

Committee: **AUDIT AND REVIEW**
Date: **27 June 2008**

Report: **SURVEY OF CONSULTEES, NEIGHBOURS, PARISH
COUNCILS/MEETINGS 2007/08**

Purpose of the report

1. To advise Members of the results of the survey.

Strategic Planning Framework

2. The information and recommendation(s) contained in this report are consistent with the Authority's statutory purposes and its approved strategic planning framework:

- **Best Value Performance Plan objectives**
'Provide a helpful & responsive Development Control service'

Background

3. In 2006/07 the Authority carried out its 3 yearly survey of planning applicants in accordance with the requirements of national performance indicator BVPI 111. This showed that 86.44% of applicants were either satisfied or very satisfied with the service that they had received from us. This was reported to A&R in August 2007.
4. In considering that survey Members asked that a survey be carried out to gauge levels of satisfaction with the service offered to those consulted on planning applications, including parish councils/meetings and neighbours.
5. In October / November 2007 a questionnaire was sent to all 85 parish councils/meetings, to 23 regular consultees, and to neighbours who had commented on applications within the survey period. The questionnaire was based on that used for applicants in as far as was possible.
6. 45 replies were received giving a response rate of 41%. The response rate among parish councils/meetings was 40%. A number of parish clerks combined their own experiences with those of their organisation. The results can be found in the attached Appendix 1 (percentages have been rounded to whole numbers)
7. 71% of respondents were either very satisfied or fairly satisfied with the service provided by YDNPA. Only 5%, 2 respondents, were fairly dissatisfied as shown below.

8. This represents a lower percentage satisfied than applicants. However, the percentage dissatisfied is also lower, 10% of applicants were in this category. The higher proportion of respondents with a neutral view probably reflects their more detached role within the Planning system.

9. Of the other findings only 2%, one respondent, had had difficulty finding out about an application they were interested in, and only 2% felt they had not received sufficient help. Given the varying needs of users of the service these are seen as encouraging results.

10. The most negative response was 11% of respondents who did not feel that they understood the reasons for the decision. All consultees, including parish councils/meetings receive copies of decision notices, which state the reasons for approval or refusal. Under the circumstances, it is not clear whether this response indicates that the stated reasons are not sufficiently informative or that the respondent did not accept them as justifying the decision.

11. The questionnaire also asked respondents for their views on whether elements of the service had got better or worse over the last three years. 'The fairness with which views were dealt with' was the only one of these which more people thought had got worse rather than better, although a large majority saw no appreciable change. In respect of every other element, more people saw improvement than a worsening of service. The biggest improvement was perceived to be in the advice and help received, with all respondents feeling that this had got better or remained consistent.

Conclusion

12. The last two years have been difficult for the Development Control service, with persistent staff vacancies coinciding with a high workload. Under the circumstances, the generally positive feedback received from respondents indicates that service to the public has been maintained despite these difficulties.

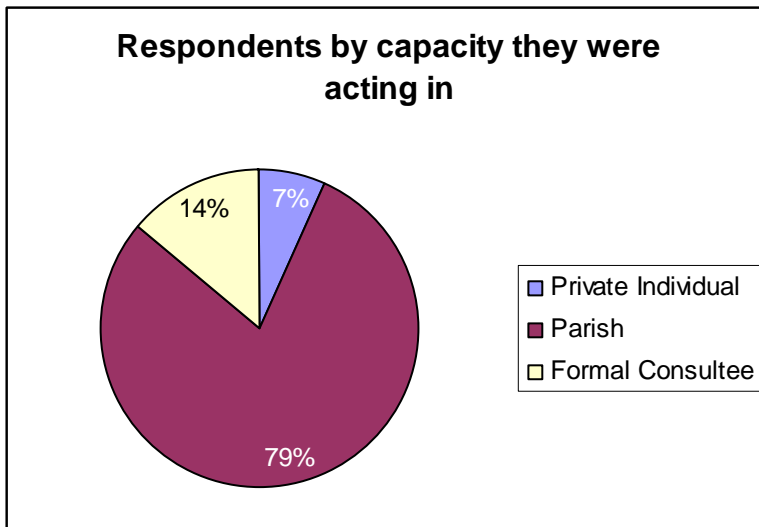
RECOMMENDATION

13. That Members note the survey results.

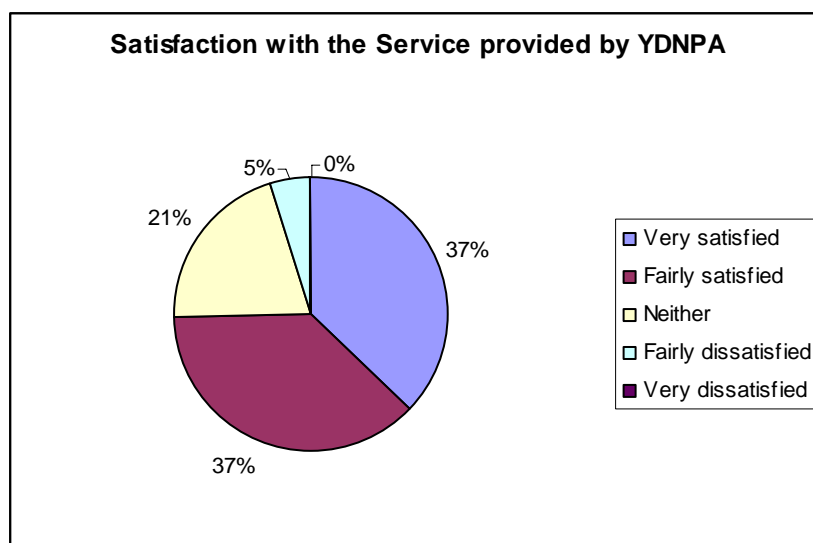
Peter Watson
Head of Planning
15 April 2008

Background documents: Survey questionnaire 2007/08

Survey of Consultees, Neighbours, Parish Councils/Meetings 2007/08



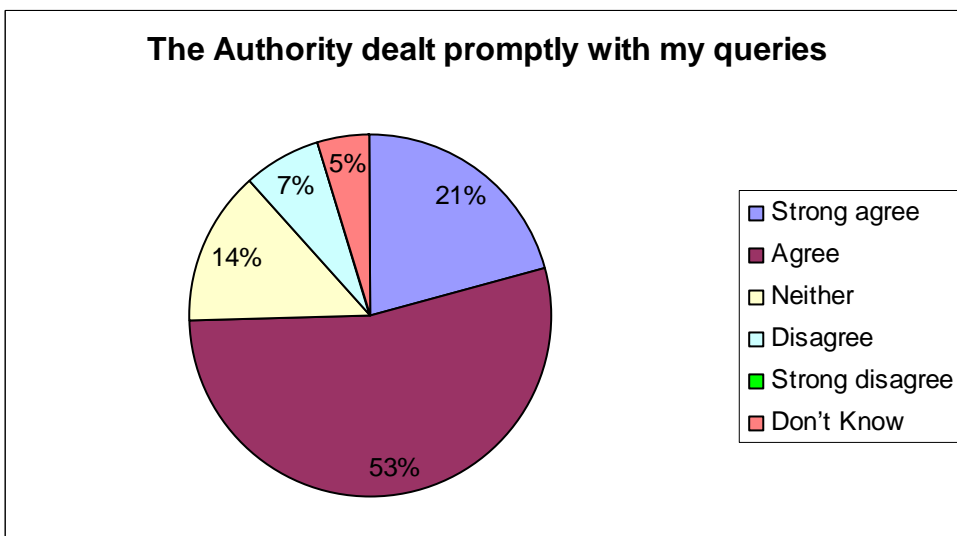
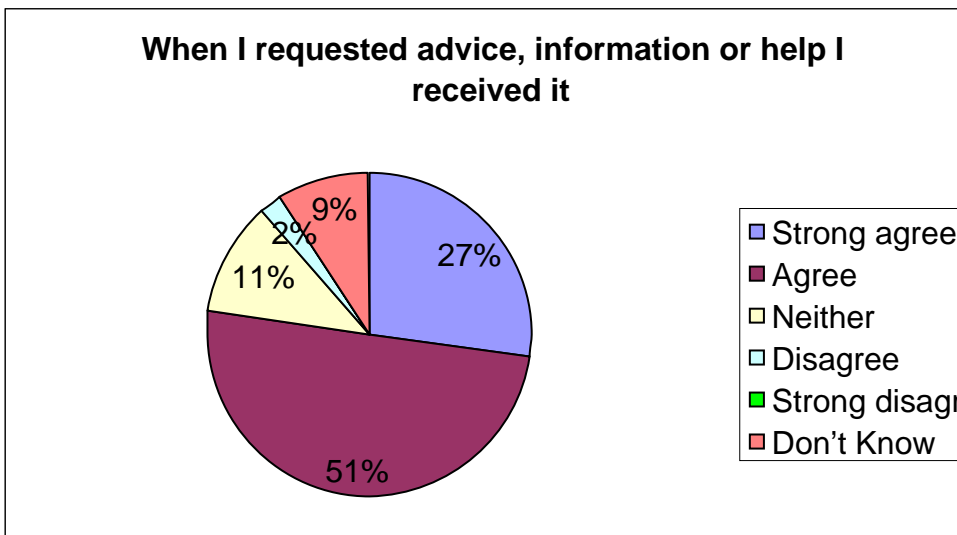
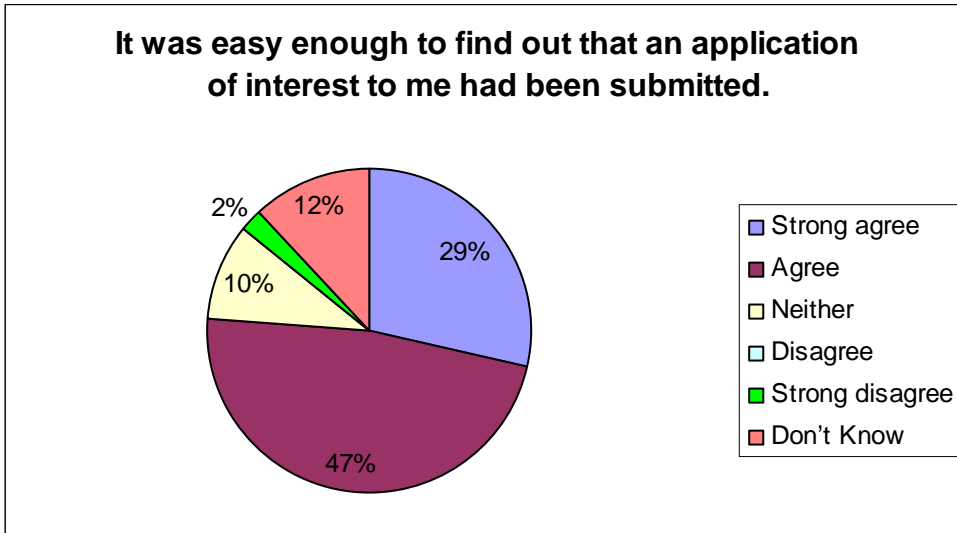
71% of respondents were either very satisfied or fairly satisfied with the service provided by YDNPA. Only 5%, 2 respondents, were fairly dissatisfied as shown below.



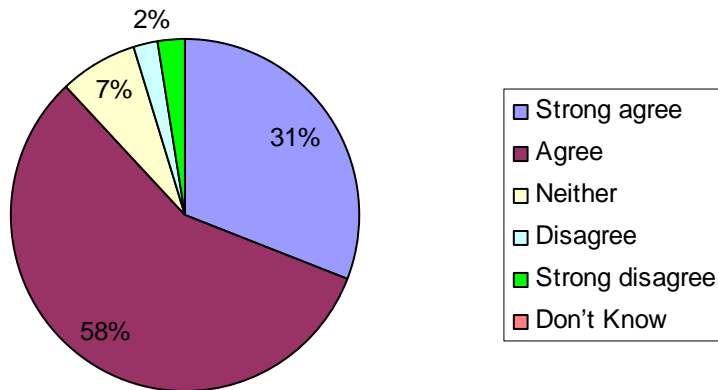
The majority of respondents 89% found out about the planning application as they received a letter, of the others 2 found the details on the internet and one from the weekly list that the Planning Support Officer sends out.

78% of respondents were aware that they could view planning applications on the internet. Of these 37% have used this service.

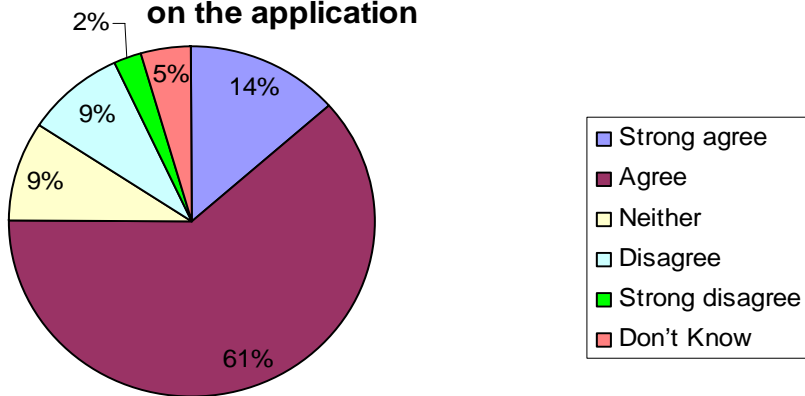
The following pie charts show the experience of the respondents in their dealings with the Authority.



The Authority informed me about the outcome of application(s)

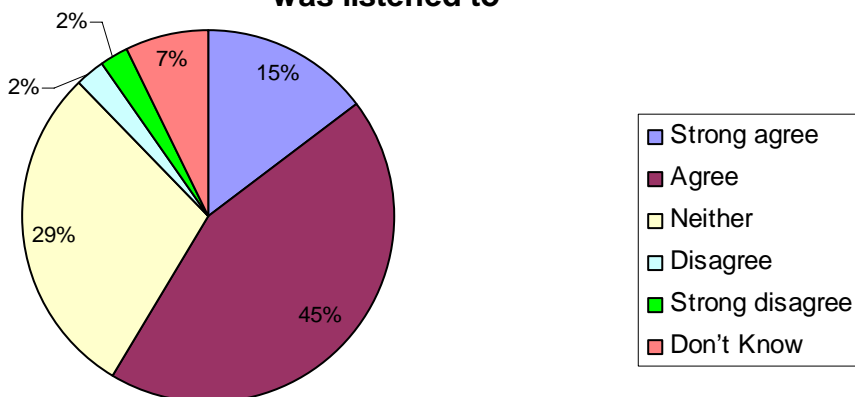


I understand the reasons for the decision made on the application



This question received the highest negative response 11%

I felt that I was treated fairly and that my viewpoint was listened to



This question received the lowest positive response 60%

In general it was felt by most respondents that the service offered had improved or stayed the same over the last three years. The table below shows the percent responses for each question. (Rounded to nearest whole number)

	Better	Same	Worse	Don't know
The ease of finding out if an application has been submitted	18	65	3	15
The advice information and help provided	24	62	0	15
The promptness with which queries are dealt with	15	68	6	12
The information provided on the outcome of the application	18	71	3	9
The clarity of the reasons for the decision given	12	67	9	12
The fairness with which my views were dealt with and my viewpoint listened to	3	72	13	13

One of the main comments made was that Parish councils in particular find it difficult to respond within 21 days due to the timing of their meetings and the time taken to receive the details in the first place.

All the individual comments are included below.

Decisions of the committee are sometimes arbitrary and inconsistent which leads to accusations of bias

The website does not help Highway Authority as we cannot be expected to view every application to determine whether we need to be consulted

I find that I cannot download the planning applications on my computer - your programme isn't compatible to mine (Vista) (Microsoft). I therefore have to ring you to ask for a paper copy to be sent, which is time consuming and annoying - don't know why this happens. Also, the old telephone exchange on the A59 is having some work done on it, but the parish has not been notified

Sometimes experience difficulty in responding within timescale requested

As Chairman of Burnsall PM I am always informed about planning applications in the Parish, and asked to comment, which I always do. My only moans would be that later variations to the plans are not always notified to me, although they are sometimes quite significant, and on occasions I have not been informed of the outcome of applications, but generally the system seems to work well.

Only been dealing with you since July - but have found your service prompt and responsive

Only been dealing with authority for 10 months as Parish Clerk. Our main problem as a very small parish council is to consult councillors. Whilst difficult it would be good if parish councillors could be e-mailed about applications in their parish.

As a Parish we have not applied. As part of Chatsworth Estate all applications are made by them and copies sent for our approval.

Get data base up to date throughout your offices

All but one of the decisions has been in agreement with the views of the Calton Parish Meeting but I have no idea whether the parish views influenced the decisions. The exception was the replacement conservatory at Newfield Hall, to which some parish members objected strongly. No explanation was given on why the application was approved.

I am a new parish clerk so have only dealt with 1 application response so far. Looking at decision notices of some planning applications on the website, this doesn't always work. The location maps for some sites are to a small scale and for the rural locations it is hard to distinguish where the site is. The quality of the photocopied maps could be better.

The Council had not always been convinced that, on the odd occasion when it has commented, the views have been taken into consideration. However, on the whole the council appreciates the time and effort taken by the Authority to respond to its concerns.

Would like to get a full 21 days to respond. By the time the letter has arrived, often 4/5 days have elapsed.

Please may I make the following comments about Planning Committee Agendas? I am sure they do the job but they look very complicated, boring and uninteresting, nor are they interestingly clear - a big turn-off in other words! Sorry about this but I have thought this for a very long time and I get them for Clapham-cum-Newby and Stamford too?

We as a Parish Council can often get notification of a planning application the week of a meeting and as we will not meet for a further 4 weeks responding within 21 days can be difficult. I will in future look at www.yorkshiredales.org.uk frequently.

I respond for Ramblers' Association. However, the papers that I get often do not have information about footpath matters; eg S/03/74A Decision has a condition on the footpath but none of the plans have this information.

The YDNP planners appear to follow the Local and Structure Plans very rigidly. Situations vary and using one's own judgment and common sense would be appreciated and earn respect. It is easy to say everything is black or white but it isn't.

NYCC - Highways Dept.

As a parish council, Councillors feel their views and local knowledge are sometimes discounted. As a Clerk I find the planning department are always helpful and polite.

I was not informed as the next door neighbour that a planning application had been submitted verbally or in writing. There wasn't a notice put up anywhere so the effect that a planning application had been submitted to the YDNP planning office. This practice ... (lengthy response see form)