

DA Forum pushing 'Risk Smart' turnarounds

Barry Craddock reports

Although GCCC have indicated that development processing delays continue to be reduced, the joint industry bodies are establishing a set of measurable statistics that reflect agreed measures. The focus is on what's actually been achieved to meet targets and therefore what's accountable.

The DA Forum has allowed for improved communication between industry representatives and GCCC Officers that has also transpired to the development industry overall. This platform is only the beginning to a collaborative effort of reducing unnecessary delays in DA processing now that the Sustainable Planning Act 2009 (SPA) is in operation. The group focuses on the problems, issues or frustrations that add to further delays.

A push to have more applications considered under the 'Risk Smart' banner is seen a positive step forward by the group in producing faster timelines for low risk applications that can only assist the development industry, developers and end consumers. Continued improvement is still required from GCCC in relation to development permit conditions being relevant and issued in a timely manner and internal departments responding to the assessment manager also in a timely manner.

Background: From early 2008, SDGCI representatives have been actively engaged with Gold Coast City Council (GCCC) concerning the delays in development application (DA) processing. Together with the UDIA, Property Council and development industry representatives, a DA Forum was established to meet monthly with senior council officers. The idea was to work cooperatively through DA processing problems, frustrations, concerns and solutions to reduce development application delays.

The overall aim of the group being to streamline Council processes to allow faster 'turn around' times for all applications.

Through various workshops, 50 items were recognised by the DA Forum members that required attention and an Action Plan developed to systematically work through these as a collective group. Three key areas were readily identified being pre-lodgment, application process and information request & decision phases.

The Action Plan has been established in a manner that provides for outcomes and measurable timeframes to be achieved. The Forum has not only dealt with processing of planning applications but also with regard to Infrastructure Charges, Operational Works applications and Sealing of Survey Plans.

To date GCCC claim that about 50% of the issues raised have been attended to in raising the level of service from council. The early phases of the application process have been successfully implemented and appear to be operating efficiently. These items include:

- Acknowledgement Notices containing correct referral agencies;
- Reduction in number of Amended Acknowledgement Notices;
- Information Requests in accordance with Act timelines and appropriate requests;
- Draft conditions being sent to Applicants;

- Improved Final 'sign off' delays;
- Decision making time in line with Act;
- TLPI & PIP – impacts (new forms less complex);
- Survey/Questionnaire feedback on Decision Application process experience by applicants;
- Establishment of timeline to consider Negotiated Decision Notices by GCCC; and
- Applicants able to attend Developer Contributions Group Review Committee meeting at 'front' end of process.

SDGCI will continue to work hard in this forum for a better outcome for our industry.