Call for ideas Suggestions:

1. Improve availability and weight given to pre-app discussions/applications

- We have hugely benefitted from early dialogue in our local councils, and the councils that accommodate free pre-app submissions is hugely helpful and produces better planning applications that have the comfort of being assessed and screened.

- The availability of planning officers to take calls and have informal discussions with agents should be encouraged. We have experienced several councils where this is either unavailable (without paying) or discouraged.

- We have also experienced on numerous developments where we have had extensive pre-app discussions at officer level (often over an extended period of time), only to have this reviewed at planning application level and altered drastically. This undermines the planning officer and creates much additional abortive work for the applicant (both time and money being spent).

2. Improve multi-disciplinary meetings

- We have hugely benefitted from councils who involve input from roads/landscape/drainage departments all the way through, and allow for meetings that include representatives with these departments.

3. Improve the 'tracking' and discharge of planning conditions

- We have been frustrated by planning lack of accurate tracking and discharge of planning conditions, and have spoken with planning officers who don't know the current status of planning conditions. Often we are involved with complex planning applications with numerous planning conditions, and we have a 'live working spreadsheet' that shows the current status of each condition, who is responsible for action, and the current status/date of discharge. Such a document should be employed by planning departments on ALL complex applications, and should be a live document that is uploaded to the Planning portal and referred to.

4. Avoid the Politicisation of Planning Applications

- We have been involved with several planning applications (and have spoken with other agents and applicants who have had similar experience) where we have had really useful engagement with a planning department, addressing all the relevant policies and conditions, who have recommended approval at a planning committee only to be turned down at committee level due to a political decision. We have been informed by individual Committee members that they were minded to vote in approval but they cannot 'defer from the Party line.' There are obvious cases where this is appropriate due to the nature of the development, but all too often we have found that this undermines the planning officers and department whose job it is to assess the application in detail and have the expertise, training and qualifications to make an appropriate recommendations.

- All Council officers attending planning committees should have appropriate 'training in planning matters' mandatory before being allowed to be take part in committee decisions.

5. Streamline the Council Planning Policies

- Like may practices we are involved with applications in a number of local authorities, and are always staggered by the huge differences between various Council's planning policies and requirements (eg with regards to amenity space, parking etc that would seem all reasonable to expect as standard to apply Scotland wide). We do appreciate that variances are often necessary with various authorities, but there would appear to be fundamental principles that should be discussed and agreed across various Councils

6. Encourage Use of Green / sustainable / passive design

- This is the decade for the UK as a whole to change the way we build in direct response to the World Climate Emergency. The use of green technology and building strategies should be encouraged (by financial, policy or other means)

Jonathan Reeve
Architect
VOIGT Architects Limited