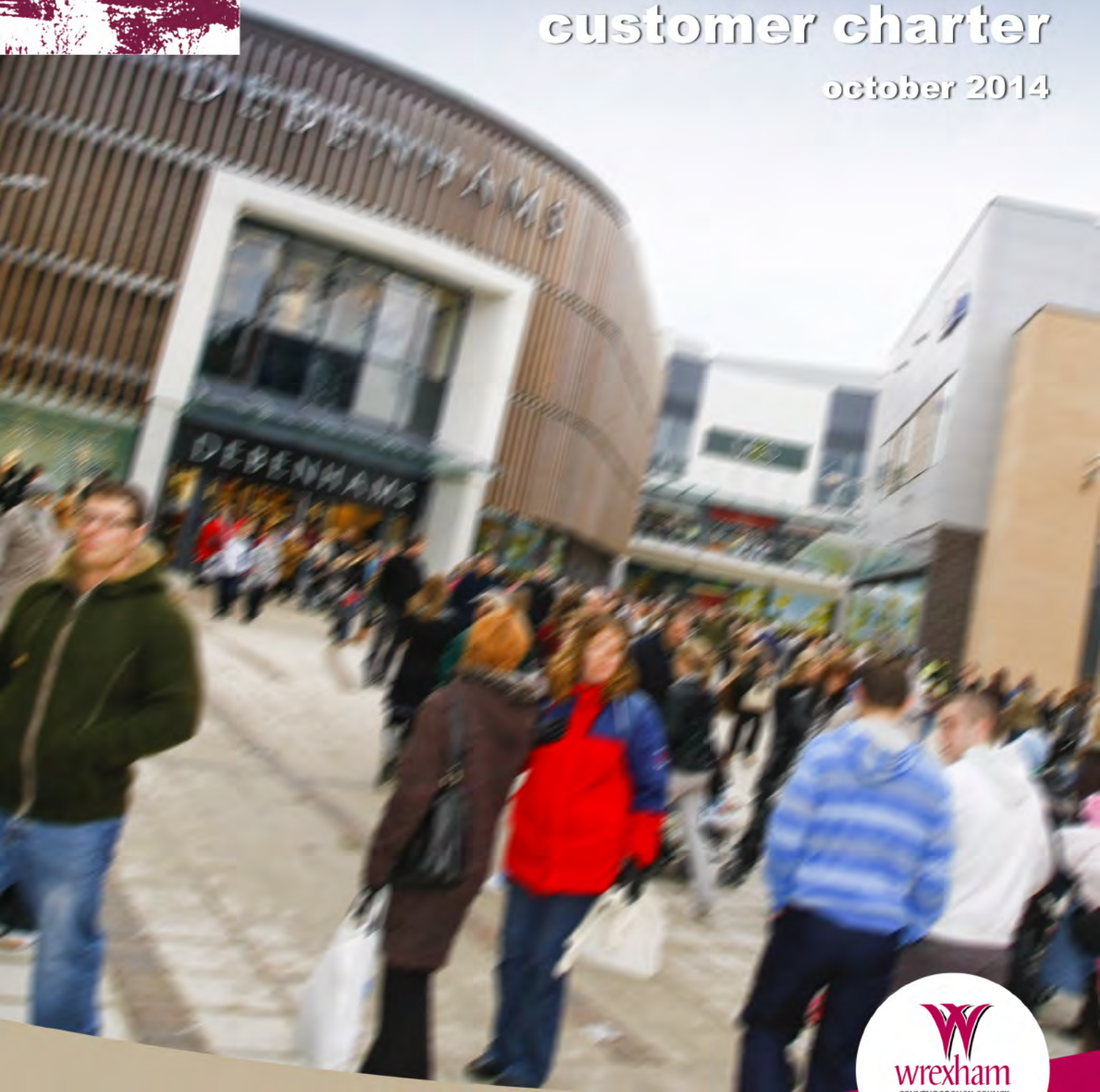




# wrexham planning service

## customer charter

october 2014



# **Community Wellbeing and Development Planning Service Customer Charter October 2014**

## **The Planning Service**

Planning is about how people make decisions about the future of our towns, villages and countryside. When someone wants to extend a house or develop a shopping centre the Planning Service at the Council is responsible for deciding whether it should go ahead. We also need to protect the natural environment and historic areas for future generations to enjoy.

We want you to be able to take part in discussions about any proposals that may affect you, your family or where you live before any decision is made. We need to make sure that new developments are designed so that everyone can use or benefit from the facilities and that they are built to be energy efficient and safe.

The Planning Service is here to help you to become involved in the following activities:

- find out if you need planning permission
- make a planning application
- apply for building regulations approval
- find out about local development plans
- have your say about new development proposals
- protecting our natural environment
- protecting our historic areas

## **Here to Help You**

This leaflet explains how we are trying to make our service easier for everyone to use including a person with a disability or someone wanting to communicate with us using a language other than English or Welsh. We want to make sure that you can easily understand our information when you contact us and want you to be able to tell us what you think of our service or how it could be improved.

Our aim is to treat people fairly so that everyone will receive the same level of service irrespective of age, disability, gender, race, faith or sexual orientation. We will treat people with respect and when planning new services or developing new policies we will try to consider the needs of all groups of people including those who care for others. We will look at our procedures to check that they are fair and if they are not we will change them.

## **Accessible Information**

We recognise that people have different ways of making their feelings and needs known so we will try and communicate in a way that works best for you and have put in place measures to make our service more accessible.

Information can be supplied in different formats including Braille, large print, computer disk or audio tape. All information is produced in English and Welsh but we can translate information into different languages including British Sign Language (BSL) if asked.

Most information is available on the Council's web site which is Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB) approved. This means that information can be accessed if you are blind or visually impaired using special software.

We are working to improve our electronic services so that you have a choice on how to contact us. You are able to apply for planning permission on-line or ask for information in different formats. You can view the details of any planning application and have your say about a new proposal before a decision is made. We provide links to the Governments Planning Portal which provides all the information you would need to know about planning or building regulations.

The website can be viewed in many European languages, but if you need further help to access or understand our information please let us know.

## **Promoting Equality of Opportunity**

Our aim is to provide a local environment that is well designed and safe. We will promote the practice of inclusive design which will allow everyone to use the facilities and services provided within new developments and are not excluded.

Developers of large schemes are required to show that they have considered the needs of all groups of people when they submit a proposal for planning approval by submitting a Design and Access Statement. Our building inspectors will make sure that new developments are constructed safely and comply with current regulations such as Part M of the Building Regulations which requires access for the disabled.

We will promote equality of opportunity, good race relations and the Welsh language and culture in all our activities.

## **Planning Policy and Guidance**

We try to achieve the right balance between encouraging development which will provide homes, jobs and services for the community and protect the special features of our town, villages and countryside. Our policies and proposals for the development and use of land are explained in the Wrexham Unitary Development Plan which we will use when deciding whether or not development will be allowed.

Local planning guidance notes are available which explain in more detail how our policies are applied and will help you to understand what is needed when submitting an application for approval.

## **Consultation**

After we receive a planning application or before we write a new policy, we will ask people for their comments before a decision is made. We try to include as many people as possible so that no groups or communities are excluded from having their views known, for example, a local disability group are asked to comment on the design of new developments to make sure that we take into account the needs of disabled people.

All new development proposals are available to view at our offices or on the website where comments can be submitted on-line. We will allow enough time for people to comment when we consult. An example is 21 days for you to comment on a proposed development that may affect you or where you live.

Comments that are of a racist nature or could offend or insult anyone will not be accepted and we have procedures in place to deal with these comments. Please note that comments made about a proposed development form part of the case file and can be viewed by members of the public at our office.

We are currently preparing a new Development Plan to replace the existing Plan which will give everyone the chance to submit ideas about the way the Borough as a whole or how your community in particular should develop in the future. You will be able to have your say about any new policy that may affect you or where you live. We will help you to understand the process through presentations and workshops in local communities and will make use of the local forums and the Association of Voluntary Organisations in Wrexham for under-represented groups. The Wrexham Local Development Plan includes a Delivery Agreement incorporating a community involvement scheme which outlines who, how and when we will contact you during this process.

We will acknowledge all comments and let you know what has been decided by the Council.

We will regularly ask our customers how they feel about the service they have received from the department. If we are told we should improve our performance in a particular area we will change our procedures to try and make this happen.

## **Dealing with your Planning Application**

We want as many applications to succeed as possible and we can offer advice before you submit your application for approval. We will acknowledge all applications when we receive them unless your application is incomplete when we will help you to make the changes needed.

All planning applications are publicised so that anyone affected by the proposal has a chance to comment before a decision is made. A copy of the application is also sent to the Community Council and we notify your local Councillor. Details of planning applications can be viewed on our website together with useful help and guidance. All planning applications and plans are available to view at our office where someone will be available to give you advice or explain what is proposed more clearly.

Home visits by staff can be arranged on request if you have a severe mobility restriction.

We will acknowledge receipt of any comments made in support or to oppose an application and we will carefully consider them before a decision is made. If we cannot agree with the points made and cannot negotiate a solution with the applicant, the application will be referred to the Council's Planning Committee for a decision. You may be able to speak to the Planning Committee to explain your point of view before they make a decision. We will let you know how this can be arranged.

We will inform you of our decision and clearly explain whether your application has been approved together with any conditions or we will give a clear reason why the application has been refused. Details of any right to appeal will be included.

## **Building Regulations**

Our aim is to provide a healthy and safe built environment which is energy efficient and accessible to everyone. We will help you to understand what is needed to build your project to satisfy the Building Regulations. Our staff will visit your site, maintain detailed records of your work and provide you with a Building Regulation Completion Certificate when you finish your project. We offer a tailored service to meet the demands of large development schemes.

## **Protecting Our Environment**

We have put measures in place to protect and enhance our local environment such as Tree Preservation Orders, Conservation Area Enhancement Schemes or Biodiversity Action Plans. We will investigate all threats to trees, hedgerows, endangered wildlife, habitats or listed buildings and take action to prevent harm. Advice is available to help you with a planning application and we produce a range of guidance notes to help you understand our natural and built environment.

## **Customer Comments, Compliments and Complaints**

We are committed to Customer Care and want to know if you have comment to make about our service. We have put in place an effective procedure which deals with customer comments, compliments and complaints and use them in a positive way to improve our service.

If you wish to make a complaint we have put in place measures so that it will be dealt with effectively and efficiently. It will be acknowledged within 5 working days of us receiving it and you should receive a full written response within 20 working days. If the complaint is likely to take longer than 20 working days to resolve, the reason for the delay will be explained to you and regular progress reports made until a final response is given.

If you are not happy with our response or have not received a written response, you can take your complaint to the next stage of our Complaints Procedure which we will send to you on request. This will be an independent review conducted by the Corporate Complaints Officer.

We would also like to hear from you if:

- you have any suggestions on how we can improve our services
- you have any difficulty using any of our services
- you would like to compliment us for doing something well.

## **Planning Enforcement**

We will investigate complaints made by you about a development or activities that have not had permission or are considered harmful to the community. We aim to strike the right balance between the rights of people to enjoy their property with those of their neighbours and the community to have a decent place to live. We will act in the public interest but are not able to intervene in private disputes between individuals or when activities do not break planning laws. We will try to reach solutions to control unauthorised activities and development by negotiation rather than serving legal notices but will do this as a last resort.

The planning enforcement system is controlled by a complicated legal framework. Quite often we are unable to control the time it takes to resolve cases. Where the deadlines are within our control, we are committed to meeting them efficiently.

All complaints will be registered, although the information will be kept confidential and not for public inspection. Your identity will not be revealed. Where an anonymous complaint is received our investigations will be limited. Unless a visit reveals clear evidence of a breach of planning control the investigation will be terminated at that point.

If your complaint requires a site visit, we aim to do this within 5 working days. If our investigations suggest that there may be a breach of control, we will write to the owner/occupier of the land within 10 working days. The letter will explain what appears to be wrong and the action that we intend to take. If there is any doubt about the facts of the case we may send a letter requesting further information. This will explain what information is needed and the time for reply. Except where there is an overriding amenity concern, we will give 28 days for the owner/occupier to respond. This may be to remedy what is wrong or apply for planning permission. We will send one reminder allowing a further 7 days to respond and then action may be taken that is proportionate to the unauthorised activity or development.

We aim to resolve 75% of investigations within 12 weeks. This will allow for detailed negotiations, which is a requirement of the guidance published by the National Assembly for Wales. In straight forward matters we aim to resolve 40% within two weeks of receipt of the allegations. We try to keep complainants informed of our investigations.

## **Payments**

Payment is required for Planning and Building Control applications. The amount will vary depending on the size of your development and is set by the Welsh Assembly Government. The Unitary Development Plan is available as a full printed document or in small community extracts based on where you live and the price varies depending on what you require. Most of our information is available on the website to view or download free of charge.

All our charges are displayed on the website and are sent to you when you request an application form. We will accept many methods of payment or you can make secure payments on-line when you submit an application through our website.

## **Data Protection and Information**

We will protect personal information from disclosure under our data protection policy but please note that when you apply for planning permission your application becomes part of a public register that can be viewed by the public at our offices. When we publish planning applications on our website as part of our consultation we will remove personal details like your telephone number and signature.

We will try to publish as much information as possible about our activities but have put measures in place to meet requests for additional information.

## **Staff Training and Awareness**

From time to time it is important that we check that our aim to treat people fairly is being met. Your co-operation is needed when we conduct our monitoring exercises so that we can gain a better understanding of our customers which will help to improve the service for you.

All our staff have been trained to respond to the different needs of people who use our service, for example, by explaining some of our information or procedures more clearly so that you can understand.

## **Response Times**

Our aim is to respond to requests for a service or information efficiently and effectively and have put in place measures to help this happen, for example, we will acknowledge a valid planning application within 3 working days or make a decision on the majority of planning applications within 8 weeks.

We will acknowledge all letters within 5 working days of receipt and will try to give the majority (90%) of enquiries a full response within 20 working days of receipt.

We will try to answer most (80%) telephone calls within 15 seconds and improve on our percentage of calls abandoned.

## **Visiting Our Offices**

We have tried to make our offices as accessible as possible for everyone including wheelchair users. Staff in Contact Wrexham will be pleased to provide any help you may need.



There is a hearing loop fitted in Contact Wrexham that may help if you have hearing difficulties or we can arrange a meeting with an interpreter present if you can give us some notice. Staff also have access to the Big Word (a national translation service) if you wish to talk to someone in your own language.

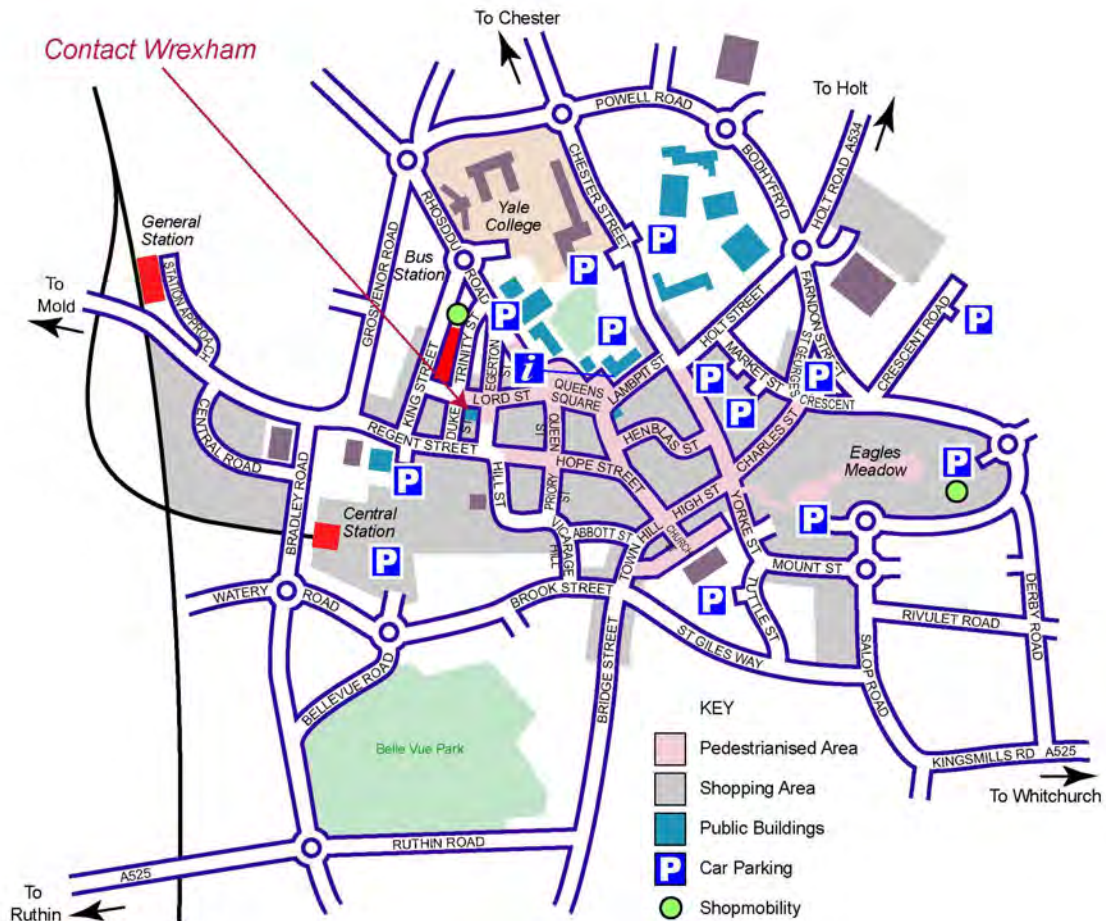
We also have a self service area where there will be provision for you to have full internet access (if you are a library member) with space for a wheel chair and use of an alternative keyboard/mouse which may help if you have a disability.

Our office is located at:

- **Contact Wrexham, 16 Lord Street, Wrexham LL11 1LG**

Our office opening times are Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday 9.00 am to 4.30 pm. Thursday 10:30 am to 5:30pm. If the opening hours prevent you accessing our service, please contact us to see if different arrangements can be made.

To protect your health smoking is not allowed in any Council building.



## How to Contact Us

If you have any suggestions on how we can improve our service or you would like more information in a format that suits you, please contact us at the address below:

- Head of Community Wellbeing and Development  
Wrexham County Borough Council  
16 Lord Street, Wrexham LL11 1LG
- Telephone: 01978 298994
- E-mail: [planning@wrexham.gov.uk](mailto:planning@wrexham.gov.uk)
- Website: [www.wrexham.gov.uk/planning](http://www.wrexham.gov.uk/planning)

Deaf or hard of hearing customers can also contact the department direct by phone using the BT Typetalk relay service - Simply dial 018001 followed by 01978 292016. Alternatively textphone users can contact the main switchboard using the minicom number - 01978 292130.

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This leaflet is available in accessible formats. Please phone 01978 298994 for information.

October 2014

## **Adopted Guidelines**

Wrexham Unitary Development Plan  
Supplementary Planning Guidance Notes  
Local Development Plan - Timetable, Community Involvement Scheme  
Complaints Policy  
Freedom of Information Policy  
Welsh Language Policy  
Strategic Equality Plan

## **Recognised Good Practice**

Planning, Building, Streets and Disability Equality (DRA)  
Principles of Inclusive Design (CABE)  
Design and Access Statements (CABE)  
Code of Practice (RTPI)