

**BMG BVPI Report- Epping Forest District
Council Planning BVPI**



**Epping Forest
District Council**



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1 BVPI 111

1.1.1 Outlined below is the statistic required by the Department of Communities and Local Government. To comply with the DCLG requirements, the proportion of respondents that are very or fairly satisfied is reported for the User Satisfaction Best Value Performance Indicator. This statistic is based only on those respondents that provided a rating (i.e. excluding 'don't know' and non-respondents), and the sample base and associated confidence interval is quoted.

The table below shows the proportions of respondents overall who were satisfied and dissatisfied with the overall service provided by the Council in processing their planning application.

Table 1

(Q6 – BV111) Respondents' level of satisfaction with the service provided by the Council in processing their application (Q6) (All respondents where a response was provided)			
Very/fairly satisfied (%)	Very/fairly dissatisfied (%)	Sample base	Confidence interval
82	13	111	+/-9.3

1.1.2 The BV111 figure for Epping Forest at 82% is above the average for Single Tier and County Authorities (72%). The top quartile figure for these authorities is 80% and the bottom quartile is 65%.

2 Introduction

2.1 Background

2.1.1 All local authorities are required to undertake Best Value Satisfaction Surveys on a triennial basis to inform the authority's performance indicators. These indicators (known as BVPIs) are submitted to the Audit Commission and form part of the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) that measures how well councils are delivering services for local people and communities.

2.1.2 Epping Forest District Council contracted BMG Research to conduct their 2006 Local Government Planning Applicants Satisfaction Survey on their behalf. BMG Research has worked extensively on BVPI surveys in the past. As part of both previous statutory rounds in 2000 and 2003, as well as working with clients to conduct interim satisfaction and corporate health surveys to assist in their planning for the 2006 BVPI round.

2.1.3 The survey was undertaken adhering to the prescriptive guidelines laid out by the Department of Communities and Local Government for all BVPI Planning Surveys.

The survey gathered the Best Value Performance Indicator number 111, which relates to satisfaction with the planning service by those making a planning application.

As part of the Best Value initiative, a number of 'service quality' Best Value Performance Indicators have been specified by the Government to reflect users' experience of Council services. The first round of BVPIs were gathered in the year 2000 and then in 2003.

3 Methodology

- 3.1.1 The target population for the survey was all planning applicants or agents of applicants who had received a decision letter on their application between 3rd April 2006 and 29th September 2006.
- 3.1.2 The target population consisted of the applicants or their agents – not their applications. Therefore, if an applicant had made more than one application within the sampling window, he or she would only have been surveyed once. This also applied where one or more type of planning application was made (e.g. householder development and listed building consent).
- 3.1.3 For the purposes of drawing up the sampling frame, if multiple notifications of decisions were made within the sampling window, then the first notification of decision made would be the one on which to base the sample. Subsequent notifications of decision were not included in the sampling frame. In the case of applications from companies this meant that the name on that one application effectively became the applicant.
- 3.1.4 Only applications determined by the local authority were included in the sample and not, for example, those called in by the Secretary of State.
- 3.1.5 For this particular indicator the degree of precision/accuracy required is a maximum of $\pm 5\%$ at the 95% confidence level. DCLG Guidance specified that a minimum achieved sample of 400 is required. This is based on the total number of respondents to the survey not the number of respondents to each individual question.
- 3.1.6 However, there were only 262 applicants/agents who had submitted at least one application to Epping Forest Council during the sampling window, so a full Census was mailed.
- 3.1.7 The methodology was implemented according to DCLG guidelines and as such included two reminder mailings.
- 3.1.8 The initial mailing of 262 Epping Forest addresses took place on 10th October 2006, and following this those respondents who had not returned a completed questionnaire were re-mailed.
- 3.1.9 The second mailing was sent on 3rd November 2006, and the third mailing on 1st December 2006.
- 3.1.10 The survey was conducted using a postal methodology. Questionnaires were bar-coded with a unique reference number to monitor the responses rate and to track which respondents had returned a completed questionnaire.
- 3.1.11 From the initial mailing and two reminder mailings, a total of 113 usable completed questionnaires were returned to BMG Research, representing an overall response rate of 43%.
- 3.1.12 Graphs and tables are used throughout the report to assist explanation and analysis. Although occasional anomalies appear due to ‘rounding’ differences, these are never more than $\pm 1\%$. These occur where rating scales have been

added to calculate proportions of respondents who are satisfied at all (i.e. either very or fairly satisfied).

4 Report Contents

4.1.1 This report contains a written summary of the findings of the survey, highlighting those statistics that are required to be reported to DCLG.

A separate data report is available, containing cross-tabulations by:

- Gender
- Age group
- Employment status
- Disability
- Ethnicity
- Status/respondent's capacity when making the application (i.e. private individual, as part of own business/ on behalf of employer or as an agent)
- Previous applications
- Outcome of application
- Overall satisfaction (with the service provided by the Planning Department)

The questionnaire followed the template provided by the DCLG for the Planning Survey, and has been included in the appendix.

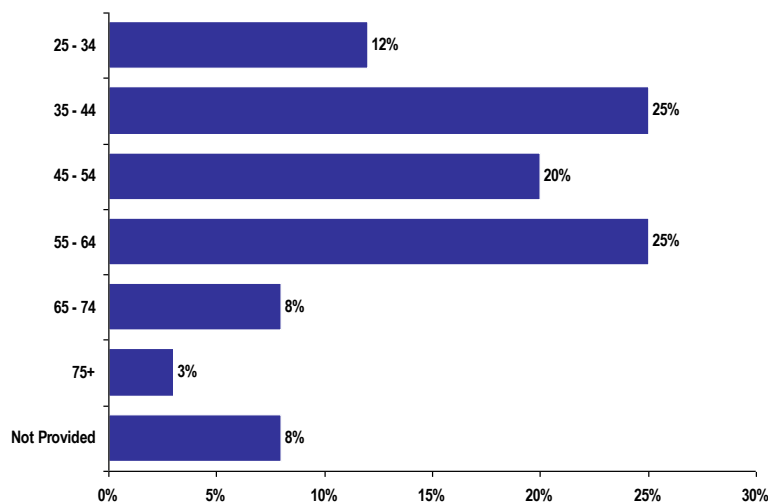
5 Respondents Profile

5.1 Gender and age

- 5.1.1 Overall, over two-thirds (68%) of respondents to the survey are male, whilst nearly a third (31%) are female. Only 1% did not provide details of their gender.
- 5.1.2 The largest proportion of respondents to the survey are aged between 35 and 44 and 55 and 64 which both accounted for 25%. The smallest proportions were respondents who were between 65 and 74 at 8% and 75+ at 3%. Eight percent declined to answer this question.

Figure 1

**(Q10) Age of Applicants
(All respondents)**

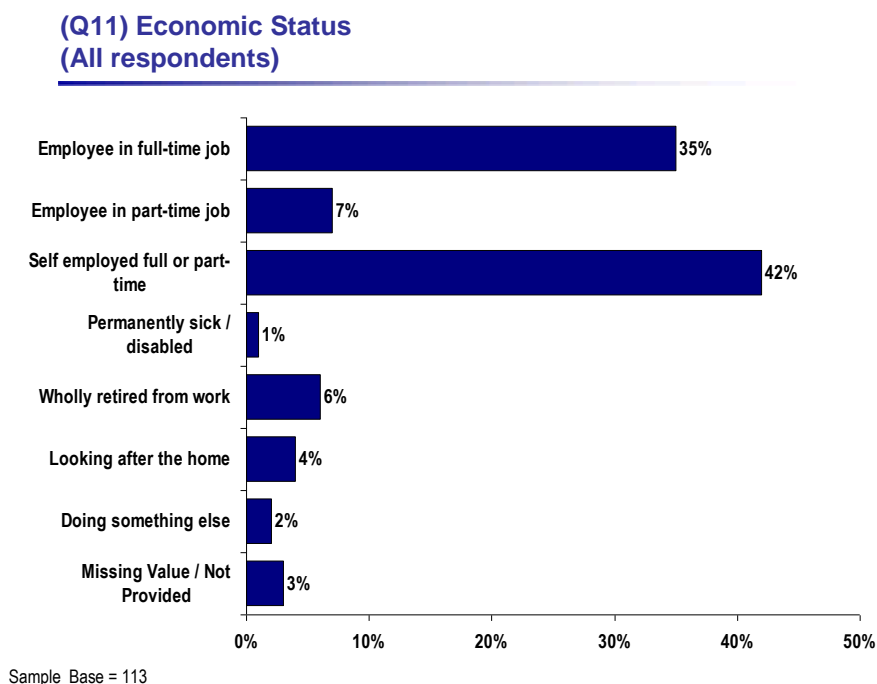


Sample Base = 113

5.2 Economic Status

5.2.1 The largest proportion (42%) of all respondents in the survey are self-employed, and just over a third (35%) were employed in a full-time job. Respondents who were employed in a part-time job or retired accounted for 7% and 6% of all respondents respectively.

Figure 2



5.3 Long-term illness and disability

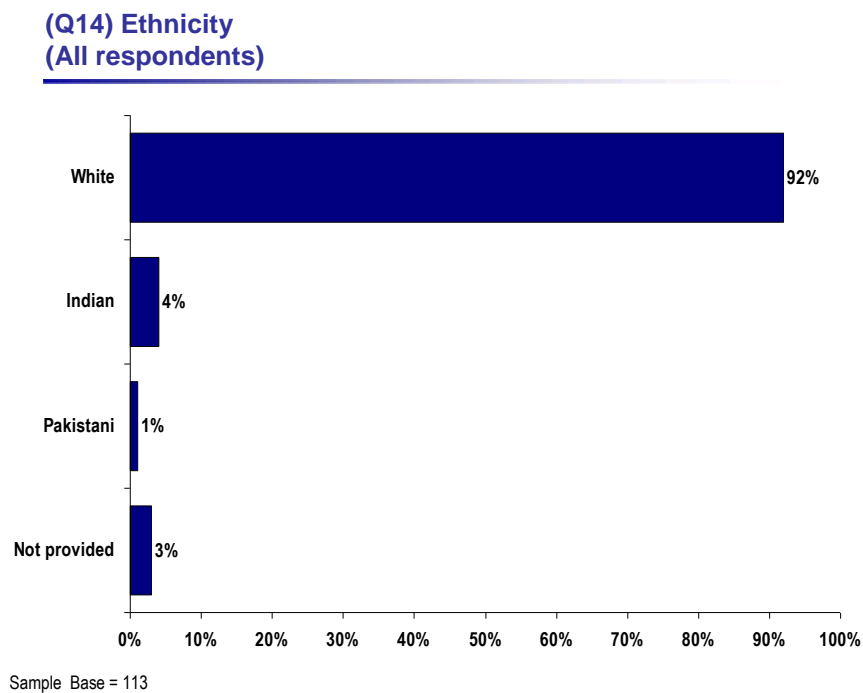
5.3.1 Just over one in ten (12%, thirteen respondents) of all respondents to the survey state that they have a long-standing illness, disability or infirmity.

5.3.2 Six of the thirteen respondents with a disability report that the disability limits their activities in some way.

5.4 Ethnicity

- 5.4.1 As the following graph shows, over nine in ten (92%) of all respondents described their ethnicity as *White*.
- 5.4.2 Five percent of respondents are from a Asian background including 4% from an Indian background and 1% from a Pakistani background. Just 3% of all respondents did not provide an answer to this question.

Figure 3



6 Experience of the Planning Department

6.1 Introduction

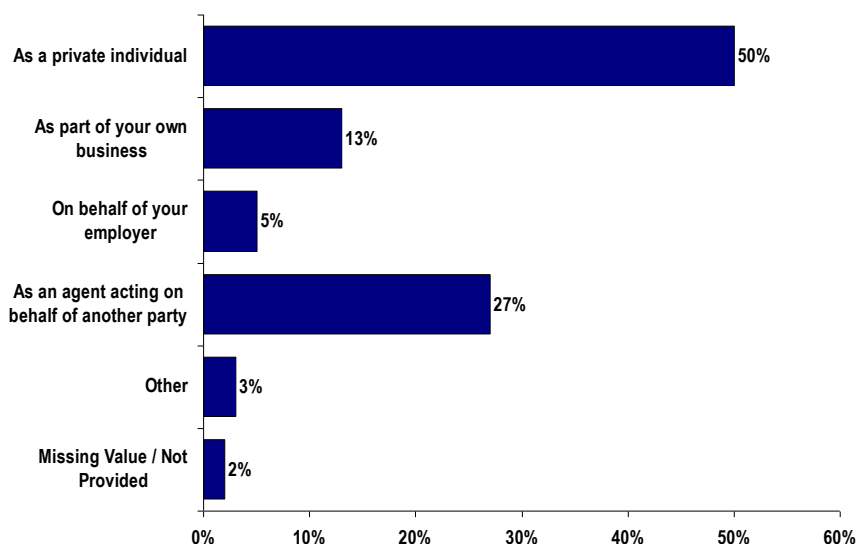
- 6.1.1 This section of the report considers respondents' experiences of the Planning Department, the frequency with which they make applications to the Planning Department for planning consent, and their level of satisfaction with the way in which the Council handled applications. Also included is in what capacity the respondent was acting when they applied, the type of application, and whether the application was granted.
- 6.1.2 Respondents were also asked to state whether they believe various aspects of the service offered by the Planning Department have improved or deteriorated over the last three years, and their reflections on this question are also included in this section.

6.2 Applicants' capacity, and type of application

- 6.2.1 Overall, half (50%) of the respondents applied to the Planning Department as a private individual, with a little over a quarter (27%) applying as an agent acting on behalf of another party.
- 6.2.2 Only 13% of respondents applied to the Planning Department on behalf of their own business and 5% on behalf of their employer.

Figure 4

(Q1) When respondent made their most recent application, in what capacity were they acting (All respondents)

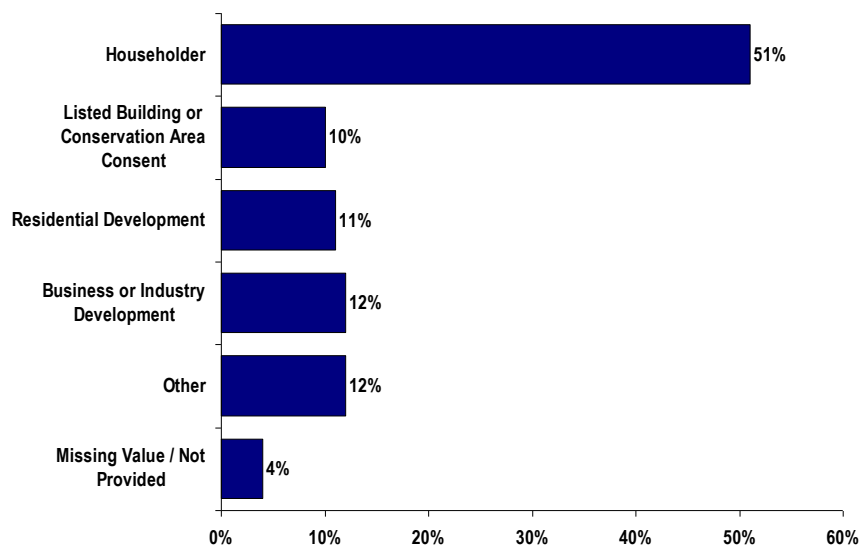


Sample Base = 113

6.2.3 A little over a half of the respondents (51%) have submitted a householder application. Additional types of application submitted include applications for business or industry development at 12% and residential development which accounted for 11%. Ten percent of applications submitted were for Listed Building or Conservation Area Consent.

Figure 5

**(Q2) Type of application submitted
(All respondents)**



Sample Base =113

6.3 Previous applications to the Planning Department

- 6.3.1 Just under two thirds of all respondents (65%) have made previous applications to Epping Forest District Council's Planning Department (prior to their most recent application), a third (33%) have not, and 1% do not recall.
- 6.3.2 All agents have made previous applications for planning consent, over six in ten (62%) of business applicants and nearly half of individual applicants (47%) have also applied for planning consent previously.
- 6.3.3 The following table shows the number of applications made during various different time periods for respondents who have applied previously.

Table 2

(Q4) Number of times respondent has applied previously (All respondents that have applied previously)							
	1 – 5	6 – 10	11 – 20	21 – 50	51+	Does not apply/Don't know	Not provided
	% Response						
In the last 6 months	53	9	0	0	0	5	32
In the last year	34	12	8	0	0	5	41
In the last 2 years	15	12	4	7	0	11	51
In the last 3 years	28	9	8	7	4	11	32
Sample Base: – 74							

6.4 Perceptions of the service received in the last year

- 6.4.1 Respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement with a series of five statements about the service they received from the Planning Department when making a planning application over the past year. The following table shows the responses given by respondents to each statement among those who gave a valid answer.
- 6.4.2 As can be seen, overall agreement levels (i.e. strongly agree or agree) are highest for the statements: 'I understand the reasons for the decision made on my application(s)' and 'I was given the advice and help I needed to submit my application correctly, which are both at (74%); and 'the Council dealt with my queries promptly' and 'I felt I was treated fairly and that my viewpoint was listened to' both accounting for 71 % of all respondents.
- 6.4.3 Levels of disagreement (i.e. strongly disagree or disagree) are highest with the statements: 'The Council kept me informed about the progress of my application' (21%); and 'The Council dealt with my queries promptly' accounting for 16%.

Table 3

(Q5) Rating of agreement with statements about experience of the council's handling of planning applications in the last year (Respondents who provided a valid answer)							
	% Response						
	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Net Agree	Net Disagree
I was given the advice and help I needed to submit my application correctly	28	46	13	5	8	74	13
The Council kept me informed about the progress of my application	16	45	18	13	8	61	21
The Council dealt with my queries promptly	17	54	13	9	7	71	16
I understand the reasons for the decision made on my application(s)	19	55	11	8	8	74	15
I felt that I was treated fairly and that my viewpoint was listened to	21	50	14	9	6	71	14
Sample bases vary							

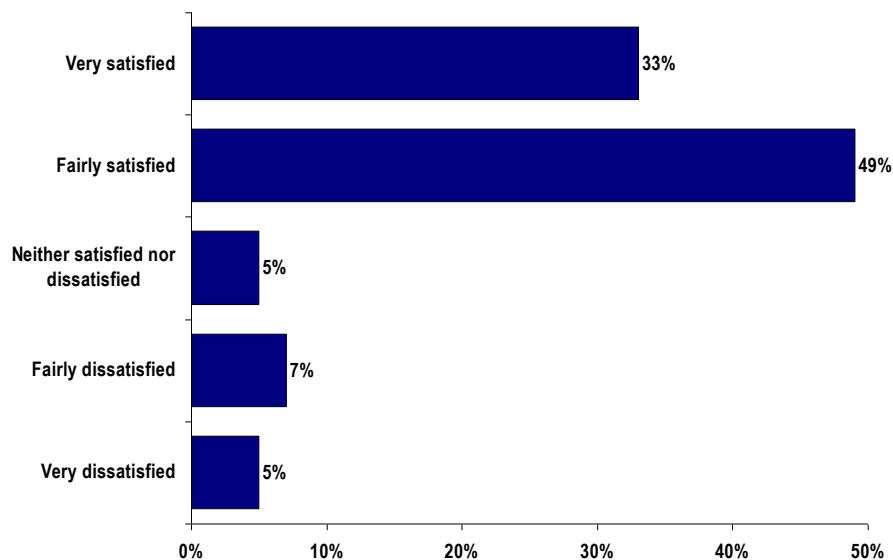
6.5 Overall satisfaction with the service provided (BV111)

6.5.1 This section presents the findings for Best Value Indicator 3 (BV111). The indicator is worked out by only including valid responses, so any 'don't know' and 'not provided' responses are excluded. The indicator score is then calculated by adding the 'very satisfied' and 'fairly satisfied' scores together and expressing this as a percentage of all the valid responses.

6.5.2 In total, 82% of respondents are satisfied (very or fairly) with the service provided by the Council in processing their planning application, whilst only 13% are very or fairly dissatisfied. The results are illustrated below.

Figure 6

**(Q6) Respondents' rating of overall satisfaction with the service provided by the council in processing their planning application
(Respondents who provided a valid answer)**



Sample Base = 111

- 6.5.3 Amongst respondents whose most recent planning applications had been successful, 88% are satisfied, whilst amongst those whose planning applications had been unsuccessful 67% are satisfied.
- 6.5.4 Amongst business applicants 90% are satisfied with the overall service provided, whilst 82% of individual and 80% of agent applicants recorded satisfaction with the service provided.

Table 4

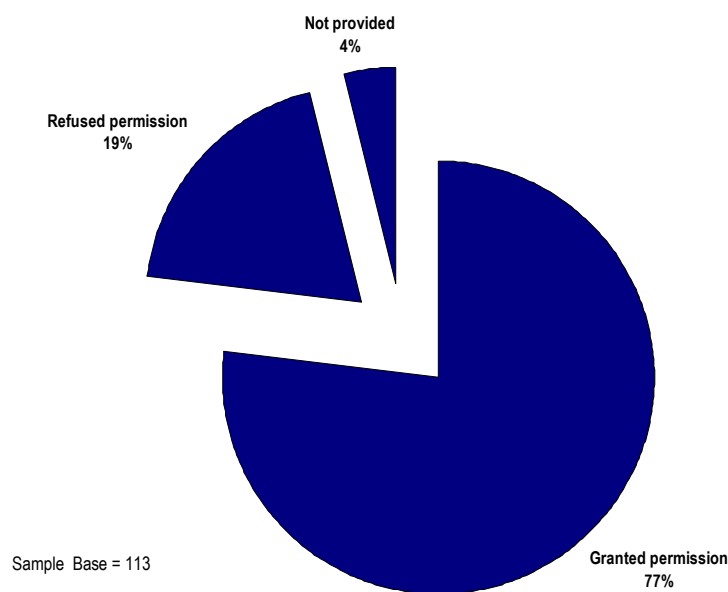
(Q6) Rating of agreement with statements about experience of the council's handling of planning applications in the last year (Respondents who provided a valid answer)			
	% Very/fairly satisfied	% Very/fairly dissatisfied	Sample bases
All respondents	82	13	111
Outcome of application			
Successful	88	6	86
Not successful	67	29	21*
Whether applied previously			
Yes, have	79	12	73
No, have not	86	14	37*
Capacity of respondent			
Private individual	82	14	56
As part of own business	90	10	21*
As an agent	80	10	30*
* Caution low base size			

6.6 Whether most recent planning application was granted permission/consent

6.6.1 Over three quarters (77%) of all respondents state that their most recent planning application was granted permission/consent, whilst 19% state that this was refused.

Figure 7

**(Q7) Result of most recent planning application
(All Respondents)**



6.6.2 Amongst those respondents who are satisfied with the service provided, 84% had their planning application granted. Amongst respondents who are dissatisfied, the equivalent proportion is much lower at 36%.

6.7 Whether the service has improved

- 6.7.1 Those respondents who had made previous applications were asked to rate the change in five specific elements of the planning service over the past three years. The following table summarises the results, and also includes a net improvement rating i.e. the proportion of respondents who feel each aspect has got better minus the proportion of respondents who feel each aspect has got worse.
- 6.7.2 For all five aspects, similar proportions of respondents who gave a response thought that the service had stayed the same. Relatively, the largest proportion. (68%) noted that 'the advice and help provided to submit my application' had not changed. For each of the statements; the clarity of the reasons for the decisions given'; 'the fairness with which my application was dealt with and viewpoint listened to'; and 'the promptness with which my application(s) were dealt with', 65% reported the service provided as not changing.
- 6.7.3 For four of the five elements, 12% or less thought that the services had got worse over the past three years. The exception being with the statement 'the information provided about the process of my application' where 16% thought the service had got worse. Encouragingly all elements received a positive net rating for change over the last three years.

Table 5

(Q8) Change in specified elements of the planning service over the last three years (Respondents who have made previous planning applications and provided a valid answer)					
	Better	Stayed the same	Worse	Net rating	Sample base
	%	%	%	%	
The advice and help provided to submit my application	30	68	2	+28	47
The information provided about the progress of my application	22	61	16	+6	49
The promptness with which my application(s) were dealt with	22	65	12	+10	49
The clarity of the reasons for the decision given	28	65	7	+21	46
The fairness with which my application was dealt with and viewpoint listened to	22	65	12	+10	49
Net rating = % rating 'better' - % rating 'worse'					

7 Appendix 1 – The Questionnaire

SECTION 1: YOUR EXPERIENCE WITH THE PLANNING DEPARTMENT

Q1. When you made your most recent application, in what capacity were you acting?

Please tick ✓ one box

As a private individual ₁

As an agent acting on behalf of another party ₄

As part of your own business ₂

Other (✓ and write in below) ₉₅

On behalf of your employer ₃

Q2. What type of application were you submitting?

Please tick ✓ one box

Householder ₁

Business or Industry Development (including minerals and waste development) ₄

Listed Building or Conservation Area Consent ₂

Residential Development ₃

Other (✓ and write in below) ₉₅

Q3. Have you applied to Epping Forest District Council planning department for planning consent previous to your most recent application?

Please tick ✓ one box only

Yes ₁

No ₂

Do not recall ₃

IF YOU HAVE ANSWERED 'YES', PLEASE CONTINUE TO QUESTION 4. IF YOU HAVE ANSWERED 'NO' OR 'DO NOT RECALL' PLEASE GO TO QUESTION 5.

Q4. Please indicate how many times you have applied to Epping Forest District Council planning department for planning consent:

Please tick ✓ one box per row

	1 - 5	6 - 10	11 - 20	21 - 50	51+	It does not apply/ Don't know
In the last six months	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄	<input type="checkbox"/> ₅	<input type="checkbox"/> ₆
In the last year	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄	<input type="checkbox"/> ₅	<input type="checkbox"/> ₆
In the last two years	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄	<input type="checkbox"/> ₅	<input type="checkbox"/> ₆
In the last three years	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄	<input type="checkbox"/> ₅	<input type="checkbox"/> ₆

Q5. Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about your experience of the council's handling of your planning application(s) **IN THE LAST YEAR** Please tick ✓ one box per row

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	It does not apply/ Don't know
I was given the advice and help I needed to submit my application correctly	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄	<input type="checkbox"/> ₅	<input type="checkbox"/> ₆
The council kept me informed about the progress of my application	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄	<input type="checkbox"/> ₅	<input type="checkbox"/> ₆
The council dealt promptly with my queries	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄	<input type="checkbox"/> ₅	<input type="checkbox"/> ₆
I understand the reasons for the decision made on my application(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄	<input type="checkbox"/> ₅	<input type="checkbox"/> ₆
I felt that I was treated fairly and that my viewpoint was listened to	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄	<input type="checkbox"/> ₅	<input type="checkbox"/> ₆

Q6. Setting aside whether any individual application was successful or not, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the service provided by the council in processing your application? **Please tick ✓ one box only**

Very satisfied	Fairly satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Fairly dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied
<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄	<input type="checkbox"/> ₅

Q7. Was your most recent application: **Please tick ✓ one box only**

Granted permission/consent ₁ | Refused permission/consent ₂

IF YOU HAVE MADE MORE THAN ONE APPLICATION IN THE LAST THREE YEARS PLEASE CONTINUE TO QUESTION 8, OTHERWISE GO TO QUESTION 9

Q8. For each of the following elements of the planning service provided by Epping Forest District Council please indicate whether you think the service has got better or worse over the last three years, or has it stayed the same? **Please tick ✓ one box per row**

	Better	Stayed the same	Worse	Don't know
The advice and help provided to submit my application	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄
The information provided about the progress of my application	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄
The promptness with which queries about my application were dealt with	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄
The clarity of the reasons for the decision given	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄
The fairness with which my application was dealt with and viewpoint listened to	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄

SECTION 2: ABOUT YOURSELF

PLEASE ANSWER ALL OF THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS

Q9. Are you male or female? **Please tick ✓ one box only**

Male..... ₁ | Female ₂

Q10. What was your age on your last birthday? **Please write in below**

Years

Q11. Which of these activities best describes what you are doing at present?
Please tick ✓ one box only

Employee in full-time job (30 hours plus per week) ₁

Employee in part-time job (under 30 hours per week) ₂

Self employed full or part-time ₃

On a government supported training programme
(e.g. Modern Apprenticeship/ Training for Work) ₄

Full-time education at school, college or university ₅

Unemployed and available for work ₆

Permanently sick/disabled ₇

Wholly retired from work ₈

Looking after the home ₉

Doing something else (✓ and write in below) ₉₅

Q12. Do you have any long-standing illness, disability or infirmity? (long-standing means anything that has troubled you over a period of time or that is likely to affect you over a period of time) **Please tick ✓ one box only**

Yes (**Please continue to Q13**) ₁ | No (**Please go to Q14**)..... ₂

Q13. Does this illness or disability limit your activities in any way? **Please tick ✓ one box only**

Yes ₁ | No..... ₂

Q14. To which of these groups do you consider you belong? **Please tick ✓ one box only**

White British..... <input type="checkbox"/> 1 Irish..... <input type="checkbox"/> 2 Any other White background (✓ and write in below)..... <input type="checkbox"/> 3		Black or Black British Caribbean..... <input type="checkbox"/> 8 African <input type="checkbox"/> 9 Any other Black background (✓ and write in below) <input type="checkbox"/> 10	
Mixed White & Black Caribbean <input type="checkbox"/> 4 White & Black African..... <input type="checkbox"/> 5 White & Asian <input type="checkbox"/> 6 Any other Mixed background (✓ and write in below)..... <input type="checkbox"/> 7		Asian Indian <input type="checkbox"/> 11 Pakistani..... <input type="checkbox"/> 12 Bangladeshi..... <input type="checkbox"/> 13 Any other Asian background (✓ and write in below) <input type="checkbox"/> 14	
Chinese and Other ethnic groups Chinese..... <input type="checkbox"/> 15		Other ethnic group (✓ and write in below) <input type="checkbox"/> 95	

Q15. Is there anything else you would like to add?
Please write in below

Thank you very much for taking part in this survey.

Please return your questionnaire in the pre-paid envelope provided to:

<Address>

Please return your questionnaire by <Date>