Department for
Communities and
Local Government

The Householder Development

Consents Review

Appendix 2

Survey of Applicants and Neighbours

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Survey of Applicants and Neighbours

Preface

Popular anecdote has established an impression that arrangements for processing householder planning applications are bureaucratic and difficult to use. The Householder Development Consents Review Steering Group wanted to know whether this impression really fits with the experience of users and if it does, where they perceive the main problems lie.

To redress this situation, HDCR commissioned MORI to interview householder applicants and neighbours who had been notified of householder applications to gather information about their experiences.

This is MORI's report to the Review. Formally, it forms an appendix to the main report but it is published in web-based format only.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1.1 Background

MORI was commissioned by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) to undertake a survey of planning applicants and neighbours (from 2004 applications) to measure perceptions of the planning system with a view to informing planned revisions to the existing regime as part of the Householder Development Consents Review (HDCR).

The project is made up of two research studies – one with planning applicants and one with neighbours of planning applicants – and follows an initial study[1] which set out to identify and better understand the range of householder developments taking place across the country and then to define and categorise the associated impacts. In order to allow comparisons and links to be developed, both studies cover the same eight case study areas, selected to be representative of the broad type of local authority areas and dwelling stock as well as location and size.

1.2 Applicants' Study

- 1,000 18 minute interviews with planning applicants (from 2004) conducted by telephone using CATI (Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing) between 17 August and 9 September 2005.

- Sample randomly selected and stratified across eight case study areas: Bath and North East Somerset, Birmingham, Harrow, Leeds, Oldham, Swindon and Telford and Wrekin and West Dorset

1.3 Neighbours' Study

- 320 15 minute face-to-face, in-home interviews with neighbours of planning applicants (from 2004) conducted between 16 August and 16 September 2005

- Sample clusters selected across six case study areas: Bath and North East Somerset, Birmingham, Harrow, Leeds, Oldham, Swindon

- Interviewing maximum of two neighbours per selected applicant address (not directly matched to the applicants' survey)

1 Appendix 1 Making the System More Proportionate, Les Sparks and Emrys Jones (January 2006)

1.4 Sampling and Questionnaire

The sample was provided by the eight case study local planning authorities. MORI undertook an extensive coding exercise to standardise c.15,500 application records from all eight areas to 10 typologies developed by ODPM. Where possible, missing telephone numbers were matched into the sample by an electronic and manual matching exercise.

Questionnaires were drafted by MORI and reviewed by the core ODPM team, with wider contributions from other key staff.

1.5 Data Analysis

Data are weighted so that each case study area makes up an equal proportion of the overall sample size.

The achieved sample, based on descriptions submitted in the original planning application, is broadly similar in terms of development type, retrospective applications and outcome, to the population provided. A profile of the sample is appended.

1.6 Interpretation of Data

As a sample, not the entire population of applicants or neighbours has been interviewed, all findings are subject to sampling tolerances, and not all differences are statistically significant. A guide to statistical reliability is appended.

It is worth noting that the survey deals with respondent perceptions rather than facts. In particular, these perceptions may not reflect the actual quality of the service provided by each local planning authority.

Where results do not sum to 100, this may be due to computer rounding, multiple responses or the exclusion of don't know/not stated responses.

1.7 Publication of Data

As with all our studies, these findings are subject to MORI's standard Terms & Conditions of Contract. Any press release or publication of the findings of this survey requires the advance approval of MORI. Such approval will only be refused on the grounds of inaccuracy or misrepresentation.

<div align="right">

MORI/25721
Bobby Duffy
Rachel Williams
Beccy Maeso
Matt Williams
Julia Pye

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CHAPTER 2

Summary

Applicants are generally positive about the planning process and their dealings with the local planning authority. However, it is clear that the outcome of the application has a major impact on this, for example, overall 77% of applicants are satisfied with the service provided, falling to 25% among those who were unsuccessful.

However, while applicants are generally happy the research does, to some extent, support the current perception that the process is confusing and complex. For example, applicants and neighbours are in agreement that it is unclear what can be done without planning permission, that the process is bureaucratic and that it is too complex for small scale householder developments – all issues being addressed by the Review.

Levels of awareness of the system are not high, particularly considering the fact that contact for these applicants is relatively recent. However, this appears related to the fact that the majority used an agent to submit their plans (78%), which means that they are shielded from having to understand the system in detail themselves. In fact, reflecting views on the complexity of the system, 80% say an agents help is vital.

Further, engagement among applicants who have had objections or permission refused is higher as they have been more forcibly bought into contact. One result of this is that those who know more about the system are less likely to be satisfied with the service provided and are less favourable towards the system in general. This is in direct contrast to the vast majority of our reputation work, which suggests that greater contact with and understanding of an organisation are key drivers of satisfaction. Clearly, the nature of contact is key here.

It should be noted that low levels of engagement among the public (neighbours and applicants) is not necessarily a problem – some may feel they just do not need to understand the process particularly if there are agents who can bridge the gap and provide expertise for them. Clearly, differing levels of expertise and understanding among agents may be an issue, but this also suggests that agents are a very important group to include in the Review as to many householders they are the "face" of the process.

So while a more transparent system may make it easier for the public to engage with the planning process, it may be that this is not required given their reliance on agents and the fact that for most people it is something they will only come across once or twice in a lifetime but equally there could be dangers in putting such an emphasis on the role of agents not least in making the process more exclusive – perhaps an issue for the Review.

Awareness and use of online facilities are currently relatively low, with very few saying they used the 'Planning Portal' or their local council's website to download the application form. However, there is evidence to suggest that online resources are likely to become more popular with around three in five applicants saying they would have used the Planning Portal if they were aware of it.

CHAPTER 3

Profile of applications

3.1 Application type

- The most common types of development, according to *applicants'* definitions were extensions, predominantly two-storey side and single-storey rear extensions, along with conservatories.

- *Neighbours'* descriptions are broadly similar, although they are more likely to cite side extensions, both two-storey and single-storey.

TYPE OF APPLICATION

Q5 *Please can you tell me the type of development/s for which a planning application was submitted in the last year? (Applicants)*

Q6 *And taking your answer from this card, can you tell me what type of development was undertaken or proposed? (Neighbours)*
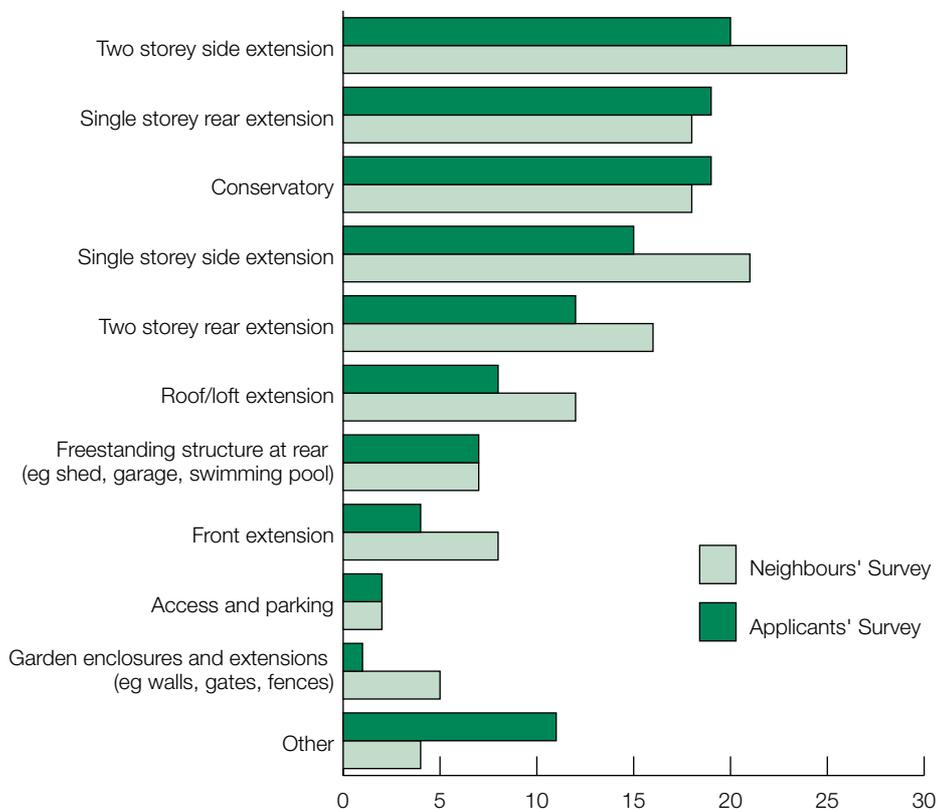
Base: All planning applicants (1,000), Aug-Sep 2005
Base: All neighbours (320), Aug-Sep 2005

Source: MORI

3.2 Outcome of Application

- Overall, according to applicants, 87% of applications were approved, with the majority of these plans going ahead or already completed (66%).

- Around one fifth have been approved but the development has not yet happened (21%). Applicants planning two-storey extensions (25%) as well as those who anticipated at least a fair amount of objections from neighbours (30%) are more likely to have not developed even though their plans were successful.
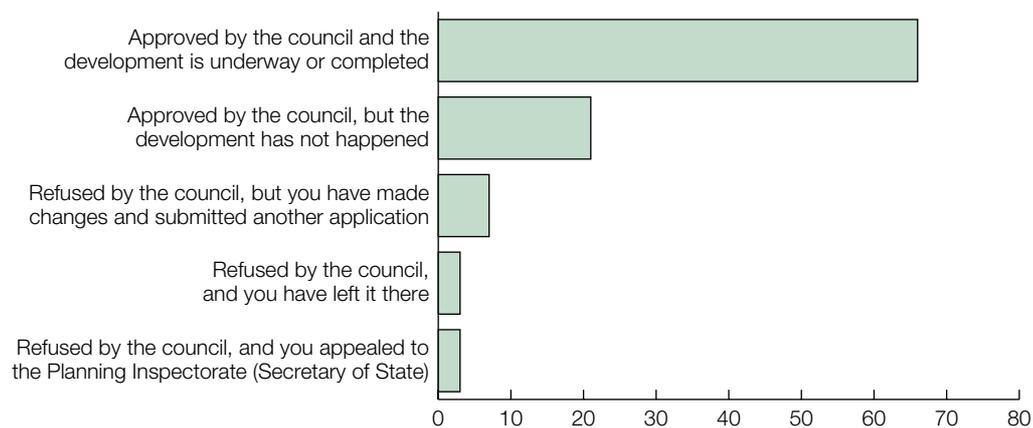
- One in eight applicants were refused permission to develop (13%), with around half of these having made changes to their plans and submitted a new application (7%).

OUTCOME OF APPLICATION

Q8 *What happened to your (most recent) application? Was it . . .*

Base: All planning applicants (1000), Aug-Sep 05   Source: MORI

3.3 Agents

- The majority of applicants used an agent, such as an architect, surveyor or building contractor, to submit their plans to the council (78%). As we would expect, use of an agent is particularly likely amongst those who say they do not know very much about the planning system (84%). And there is a suggestion that for larger and perhaps more complicated developments, for example two-storey extensions, an agent is more likely to be employed (86%).

USE OF AN AGENT

Q6 *Did an agent submit the plans for your (most recent) development to the council for you?*
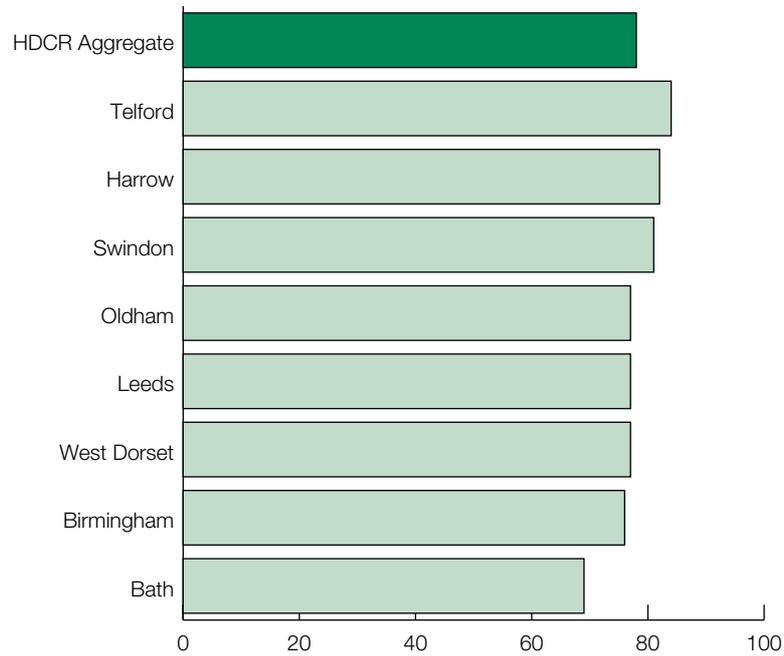
Base: All planning applicants (1000), Aug-Sep 05   Source: MORI

- For many applicants their use of an agent directly affects the way they view the system. For example, these are their key source of information about the process and in many ways their "front line" of contact, as the agent deals with any queries and paperwork for them. For example, over half say their agent completed the original application form.

CHAPTER 4

Views of the planning system

4.1 Awareness

- Awareness of the planning system is not particularly great among recent planning applicants; while around three in five say they know at least a fair amount about the householder development process (57%), just 10% say they know a great deal. Two in five applicants feel they know either not very much or nothing at all about the process (43%).
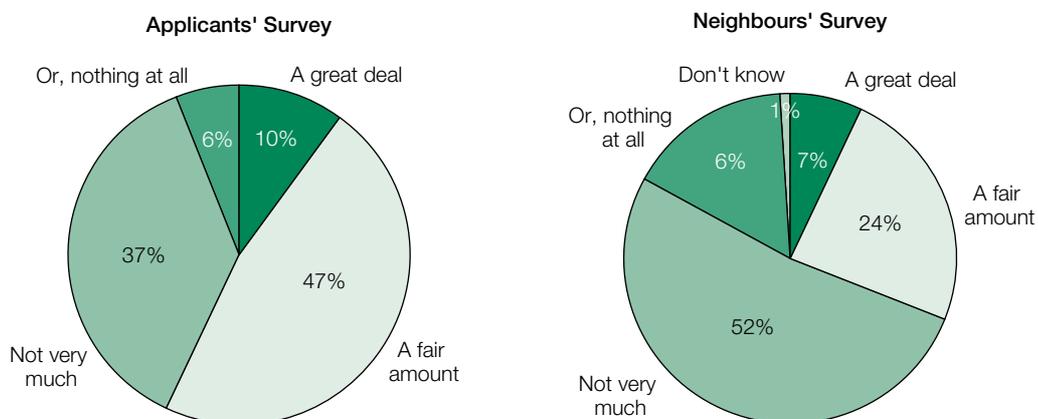
- However, almost all (90%) say they were aware that planning permission was necessary for the work they did or were thinking of doing to their home. Although still high, fewer (74%) were aware that other consents may have been necessary such as building regulations, tree preservation or conservation area consent.

- As we would expect, knowledge of the planning system is lower among neighbours, who are less likely to have had direct personal experience. Seven in ten neighbours say they know little or nothing about the planning system (68%). Only three in ten neighbours (31%) feel they know a fair amount or great deal about the system.

PLANNING SYSTEM – AWARENESS

Q3/7 *And how much would you say you know about the system for handling householder developments, such as planning permission and building regulations, generally? Would you say you know . . .*

Applicants' Survey

Or, nothing at all	A great deal
6%	10%
37%	47%
Not very much	A fair amount

Neighbours' Survey

Don't know	A great deal
Or, nothing at all	1%
6%	7%
52%	24%
Not very much	A fair amount

Base: All planning applicants (1000), Aug-Sep 05
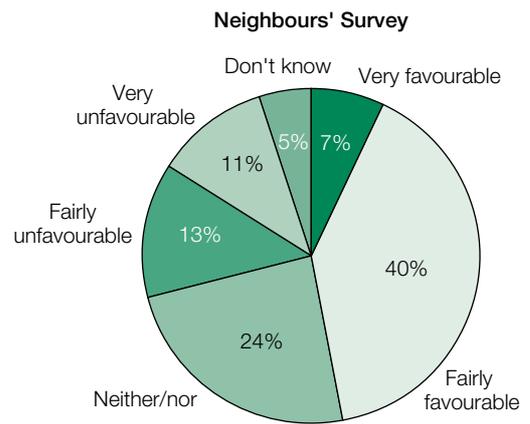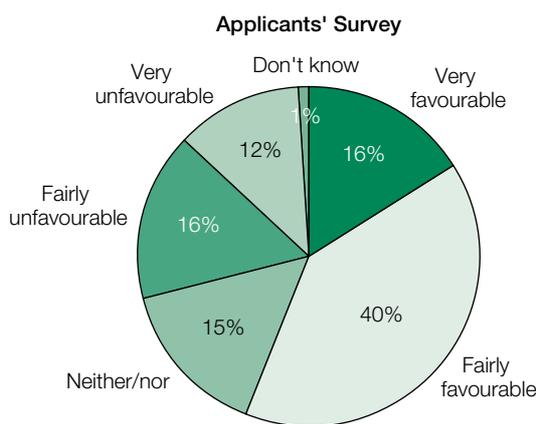Base: All neighbours (320), Aug-Sep 05

Source: MORI

- Again, it is not surprising that those who have had greater involvement in the process generally have higher levels of awareness. For example, applicants who anticipated objections from their neighbours as well as those who actually received objections via the council are more likely to know more about the system (68% and 66% respectively). In contrast, those who used an agent are less likely to say they know about the system (53%).

4.2 Favourability

- On balance, recent planning applicants are fairly positive about the system for handling householder developments; just under three in five say they view the system favourably (56%), while half as many have an unfavourable opinion (28%). Of no surprise, those whose application was approved are more favourable, particularly compared with those refused permission (61% versus 25%).

- Neighbours are also generally positive towards the system, with around twice as many viewing the planning system favourably rather than unfavourably (47% versus 24%). Although neighbours are slightly less favourable than applicants, the difference is largely accounted for by the greater proportion who do not express an opinion (29% say neither/nor or don't know compared with 16% of applicants). Neighbours who objected about a local development are more likely to have negative views (59% say they are unfavourable towards the system).

PLANNING SYSTEM – OVERALL OPINION

Q2/6 *Taking into account everything that you know and may have heard about it, what is your overall opinion of the system for handling householder developments, such as planning permission and building regulations? Would you say your opinion was . . .*

Applicants' Survey

Very unfavourable — Don't know 1% — Very favourable 16% — 12% — Fairly unfavourable 16% — Neither/nor 15% — 40% Fairly favourable

Neighbours' Survey

Very unfavourable — Don't know 5% — Very favourable 7% — 11% — Fairly unfavourable 13% — Neither/nor 24% — 40% Fairly favourable

Base: All planning applicants (1000), Aug-Sep 05
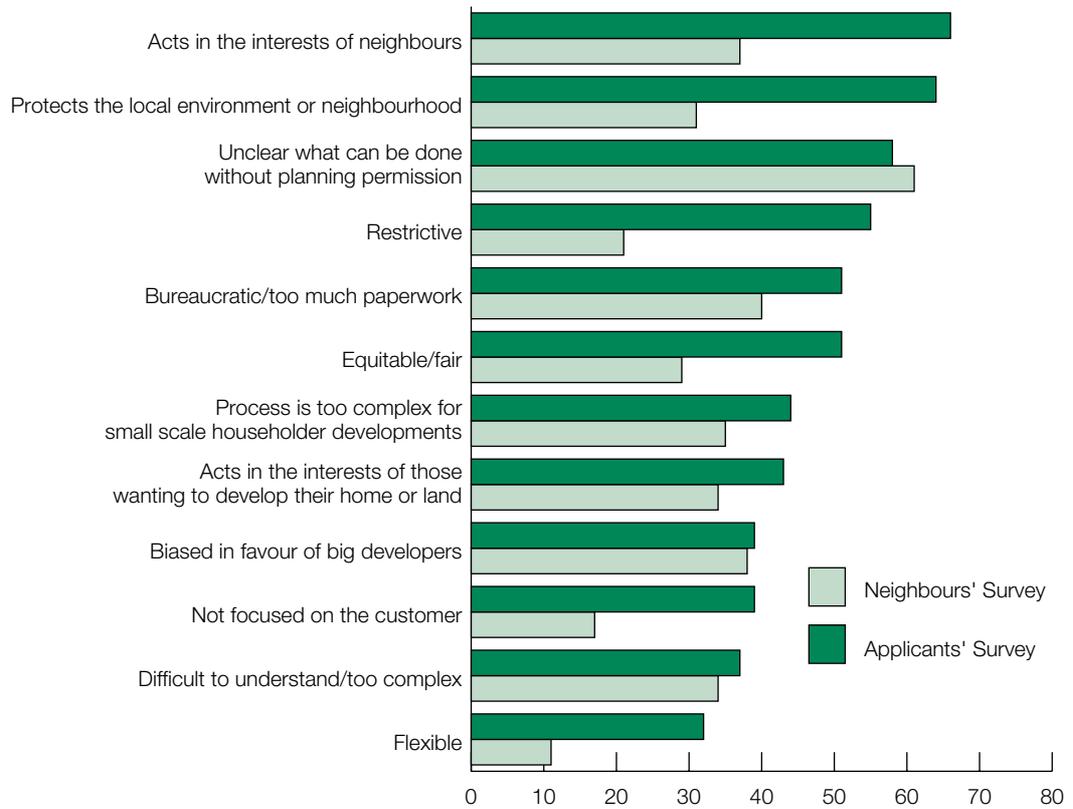Base: All neighbours (320), Aug-Sep 05

Source: MORI

4.3 Attitudes towards the system

- Findings from recent applicants suggest that they feel the system is more likely to **act in the interest of neighbours** than **in the interests of those wanting to develop their home or land** (66% versus 43%). This difference is not as pronounced among neighbours (37% and 34%), and it is notable that significantly fewer would say the system acts in their interest. There are also differences in opinion between the two groups about the process being **restrictive** with applicants over twice as likely to say this as neighbours (55% compared with 21%).

- In line with generally positive views about the system overall, around two thirds of applicants say it **protects the local environment or neighbourhood** (64%) and half feel the system is **fair** (51%).

- However, reinforcing the findings from the first phase of research conducted as part of the HDCR[2], over half of applicants feel it is **unclear what can be done without planning permission** (58%), and that the system is **restrictive** (55%) and too **bureaucratic** (51%). Reinforcing this, just over two in five say the process is **too complex for small scale householder developments**, with slightly fewer saying it is **not focused on the customer** (44% and 39% respectively).

- Among neighbours the most obvious impression of the system is that **it is uncertain what can be done without planning permission** (61%), with a further two in five saying that the process is **bureaucratic and there is too much paperwork** (40%) and a third that it is **too complex for small scale householder developments** and **difficult to understand/too complex** (35% and 34% respectively).

2   Appendix 1 Making the System More Proportionate, Les Sparks and Emrys Jones (January 2006)

PLANNING SYSTEM – VIEWS

Q4/8 *I am going to read out a list of words and phrases that could be used to describe the system for handling local planning and householder developments. I would like you to tell me which, if any, fit your ideas and impression of it.*

Base: All planning applicants (1000), Aug-Sep 05
Base: All neighbours (320), Aug-Sep 05

Source: MORI

● While both applicants and neighbours appear to find the planning process complex, there is some evidence to suggest that the professionals involved are able to provide some clarity. For example, two thirds of applicants (65%) say their agent or the council was able to tell them beforehand whether they needed planning permission. However, even here there would appear to be room for improvement, with one in five (17%) saying they had to draw up plans first.

4.4 Necessity of planning permission

● Reflecting views outlined above, about the system protecting the environment and neighbourhood, the majority of applicants agree that planning permission was necessary, bearing in mind the scale and impact of their proposed development (81% agree).

PLANNING PERMISSION NEEDED

Q16 *Bearing in mind the scale and impact of your proposed development, to what extent do you agree or disagree that planning permission should be necessary? Is that strongly or tend to dis/agree?*
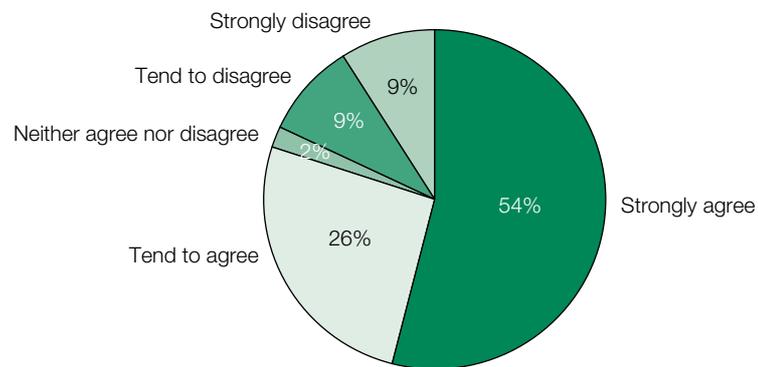
Base: All planning applicants (1000), Aug-Sep 05   Source: MORI

CHAPTER 5

The council and the planning system

5.1 Satisfaction with the service provided by the council

- Most applicants say they are satisfied with the service provided by the council (70%), while around a quarter are dissatisfied (23%), regardless of the outcome. Of those saying they are satisfied, most are fairly rather than very satisfied (40% fairly and 29% very satisfied).

OVERALL SATISFACTION WITH SERVICE

Q7 *Setting aside whether your application was successful or not, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the service provided by the council in handling your application?*
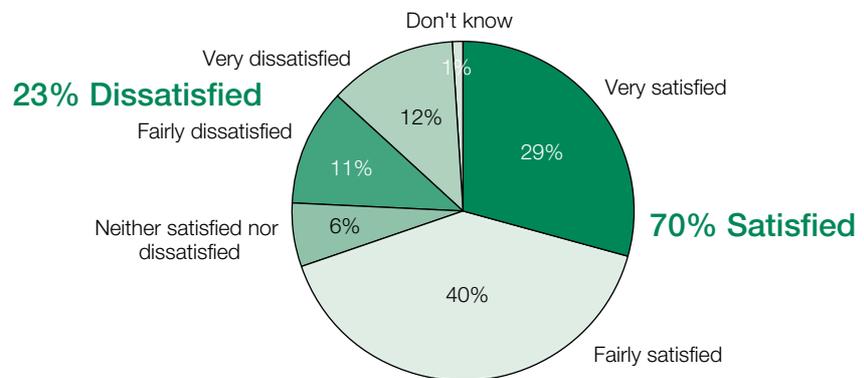
Base: All planning applicants (1000), Aug-Sep 05   Source: MORI

- Looking at the latest Best Value Performance Indicator (BVPI) data for all local authorities in England (2003/04), we can see that overall satisfaction scores with planning departments is very similar, with 74% satisfied across the country as a whole.

OVERALL SATISFACTION – BVPI COMPARISON

| | % Satisfied |

Category	Value
2004 HDCR aggregate	
2003/04 BVPI, England	

Base: All planning applicants (1000), Aug-Sep 05   Source: MORI

● The chart below also places planning services in context with others, including local primary and secondary schools, hospitals, benefits agency, employment service, local bus services, the police, local trains and the local council i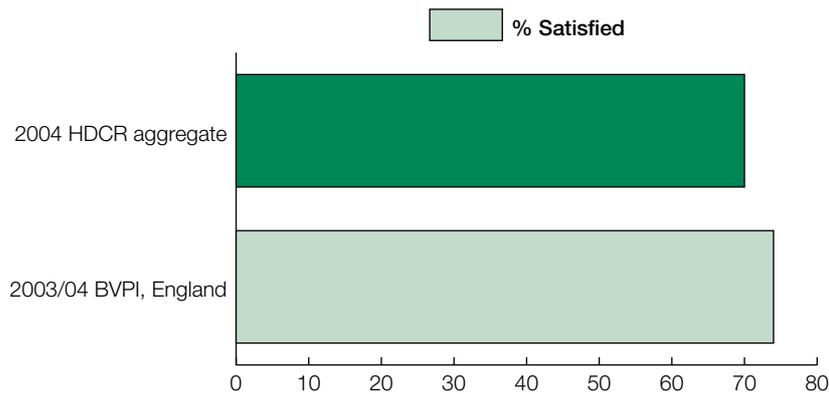n general. These data are taken from 2002 Peoples' Panel findings and while comparisons should be made with caution, given differences in the way these services are delivered and how people come into contact with them, it does show that while the planning system is viewed positively there is room for improvement.

OVERALL SATISFACTION WITH SERVICE – COMPARISONS

Category	Value
Local primary schools	
Local secondary schools	
NHS hospitals	
Planning (HDCR aggregate)	
Benefits agency/DSS	
Employment service	
Local bus services	
Police	
Trains	
Local Council	
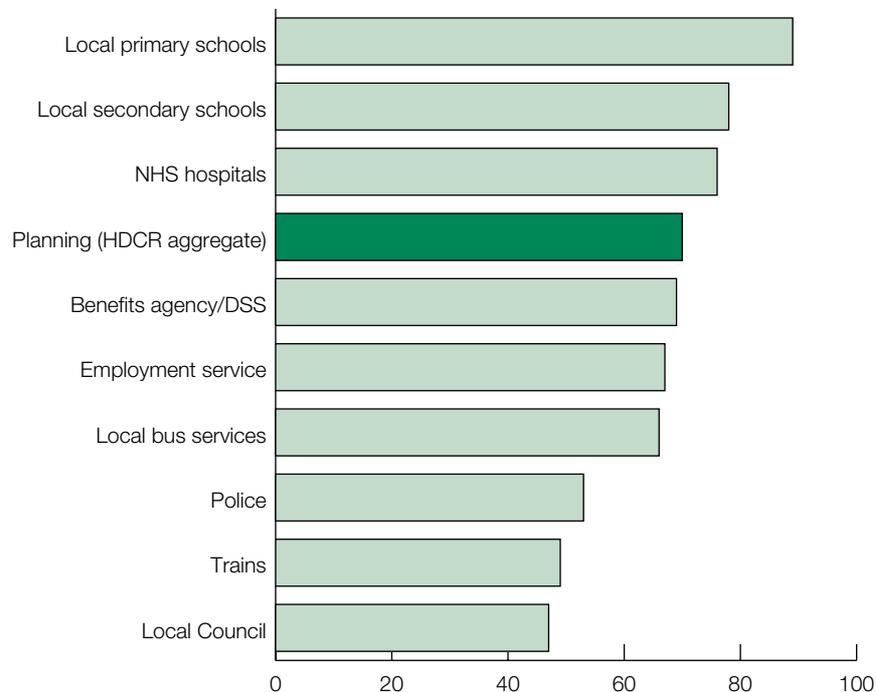
Base: HDCR aggregate figure; All planning applicants (1000), Aug-Sep 05
Note: Comparison data are taken from Peoples' Panel 2002 and are based on all users of services except for 'police' and 'local council' which are based on all.
                                                                    Source: MORI

- As we might expect, there is a close relationship between satisfaction and the outcome of the application, which is particularly evident among those refused permission. Over three-quarters of all successful applicants are satisfied with the service they received (77%) compared with a quarter of those whose application was refused (25%).

- In general, one of the key findings of MORI's reputation research is that familiarity does not typically breed contempt, and, all other things being equal the better known an organisation is the more satisfied people will tend to be with its services. However, in this case, the opposite seems to be true, with applicants who say they know not very much or nothing at all about the planning system more likely to be satisfied with the service than those who know a great deal or fair amount (74% versus 66%). There is a similar relationship with favourability towards the planning process generally – where those who say they know a fair amount about the process are more likely to feel unfavourable towards it.

5.2 Overall performance of the council

- As well as being generally satisfied with the service, most applicants are positive about the overall performance of the council in processing their application (67% say performance is good). Those who had their application refused are less likely to be positive (30% say the council's performance was good, while 48% say it was poor).

OVERALL PERFORMANCE OF THE COUNCIL

Q42 *Regardless of the planning permission outcome, how would you rate the performance of the council in handling and processing your application?*
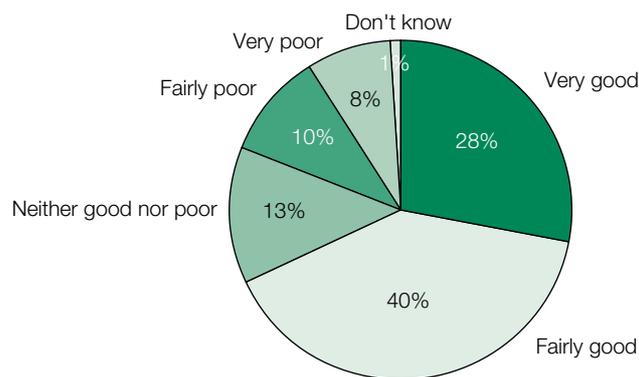

Base: All planning applicants (1000), Aug-Sep 05   Source: MORI

- There is evidence of confidence in the system with the majority of applicants saying they **understand the decisions made about their application** (86%), although this falls to just 48% of those whose application was refused. In fact, as an aside, this group were asked directly whether their council offered them enough guidance and reasons as to why their application was refused and most are negative (73% disagree).

- Around two thirds say they were **treated fairly and their viewpoint was listened to** (68%), with three in five saying that the council's **staff were friendly and helpful** and they **were given the advice and guidance they needed** (both 62%). Slightly fewer say the **council dealt promptly with queries** (58%) and half that the **local planning and building control systems provided a seamless one-stop service**.

- However, the need for an agent in the planning application process is very clear, around four in five say that **an agent's help is vital** (80%), around the same proportion that actually have used an agent.

- A key area for improvement is **keeping applicants informed on progress**, with just a third saying they were kept informed about their application (35%). Related to this around half say they checked on progress with their application once it had been submitted and only a minority say it took longer than they were told to process. These applicants cite workload and staffing issues at the council as well as general concerns with their application.

- Perceived **bureaucracy** of the system is also a concern for half of all applicants (50%). This rises to 57% of those applying for conservatories and 63% of those applying for loft conversions/extensions. Furthermore, 72% of black and minority ethnic applicants say the system is too bureaucratic.

- A quarter of applicants say that using the **planning website or email made the system easier to use** (26%). Awareness and use of online facilities are currently relatively low, generally, with just three per cent saying that they used the 'Planning portal' or the local council's website to download the application form. However, there is evidence to suggest that online resources are likely to become more popular with around three in five applicants saying they would use the Planning Portal if they were aware of it (62%).

THE COUNCIL AND THE PLANNING SYSTEM – STATEMENTS

Q41 *I am going to read out some statements about your experience of the council's handling of your application, and would like you to tell me to what extent to which you agree or disagree with each?*
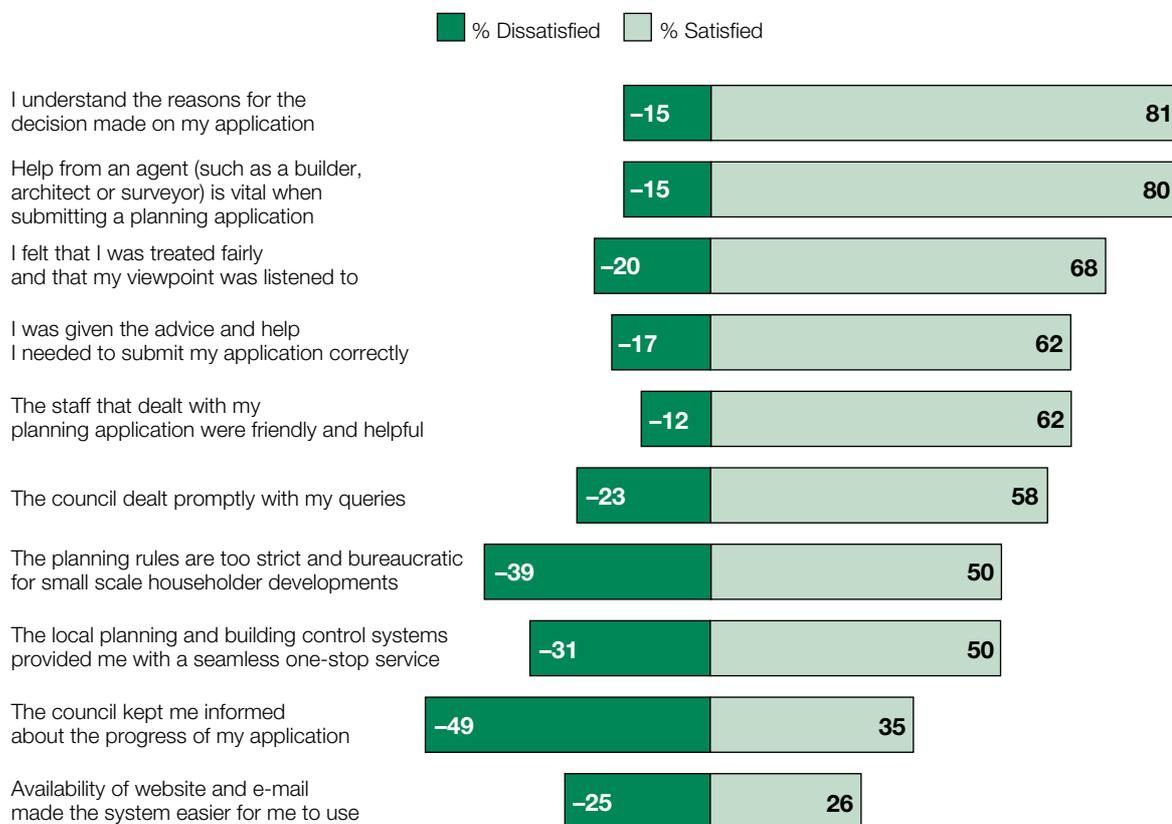
Base: All planning applicants (1000), Aug-Sep 2005   Source: MORI

5.3   Information and advice

●   The main source of initial information and advice about submitting an application were architects or a technical draughtsperson (38%). They were also the main source of advice during the process (25%). A range of other sources were consulted, including local planning officers, building contractors, friends and the council in general.

5.4   Contacting the council

●   Three in five applicants contacted the council for advice *before* applying for planning permission whether themselves or via an agent (36% and 26% respectively). This was mainly to discuss things with a specialist planning officer (39%).

●   Applicants mainly received verbal advice or a general leaflet on the way the process works (34% and 32% respectively).

●   As a result of the contact, only a minority were certain that their application would definitely be accepted (20%) or refused (5%) in its current form.

5.5   Change in views of the planning system

● Applicants were asked how their opinion of the process has changed since before they applied. Most say it is unchanged (53%), with very slightly more saying worse than better (19% versus 17%).

CHAPTER 6

Consulting with neighbours

6.1 Impact on neighbours

- Most applicants claimed to consider the potential impact of their plans on their neighbours (79%). In fact around nine in ten say they spoke with their neighbours about the planned development, mostly before the application was submitted (87%).

- However, the majority of applicants did not anticipate any objections from neighbours; 69% say none at all.

CONSIDERING IMPACT ON NEIGHBOURS

Q31 *To what extent would you say you considered the potential impacts on your neighbours before submitting your application? Would you say you thought about it . . .?*

Q32 *And to what extent would you say you anticipated objections from your neighbours to your plans? Would you say you anticipated . . .?*

Considered the Potential impacts on Neighbours

Don't know
Not at all
Not very much
A fair amount
A great deal

1%
10%
10%
32%
47%

Anticipated objections from Neighbours

Don't know
A great deal
A fair amount
Not very much
None at all

1%
4%
7%
19%
69%
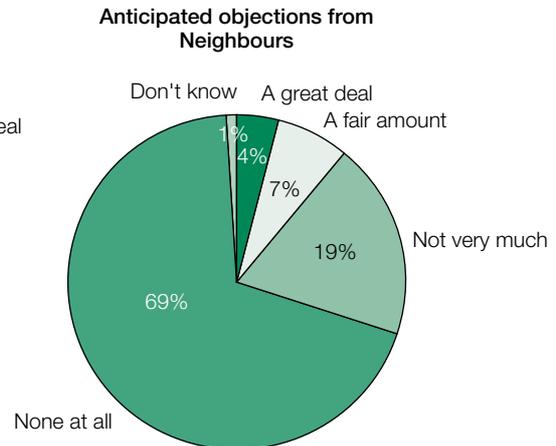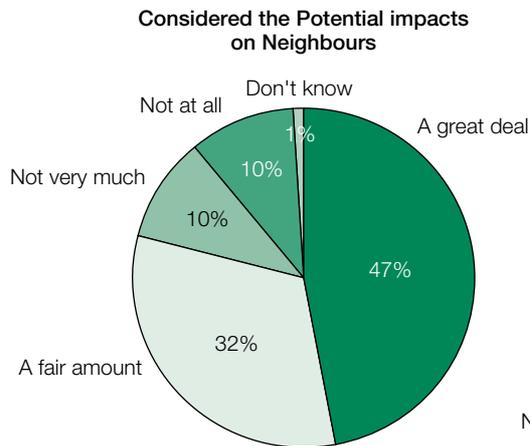
Base: All planning applicants (1000), Aug-Sep 05   Source: MORI

6.2 Objections from neighbours

- Seven per cent of applicants say a neighbour directly raised an objection with them, and twice as many (14%) say that neighbours objected to the council.

- According to neighbours themselves, around one in six made objections to their neighbour's planning application (16%). White neighbours (20%) were significantly more likely to say they made an objection than BME neighbours (2%).

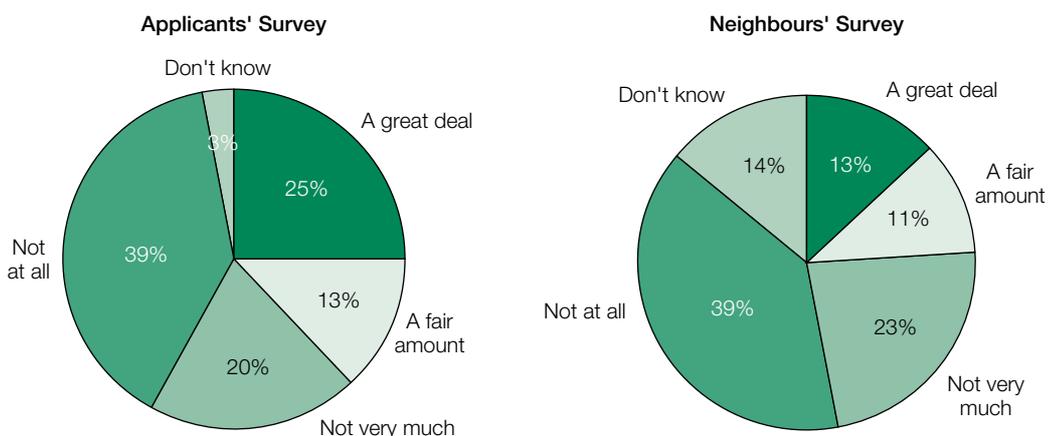- Among both applicants and neighbours, these objections were listed as mainly relating to overlooking gardens, blocking sunlight or being too close, although applicants also cite a general objection to the type of development among their neighbours.

- Over a third of applicants who had objections raised about their plans think the objections affected their chances of getting permission granted (37%), although more than half feel they did not have much impact (59%), and just a quarter amended their application as a result (24%).

- Neighbours are less likely to think their objections had an impact on whether permission was granted, with a quarter feeling their views would be taken into account in the final decision (24%, versus 37% for applicants).[3]

IMPACT OF NEIGHBOURS ON COUNCIL

Q39 *To what extent do you think that any of these objections affected your chances of getting planning permission? Would you say your chances were affected? (Applicants)*

Q27 *To what extent would you say that your views and those of other neighbours on the development were taken into account by your council before the final decision was taken? (Neighbours)*

Applicants' Survey

Don't know
A great deal
3%
25%
Not at all
39%
13%
A fair amount
20%
Not very much

Neighbours' Survey

Don't know
A great deal
14%
13%
A fair amount
11%
Not at all
39%
23%
Not very much

Base: All planning applicants that had any neighbour raise objections (168), Aug-Sep 05
Base: All neighbours of applicants who raised their objections
to neighbour's planning applications (43), Aug-Sep 05

Source: MORI

3 Some caution required interpreting this finding due to small base size (43)

6.3 Priorities for consulting neighbours

- Neighbours were asked to select the top three or four development types which they would most want to be consulted about. Their main concerns were about **extensions at ground floor levels along their property boundary** (77%)

- **Extensions at ground floor level within *one metre* from their own property boundary** were a key concern for three in five neighbours (61%). But showing a clear relationship with distance from their own property, fewer mention **extensions *two* or *three* metres away from their boundary** (39% and 18% respectively)

- **Installation of a small wind generator** on a neighbouring property is a priority for consultation for two in five neighbours (43%)

- A quarter select a neighbour **putting up a high wall or fence** or a **basement in a house** (both 24%), and **using a flat roof as a balcony** as something they would want to comment on (23%).

- **Dormer windows either on the back of a house or set into the roof** and **sheds** appear to create less cause for concern, as shown it the chart below.

PRIORITIES FOR CONSULTATION

Q30 *And looking at the same list of types of developments, which three or four, if any, would you most want to be consulted on?*
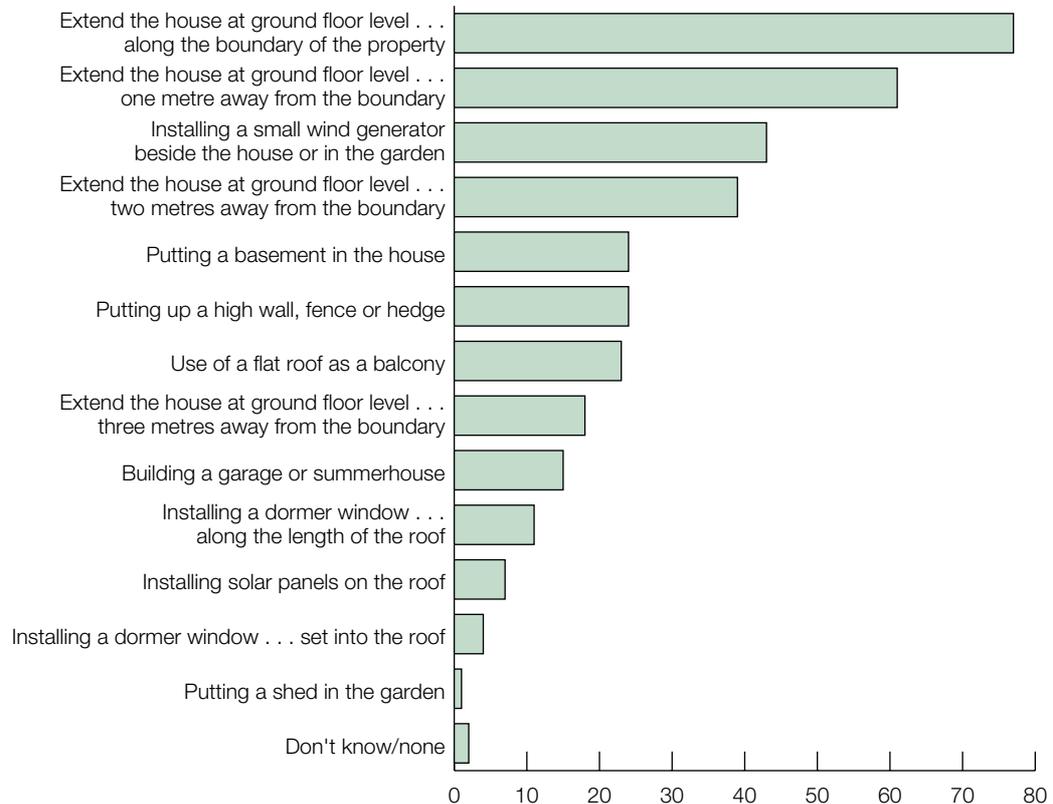
Base: All neighbours (320), Aug-Sep 05   Source: MORI
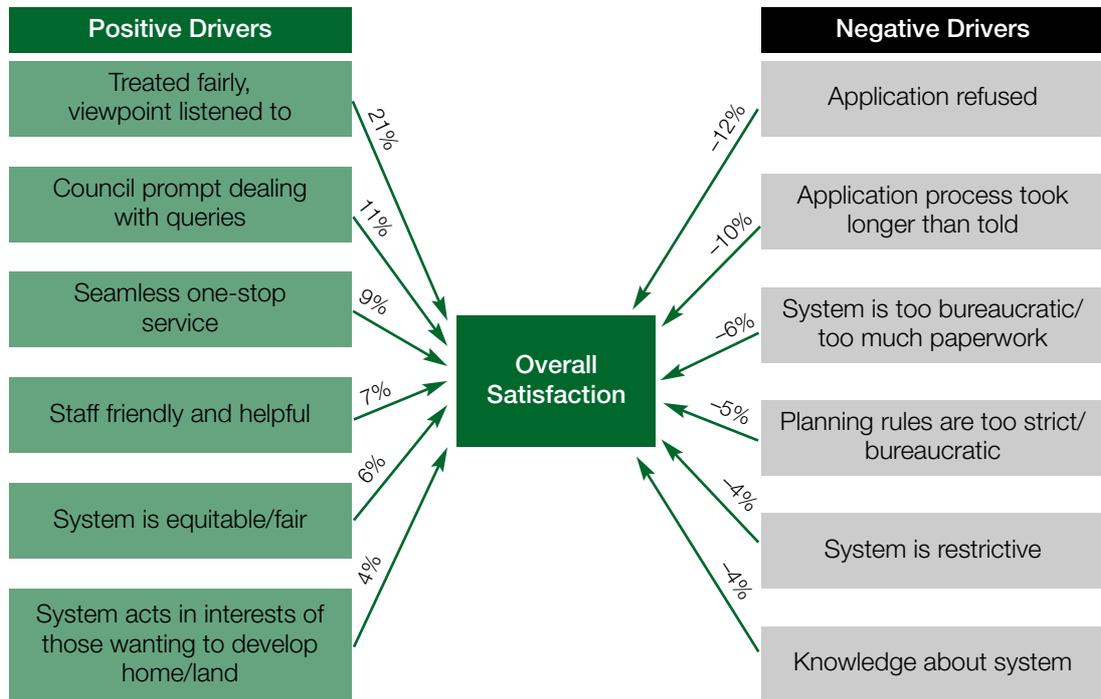
CHAPTER 7

Key Driver Analysis

- Key driver analysis is a useful way of determining which aspects of a service are most strongly associated with a high level of overall satisfaction. One way of doing this would be to ask people directly which aspects of the performance of their local planning authority they think are most important. However, a more powerful way involves using regression analysis. In simple terms this looks at how much service users associate a series of aspects with their local planning authority, and the householder developments system in particular, and compares this with their overall level of satisfaction with its performance. This can tell us which factors are most associated with overall satisfaction with the planning system – the factors that we can consider the *key drivers* of satisfaction. The result is a relative influence diagram (see below), which shows the relative importance of each key driver as a percentage.

- This section looks at the key factors explaining overall opinions towards applicants' rating of the council's performance in handling and processing their application.

- This model is relatively strong for this type of analysis; it explains 60% of the variation in applicants' rating of their council's performance. This clearly leaves room for other factors not measured in the survey that have an impact on this rating, which could be, for example, previous experiences with the council for other services or facilities. However, the model is sufficiently robust to allow for reliable analysis.

REGRESSION ANALYSIS: DRIVERS OF SATISFACTION WITH SERVICE

Showing strength of drivers, 60% of satisfaction with overall service provided by council is explained by model

Positive Drivers		Negative Drivers
Treated fairly, viewpoint listened to	21%	Application refused −12%
Council prompt dealing with queries	11%	Application process took longer than told −10%
Seamless one-stop service	9%	System is too bureaucratic/ too much paperwork −6%
Staff friendly and helpful	7%	Planning rules are too strict/ bureaucratic −5%
System is equitable/fair	6%	System is restrictive −4%
System acts in interests of those wanting to develop home/land	4%	Knowledge about system −4%

Overall Satisfaction

Source: MORI

- The diagram shows the relative strength of each of these factors in explaining levels of satisfaction. The strength of relationship with the factors is indicated by the percentage – the higher the absolute value of the percentage the stronger the predictor of satisfaction that factor is.

- So while the overall outcome of the application is strongly related to satisfaction, the regression analysis shows us that being treated fairly and being listened to is a stronger driver for satisfaction than even having your application refused.

- As well as being listened to, other communication issues, such as being promptly dealt with, and by friendly and helpful staff, are important for satisfaction. Those for whom the process took longer than they were told, on the other hand, are more likely to be negative.

- Applicants who view the system as bureaucratic are also more likely to be dissatisfied with the service overall.

APPENDICES

Statistical Reliability

When interpreting the findings it is important to remember that the results are based on a sample of applicants and neighbours, and not the entire population. Therefore, we cannot be certain that the figures obtained are exactly those we would have if everybody had been interviewed (the 'true' values). However, we can predict the variation between the sample results and the 'true' values from a knowledge of the size of the samples on which the results are based and the number of times that a particular answer is given.

The confidence with which we can make this prediction is usually chosen to be 95% – that is, the chances are 19 in 20 that the 'true' value will fall within a specified range. The table below illustrates the predicted ranges for different sample sizes and percentages results at the '95% confidence interval', based on a random sample. For example, with a sample size of 1,000 applicants where 30% give a particular answer, the margin of error/specified range will be plus or minus 3 per cent. In other words, results would lie in the range 25% to 35%, but would be most likely to be 30%, the actual finding.

Approximate sampling tolerances applicable to percentages at or near these levels (at the 95% confidence level)			
	10% or 90% ±	30% or 70% ±	50% ±
Size of sample or sub-group on which survey result is based			
1,000 applicants	2	3	3
862 applicants whose application approved	2	3	3
629 male applicants	2	4	4
320 neighbours	3	5	6
142 male neighbours	5	8	8
51 neighbours with objections to application	8	13	14

Source: MORI

Thus, the confidence interval (or margin of error) is the amount by which the survey result could increase or decrease and still be considered to reflect the 'true' result that would have been recorded if everyone in the population had been surveyed.

Tolerances are also involved in the **comparison of results** from different parts of the sample, and between two samples. A difference, in other words, must be of at least a certain size to be considered statistically significant or 'real'. At the same time, though, it should be noted that statistically significant data need to be interpreted to see whether they make reasonable sense.

The following table is a guide to the sampling tolerances applicable to comparisons.

Differences required for significance at the 95% confidence level at or near these percentages			
	10% or 90%	30% or 70%	50%
Size of sample on which survey result is based			
1,000 applicants Vs 320 neighbours	4	6	6
629 males Vs 371 females applicants	4	6	6
702 satisfied Vs 229 dissatisfied applicants	5	7	8
147 male Vs 177 female neighbours	7	10	11
150 neighbours favourable towards planning system Vs 76 unfavourable	8	13	14

Source: MORI

Caution should be exercised when comparing percentages derived from base sizes of 99 respondents or fewer, and particularly when comparing percentages derived from base sizes of 50 respondents or fewer.

Sample Profile

Applications by development type						
Development type	Population	%	Telephone Sample	%	Achieved Interviews	%
Roof extension	1,232	8%	581	8%	51	5%
Two storey side extension	2,533	16%	1,168	16%	136	14%
Two storey rear extension	871	5%	352	5%	73	7%
Single storey side extension	1,667	11%	786	11%	104	10%
Single storey rear extension	1,983	13%	934	13%	128	13%
Conservatory	2,302	15%	1,042	14%	152	15%
Front extension	574	4%	240	3%	26	3%
Freestanding structure at rear (eg shed, garage, swimming pool)	523	3%	222	3%	46	5%
Garden enclosures and extensions (eg walls, gates, fence)	286	2%	123	2%	11	1%
Access and parking	341	2%	227	3%	12	1%
Multiple plans	2,714	17%	1,123	15%	178	18%
Other	839	5%	494	7%	82	8%
Totals	15,865	100%	7,299	100%	999	100%
Retrospective Applications	419	3%	174	2%	29	3%
	Total	%	Total Apps	%	Total Ints	%
Successful applications	13,205	84%	6,119	84%	862	86%
Unsuccessful applications	2494	16%	1,123	16%	138	14%
TOTAL	15,699	100%	7,242	100%	1,000	100%

Source: MORI