension on the Western side of the existing building, landscaping and a new access route into the site. My first task was to write a brief for the client and develop a design that fitted the 350 covers they required and a kitchen that was large enough to support it. At the same time, we spent a lot of time researching the history of the site and the development of the centre. We developed a detailed knowledge of the character of the area around our building and we researched all relevant precedents.

Storytelling

The storytelling stage commenced with the development of a value proposition based on the project's contribution to the community through employment, using local materials and working with local businesses. The design focussed on the future health and wellbeing of visitors and the quality of spaces we could provide. We achieved this by opening up the building to natural light and views over the landscape and providing high-quality internal air through natural ventilation. The value proposition also extended to our client's environmental values and their desire to reduce the amount of energy required to heat and cool the building and in turn reduce the centre's carbon emissions. I collaborated with our mechanical consultant who was capable of helping us to deliver a sustainable design solution.

Collaboration

The 'story' developed through diplomacy and building rapport with the conservation officer. By engaging with him during the pre and post-application meetings I understood his interpretation of the existing building and his views on how it might be transformed. By allowing the local authority to influence the narrative, they became partners in the design story and the continued dialogue helped me negotiate a contemporary design response that worked for all parties.

In this project, development was in tension with conservation and heritage was in tension with energy saving strategies.

Re-design

When the project became public during the planning process, different value systems conflicted with each other. The predicament we had to find a solution to was to resolve the conflict between the client's brief for a very large extension and the local authority's concern for the impact of the extension on the conservation area through increased traffic, noise from large events or visually through the size of the proposed building. One of our main roles was to understand and manage the agendas of the client and the local authority. The main challenge was that we needed to convince them that any new structure would not harm the conservation area.

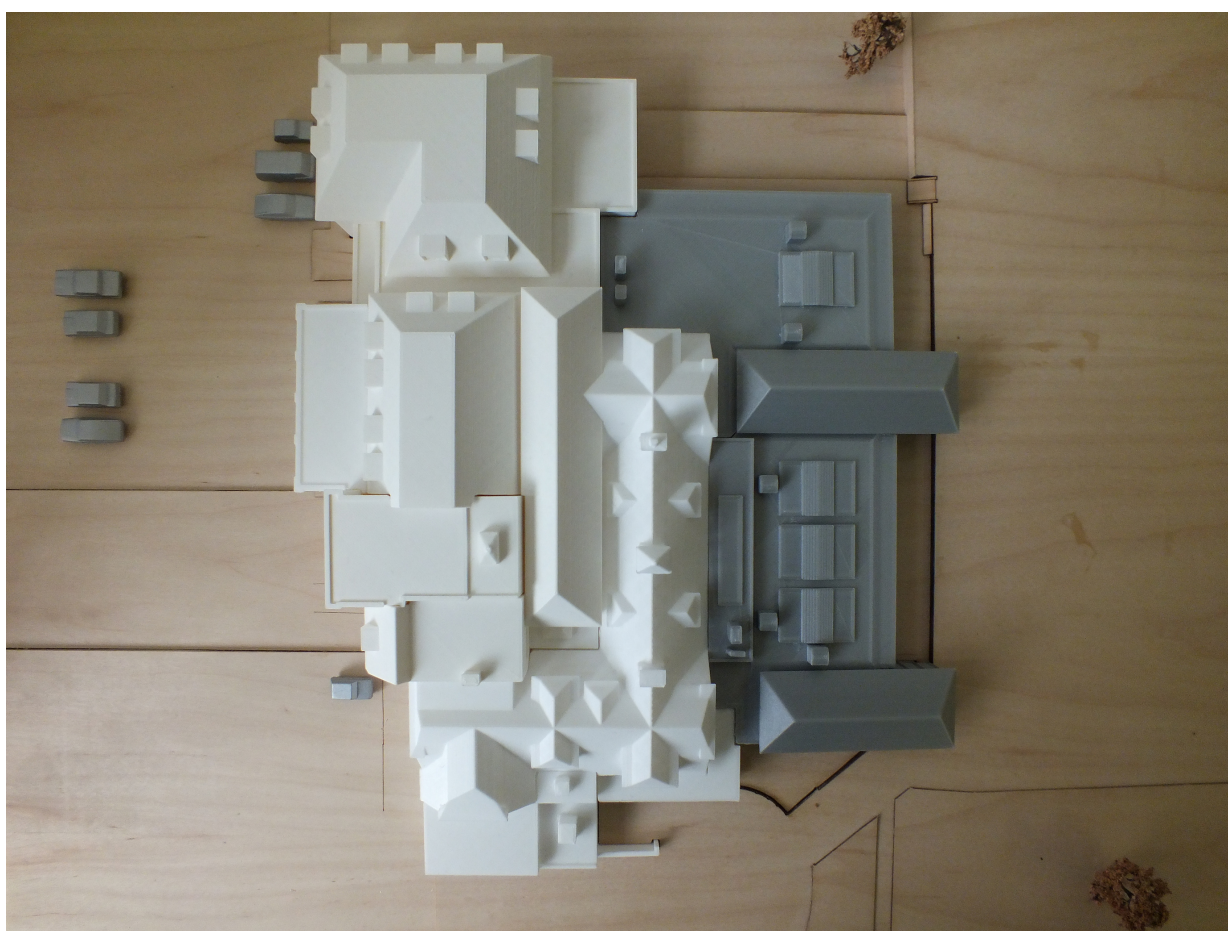
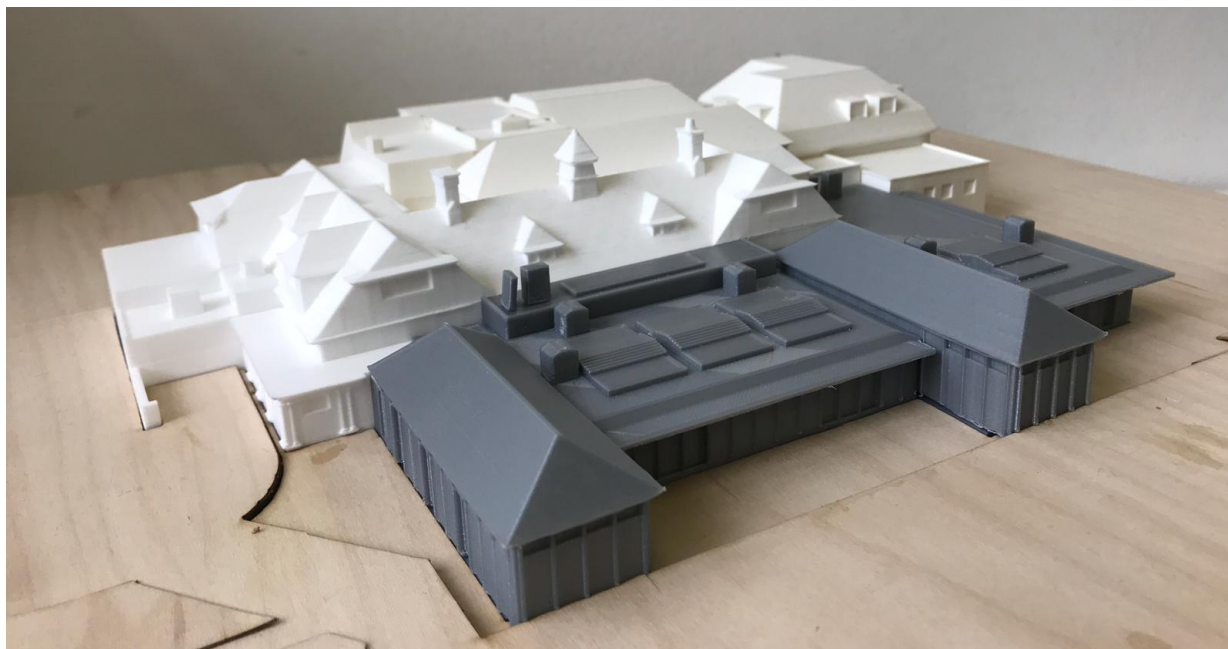
During the initial design phase, my client was unwilling to reduce the size of the proposed extension, despite our advice it was too big. To help my client understand what was achievable on the site, I arranged a pre-application meeting with the local authority to openly debate the design, heritage and planning issues. These meetings with the planners and the conservation officer helped shape the design of the centre.

Following written feedback from the planners and the conservation officer, our re-design process included looking at many alternative scenarios, brainstorming solutions, rethinking the design approach including the entry sequences into the building. We reviewed the connections with the conservation area and we re-distributed the the accommodation to reduce the bulk of the proposals. The design journey involved further meetings with the local authority and we were able to gain agreement on the design approach from the conservation officer before our formal submission.

The mechanical engineer was critical to achieving our heritage aims by keeping the height of the link building as low as possible through a natural ventilation strategy using windcatchers instead of large diameter ductwork distributing air from via mechanical plant. This reduced the visual impact of the extension on the existing mock Tudor pavilion. This solution ensured that the critical relationship between the two pavilions with a flat roof as required by the conservation officer from the council could be achieved.

Case Study:

Harrow Masonic Lodge



3D Model of Harrow Masonic Lodge

Conclusions

The project involved reinvention of the old in a new combination of innovation and conservation that helped re-contextualise the building to meet the client's evolving needs. One of the key learnings from this project was to build a strong value proposition encompassing social, economic and environmental value which helped us argue the case for the development.

Another lesson is that the four-stage journey was vital to planning success by providing a structure to follow which helped with the engagement of different 'actors'. The resulting interactions with the client, the local authority, the design team and the collaborators all played a role in ensuring a successful outcome. Planning permission was granted in August 2021.

Summary

This chapter has discussed the planning process and the four stages that we believe are critical to reducing planning risk and gaining permission for your development. It is important to firstly understand the value of the project to you and your customers. What is the economic value of your project? How will it improve efficiency and productivity? Does your new facility enable you to attract more members and keep them happy? Does your project have environmental value by using less energy or enhancing its users' wellbeing through more sustainable ventilation systems? These considerations are critical following the COVID pandemic. The project should also have social value. Does the building reduce crime rates in the local area, reduce social segregation or provide employment? All these benefits need to be clearly articulated.

Selecting a design team that can collaborate with the local authority is key to reducing the risk of having your application rejected which costs both a lot of money and a lot of time. As we have seen in the case study on the Harrow Masonic Lodge, collaboration at an early stage with the planning authority is critical in all large and complex projects. All interested parties will come to the table with different agendas and it is the architect's job to make sure at completion everyone is happy with the outcome. The project must meet your objectives but it needs to also make a positive contribution to the community. Sustainability is important for your project because it will reduce your ongoing energy costs and it is important to the local authority as it demonstrates a commitment to quality and to lowering our collective carbon footprint. There can be conflicts in conservation areas between energy conservation and heritage. This project demonstrated how I was able to resolve this and achieve a positive outcome.

What do our clients say?

"I worked with Graham on the Copper Box on the Olympic Park. He was very professional with excellent attention to detail. I am looking forward to working with him again."

David Sowerby, Project Manager, Mace, London 2012 Olympic Games.

"I had the pleasure of working with Graham and his team on a project that required a quick turnaround for detailed practical and viable solutions. I always found Graham very approachable, and nothing was too much trouble. I would have no hesitation in using Graham Ford again, or recommending him to anyone. Job well done!"

Rob Walker, Senior Design Manager at Buckingham Group Ltd.

"I have been working Graham Ford Architects as our Architects for almost 10 years. They have carried out numerous different projects from small house extensions to major House refurbishments with basements, flat conversions and most recently an exciting new build house project which they took from conception to design, planning and full project management. I find Graham very easy to work with and he has an excellent knowledge of the construction process. I have recently started a new project with Graham and Simona and look forward to continuing our working relationship with the firm ."

Alastair Graham (client)

"We employed Graham Ford Architects to provide construction stage technical design assistance on a large residential development in West London. Graham and his team brought significant value to the project and their detailed knowledge of construction detailing and the building regulations helped us to overcome some significant challenges. I look forward to working with Graham and the GFA team in the near future."

Ross Nutchey (client) Design Manager Galliford Try

Contact Us

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