

# Financial Transaction Service: Agent FAQs

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## What is changing?

At the Planning Portal, we have always been passionate about refining our service to add value for users wherever we can. It has become increasingly obvious to us that the biggest pain point within the planning process is validation, with around 25 per cent of all invalid applications being due to missing cheque payments. Delayed or missing payments cause a difficulty for everyone involved, taking up valuable time and delaying the validation and processing of applications.

Our new financial transaction service will eradicate this issue from the planning system in England and simplify the process of paying for applications for everyone.

In early September 2018, we introduced a payment service for planning applications, known as the Financial Transaction Service (FTS). The service will be completely managed by the Planning Portal, meaning less time spent chasing, paying or reconciling planning fees for everyone else. Agents will be able to focus on activities which generate income and local planning authorities (LPAs) will be able to get on with processing applications.

The service will provide a standardised set of payment options across all local authorities, so you will be able to pay quickly and easily, no matter which LPA receives your application and no matter how large the fee. Our dedicated team will be on hand to process telephone payments during usual working hours, so you can pay whenever is most convenient for you. Online payments and bank transfers can also be made at any time to suit you. The option to pay by cheque will still be available, but with quicker, more convenient options available to you we would encourage you to take advantage of them to get your application validated as quickly as possible.

You may already be familiar with our Nominate payment option (previously Payment ReDirect), which allows you to nominate another person to pay for a planning application (e.g. your client or finance department). This service has received a hugely positive response since its launch, and it is now a standardised payment method for all applications.

And finally, you even automatically get a receipt for your payment, regardless of your chosen payment option. Simple.

We now send applications and payments to the relevant local authorities together, as soon as we have confirmed successful payment. This keeps the process rapid, succinct and tidy and prevents problems which arise from missing information. It will also allow authorities to start validating your applications as soon as they get them. The application status in your Planning Portal account will show you whether the LPA has received your application and we'll also email you once it's been sent from us and downloaded by them, as normal.

The charge for this new service is £53.33 (+VAT), payable by the applicant on any application which attracts a fee. Applications below £60 will not attract a fee. Applications such as TPOs, where no fee is payable, will be sent directly to the local authority with no service charge applied.

### **Why are you introducing this service?**

The Planning Portal business plan is built on adding value to the planning and building control process. Since we were privatised, we have worked hard to reduce our costs and increase our income. We continue to work hard to provide an excellent service for our customers whilst working on balancing the books. This new service will add significant value to the planning process whilst providing an income which will enable the Planning Portal services to continue and develop.

### **How have you tested this service?**

We have spent the last few months meeting with key stakeholders, such as agents and local planning authorities, in order to test and refine our service. We first reached out to individual parties and following those meetings we began engagement with larger groups. During this time we were able to speak to around 55-60% of all LPAs as well as several agents of different sizes. We asked the people we met to keep our discussions confidential and they respected that.

Support has been overwhelming, both for the new service and more broadly for the Planning Portal itself.

Whilst we prepare for launch, we are continuing engagement through our various communication channels. Our support desk are on hand to answer any customer questions, and we are continuing a programme of face-to-face engagement with LPAs and agents.

## Why is there a service charge?

This service will vastly improve the process of submitting and receiving planning applications for all our users, but it will of course cost money to run. It will cost us a fraction of what it currently costs individual agents and authorities across the country in time and money, but we have employed new staff to take payments by phone, process cheques and reconcile payments to applications. We have also spent money on technical development. Running the service day-to-day will mean an increase in banking and finance charges related to taking and making payments.

Of course, this income will also allow us to invest in developing our services, including:

- The range of free-to-use content and interactive guidance to explain planning, from permitted development on common projects through to applying for planning permission for homeowners and others
- Free-to-use technical and legislative content for planning and building professionals
- A dedicated customer support team available 9am – 5pm to support customers
- The national building control service
- And of course the planning application service itself, including increasing the maximum file size of supporting documents, e-enabling further application types and improvements to local validation amongst many others

## Why do our clients have to pay?

We have developed the service to provide maximum value to all our users - by managing all payments ourselves, we are able to provide a greatly improved service and drastically reduce the number of invalid applications. We know this new service holds real value for applicants, who want their applications handled competently and given validation as quickly as possible. Therefore, we have decided to apply the charge at this stage so that it is payable by the individual who derives the most benefit from these improvements.

## **I don't want to pass the service charge on to my client. What are my options?**

We hope that our customers will see the value of the new service and also appreciate that these changes will enable us continue to improve 1App and our other services. We have stuck to our principles - instead of simply levying a service charge, we have added significant value to our service. We also looked closely at our costs and endeavored to keep the charge for the service as low as possible.

Should customers chose not to use our service, a handful of authorities do offer alternative online submission channels, though feedback from agents suggests that these are not user-friendly. Of course, other channels don't include the support, advice and guidance provided by the Portal either.

Paper application forms will continue to be available for download from our website, however, we suggest that the costs associated with sending these applications - printing, posting, time, etc - should be balanced against our service charge.

## **How do I pay for an application that was submitted before this new service launched?**

If you created and submitted an application before the payment service was launched, but had not paid for it before the service was launched, please contact our support team by emailing [support@planningportal.co.uk](mailto:support@planningportal.co.uk) or calling 0333 323 4589.

## **Will I still be able to print/export 1App applications?**

Yes, you can still download a draft application. However, some fields have been removed from the exported version to ensure the application is not submitted directly to the local authority.

[Find out more and see an example of a draft application.](#)

## What shall I tell my clients about the new service?

As the client is the ultimate beneficiary of any planning consent, they will be liable for the service charge. You have the choice as to whether you pay the planning fee and service charge on their behalf or ask them to pay directly using our Nominate service. Both you and they should be aware that applications will not be released to the LPA until the payment is made and processing times vary according to the different payment methods (see below).

We would recommend online or telephone payments for planning fees up to £1,000. For larger fees, we would recommend Faster Payment or CHAPS payments.

Otherwise there is no change to the service in the short-term, but part of the service charge will be used to make further improvements to the application service and other Planning Portal content.

Payment method	Fee limit	Payment confirmed to applicant/agent (Maximum time after payment is made)	Application released to LPA (Maximum time)	Payment made to LPA via BACS*
<b>Online</b>	£1,000	Instantly after successful payment is received	Instantly after payment confirmed	Next working day after application released
<b>Telephone</b>	£1,000	Instantly after successful payment is received	Instantly after payment confirmed	Next working day after application released
<b>Faster Payment</b>	£250,000 (depending on the bank you are paying from)	1 working day after successful payment is received	Instantly after payment confirmed	Same day as application released
<b>CHAPS</b>	Unlimited	1 working day after successful payment is received	Same day as payment confirmed	Same day as application released
<b>BACS</b>	Unlimited	1 working day after successful payment is received*	Same day as payment confirmed	Same day as application released
<b>Cheque</b>	unlimited	3 working days after cheque received	7 working days after payment confirmed	Same day as application released

\* Depending on your bank, BACS payments can take up to 2-3 working days to appear on your bank statement after payment has been made

**Please note:** Payment for a single application cannot be split across multiple payment methods OR over multiple cards.

## **I haven't heard about the Nominate service before, what is it?**

The nominate option allows an applicant to nominate another person or company to pay the application fee. You can use the Nominate if you are making an application on behalf of another individual or company. To nominate someone to pay, you will need to know their email address, they will receive a payment request email to start the process.

After submitting an application, applicants will be presented with a choice of ways to make payment. The nominated person will be able to pay using the same payment options available to the nominator.

To use the Nominate, you should select 'Nominate another person to pay' from the list of payment options.

You can then enter the email address of the person you wish to nominate to pay the application fee. This will trigger an email to that person with a link to direct them to make the payment via the Planning Portal's payment service. They will continue to receive reminders until they pay and you will both receive confirmation once payment is successful. [Find out more by reading our user FAQ.](#)

## **How do I get a (partial) refund for my application?**

In order to get a refund or partial refund on an application, you will first need to contact the relevant LPA. Once you have contacted them, they will confirm to us that you require a refund, return the amount to us and we will process the refund back to you via the original payment method.

The refund will be processed as soon as possible, but within 14 days of the refund being agreed by and received from the Local Planning Authority.

We will notify you and the LPA by email once the refund has been actioned.

Money Laundering Regulations requires us to make the refund as we received the original payment. Our service charge will only be refunded if there is an error made on our part.

To enquire on the status of a refund, please contact our team on [refunds@planningportal.co.uk](mailto:refunds@planningportal.co.uk).

## **How will you deal with payments for combined consent applications?**

We will take a single payment for combined consent applications and will release this to the LPA as soon as it has cleared.

## Are all LPAs supporting the new service?

You will be able to continue to submit planning applications to all LPAs in England using our financial transaction service.

## Can I have your bank details so I can easily transfer directly to your account?

For planning fees under £1,000 we recommend payment online or via telephone, as these are the quickest and easiest options. As you submit your application you will be presented with on-screen information to guide you through this process. You can also nominate a third party to pay using our Nominate service.

For larger fees, the quickest payment methods are Faster Payments and CHAPS via your bank. BACS is also available but this will take slightly longer. If you are likely to pay by bank transfer, you might want to set us up in advance as a payee.

The details are shown below:

<b>Account name</b>	PortalPlanQuest Ltd
<b>Account Number</b>	31076744
<b>Sort Code</b>	40-11-60
<b>Bank Name</b>	HSBC
<b>Bank Address</b>	City-of-London 60 Queen Victoria Street London EC4N 4TR
<b>VAT registration number</b>	207 4030 52

## Help and information

If you require assistance with completing your online planning application or for more information on our payment service, please [visit our help page for comprehensive information](#) or email [support@planningportal.co.uk](mailto:support@planningportal.co.uk).