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Learning from *Better connected surveys* Planning task

Helen Williams

Better connected reviewer

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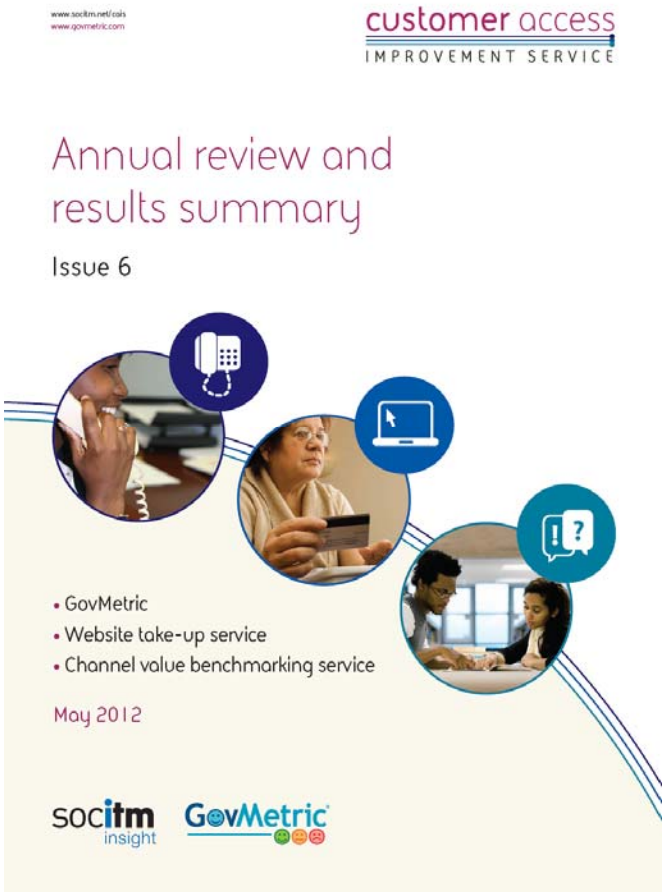
New era symbolised by launch of GDS

- Focus on meeting user needs (not building websites!)
- Be obsessed with user feedback and constant user testing
- Prioritise common case (not the exception)
- Achieve consistent user experience for all parts of online government

Highlights from *Website take-up service*

Results from 2011



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Q3 What was the main service area that you were interested in today

Main reasons to visit	% of total
1. Rubbish and recycling	10.69%
2. Libraries	8.62%
3. Job vacancies	7.48%
4. Leisure facilities	6.93%
5. Schools/youth	5.77%
6. Planning	5.44%
7. Council tax	5.19%
8. Housing	4.52%
9. Family history	4.14%
10. Transport and buses	3.72%

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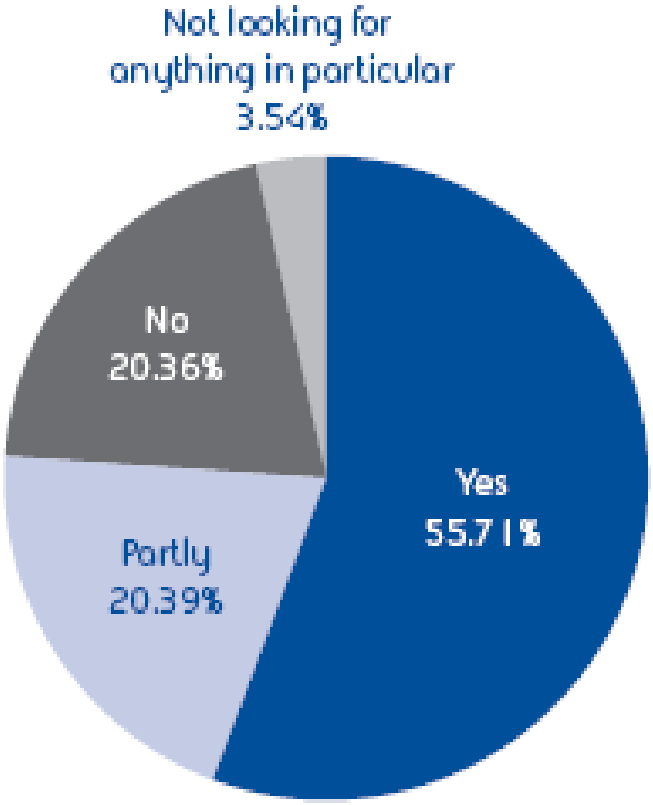
Q5 Did you find what you were looking for today?



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Visit failure by service

Libraries	13.07	Social care	20.47
Events information	14.24	Health	21.56
Council tax	14.90	Adult/further education	21.73
Leisure facilities	15.13	Highways	22.11
Rubbish and recycling	16.04	Transport and buses	22.39
Schools/youth	16.37	Electoral register	23.65
Environmental health	18.97	Housing	23.93
Council business	19.44	Parking	24.29
Job vacancies	20.04	**Planning**	**30.40**
Business	20.28	Family history	32.72

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Visit failure by frequency of visit (Planning)

Daily	20.0%
Several times in month	29.2%
Monthly	26.0%
Every few months	23.9%
Very rarely	33.9%
First time visitor	**38.7%**

Source: Feb/Mar 2012

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Tasks re planning applications

- Problem lies in software that is not very usable for general public
- Or has been poorly integrated
- Or is a mixture of both

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Is poor user experience inevitable?

- No!
- Some councils scored much better than others, using same systems and software

- Why do some councils perform better?

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Why do some councils perform better?

- Getting an excellent, consistent user journey
- Getting link wording right
- Covering the topic properly
- Testing and tweaking software configurations, upgrades
- Necessary clicks - ensuring user cannot bypass key information

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Getting wording right – South Tyneside

Planning

- Search and comment on planning applications
- Do I need planning permission?

Planning

Search planning applications
Search and comment on planning applications online.

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Search planning applications

Search for planning applications

- Current planning applications (within past month)
- Search by property/street
- Search by reference number
- Recently decided planning applications
- Advanced search
- Map of planning applications

By using our online search facility you agree to our **terms and conditions**

Email alerts
Keep up-to-date with new planning applications in your area with **email alerts**

How do I comment on a planning application?

Online

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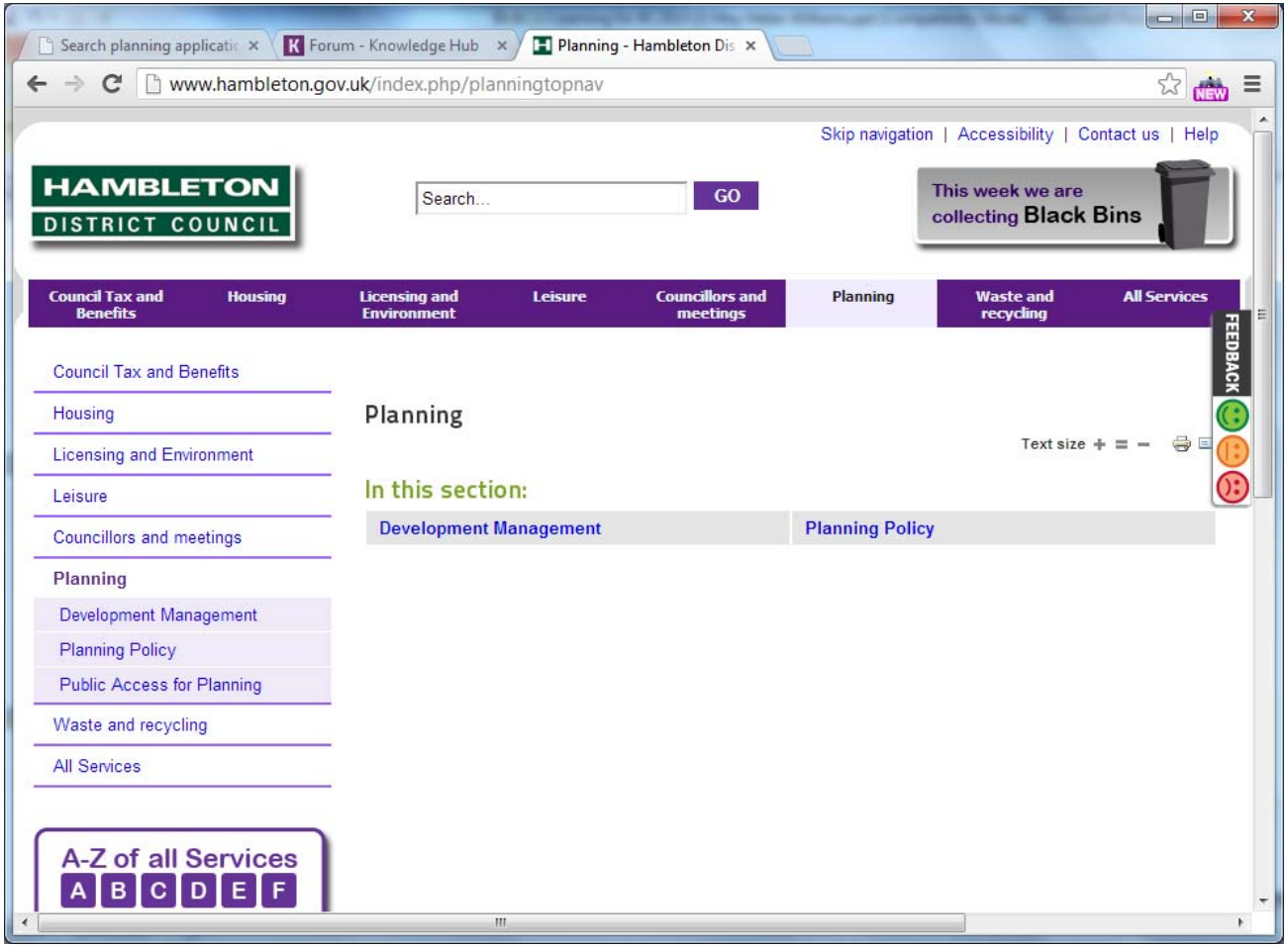
Getting wording wrong



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The planning task

- Object to a planning application: 18 questions
- Routes - can I get to the right page via Google, site search, navigational tree, A-Z etc.
- Quality of information - do I have all the relevant information to make an objection

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Planning system questions

- Q96 Is a link provided for viewing all current applications?
- Q97 When viewing a current application, am I informed that I can comment on it?
- Q98 When viewing a current application and preparing to submit comments, is guidance provided about permitted grounds for objection to an application?
- Q99 Is it clear that any comments I submit will be published, along with my name, and available for inspection by any interested party?
- Q100 Is it clear how I might obtain assistance if required
- Q102 Was a useful map presented to me during the completion of this task?
- Q103 Were all the relevant pieces of information linked together to make a smooth, coherent journey?

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Planning software performance

Product	No of customers	Market share	Ticks (average)	Rating (average)
Fastweb	12	4%	70%	2.25
ApplicationSearchServlet	11	4%	51%	2.00
Ocella	11	4%	38%	1.82
SwiftLG	16	6%	45%	1.75
Planning Explorer	21	7%	43%	1.71
PlanetApplicationEnquiry	3	1%	48%	1.67
WAM	8	3%	41%	1.63
AcolNet	25	9%	39%	1.60
Public Access	172	60%	52%	1.55
GFPlanningsearch	8	3%	29%	1.13
Total	**287**	**100%**	**45%**	**1.71**

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Councils using Fastweb

- Craven DC
- Eastleigh BC
- Eden DC
- Harlow DC
- Mansfield DC
- Neath Port Talbot CBC
- North Devon DC
- Rugby BC
- South Lakeland DC
- LB Sutton
- Welwyn Hatfield DC
- Wyre Forest DC

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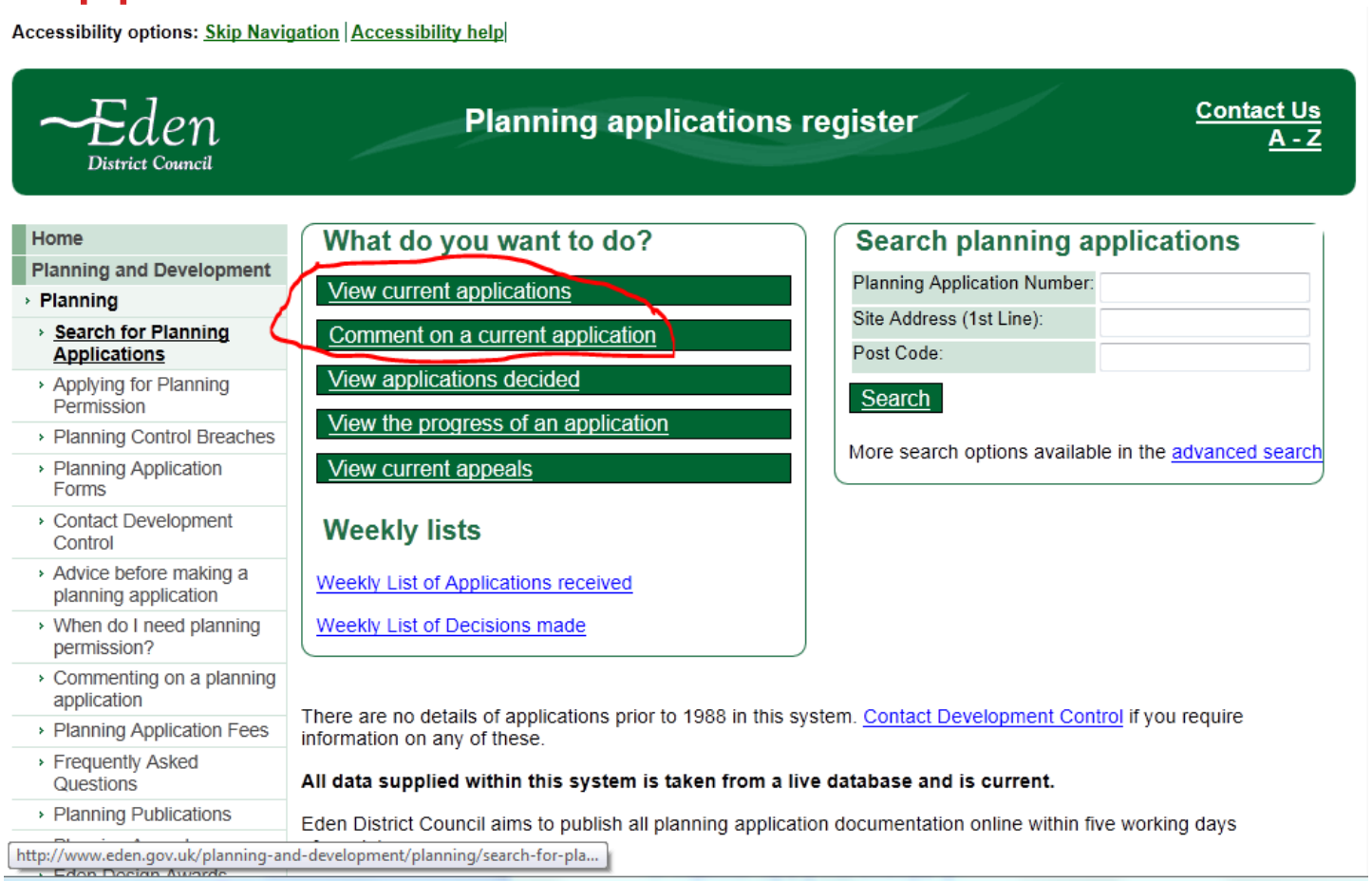
Q96 Is a link provided for viewing all current applications?



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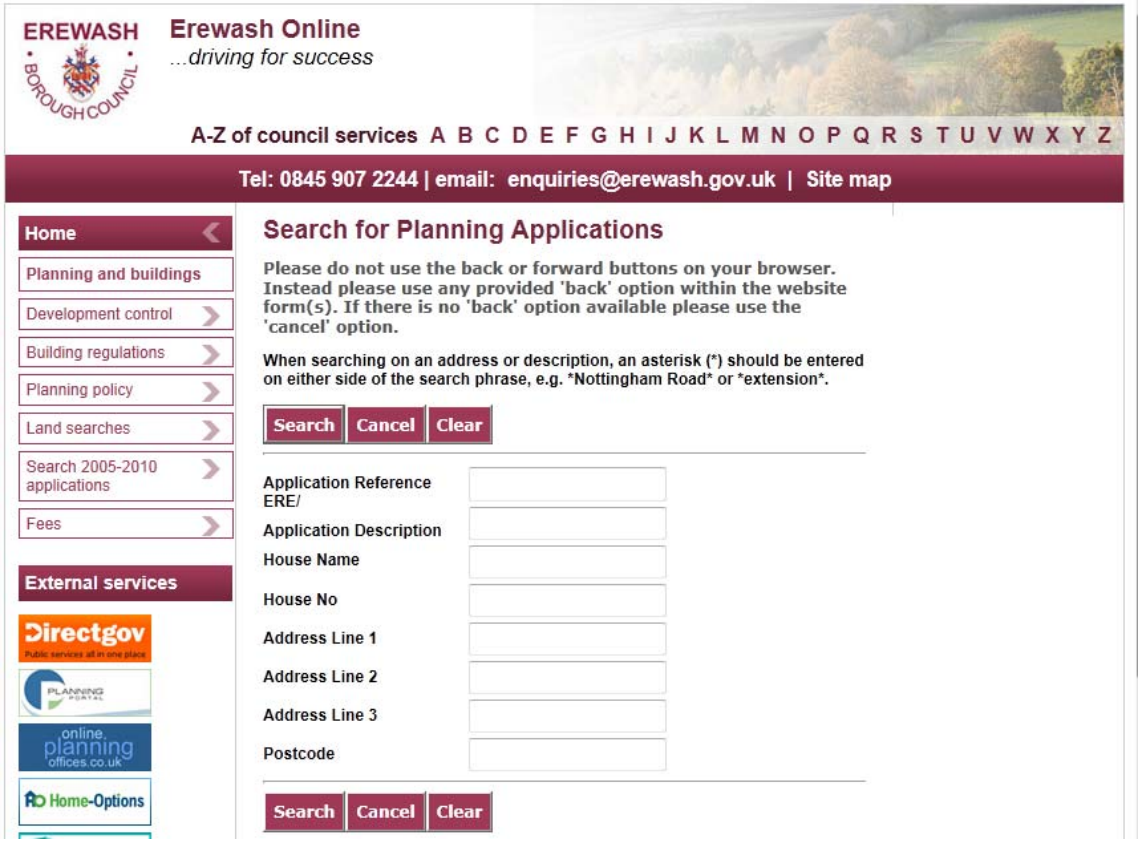

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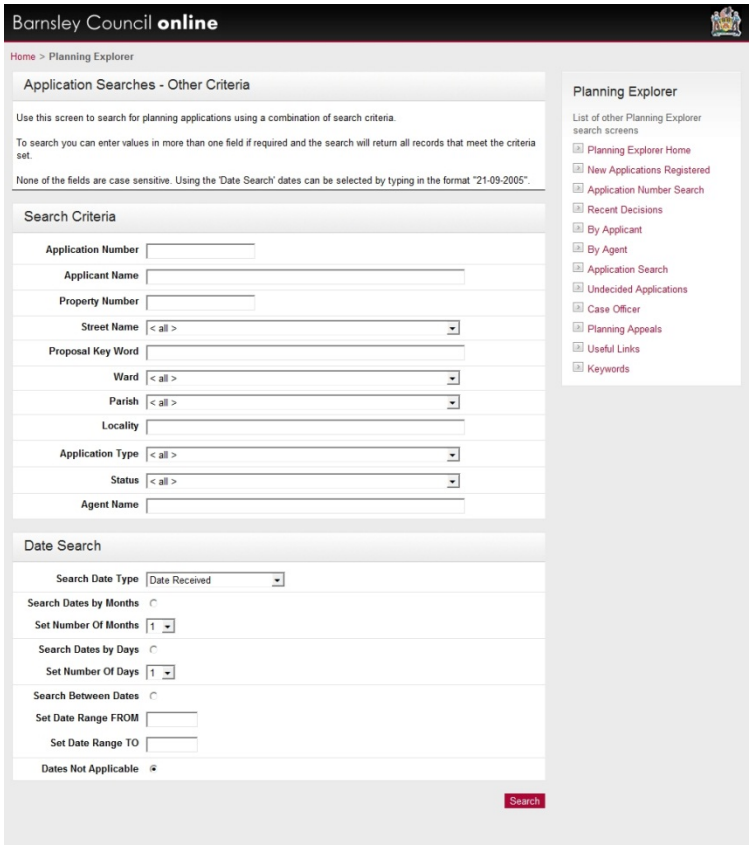

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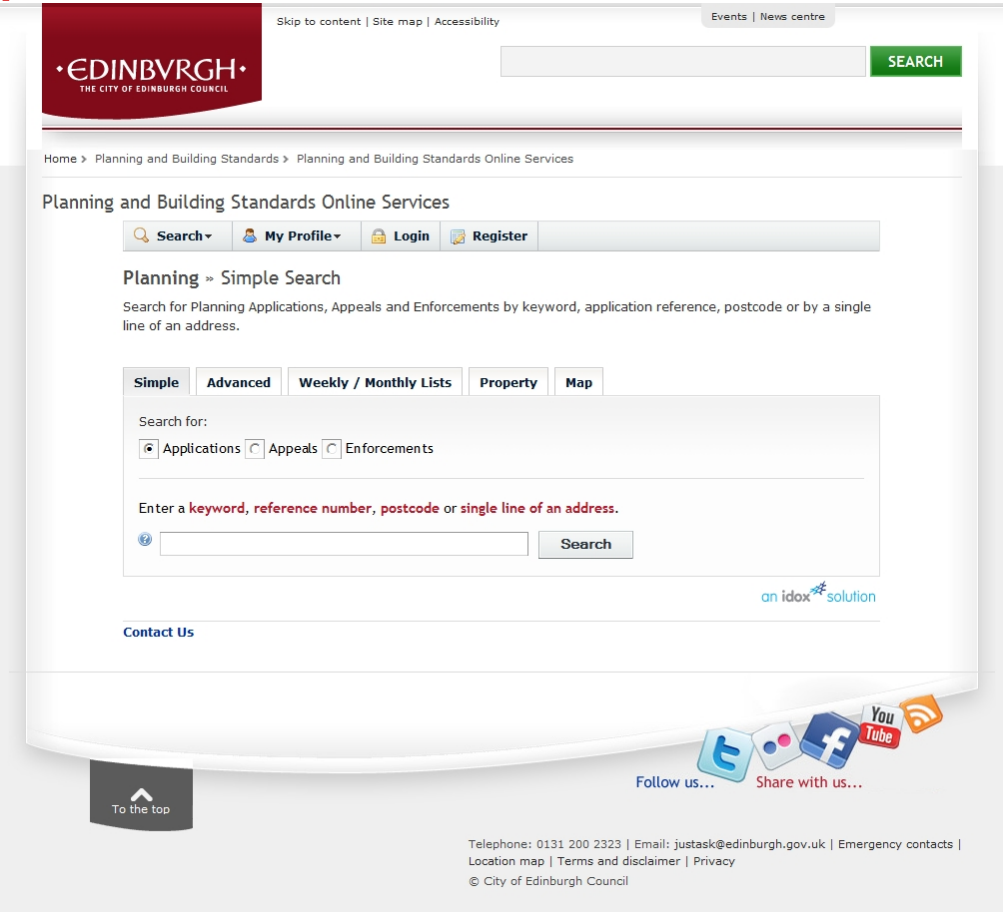

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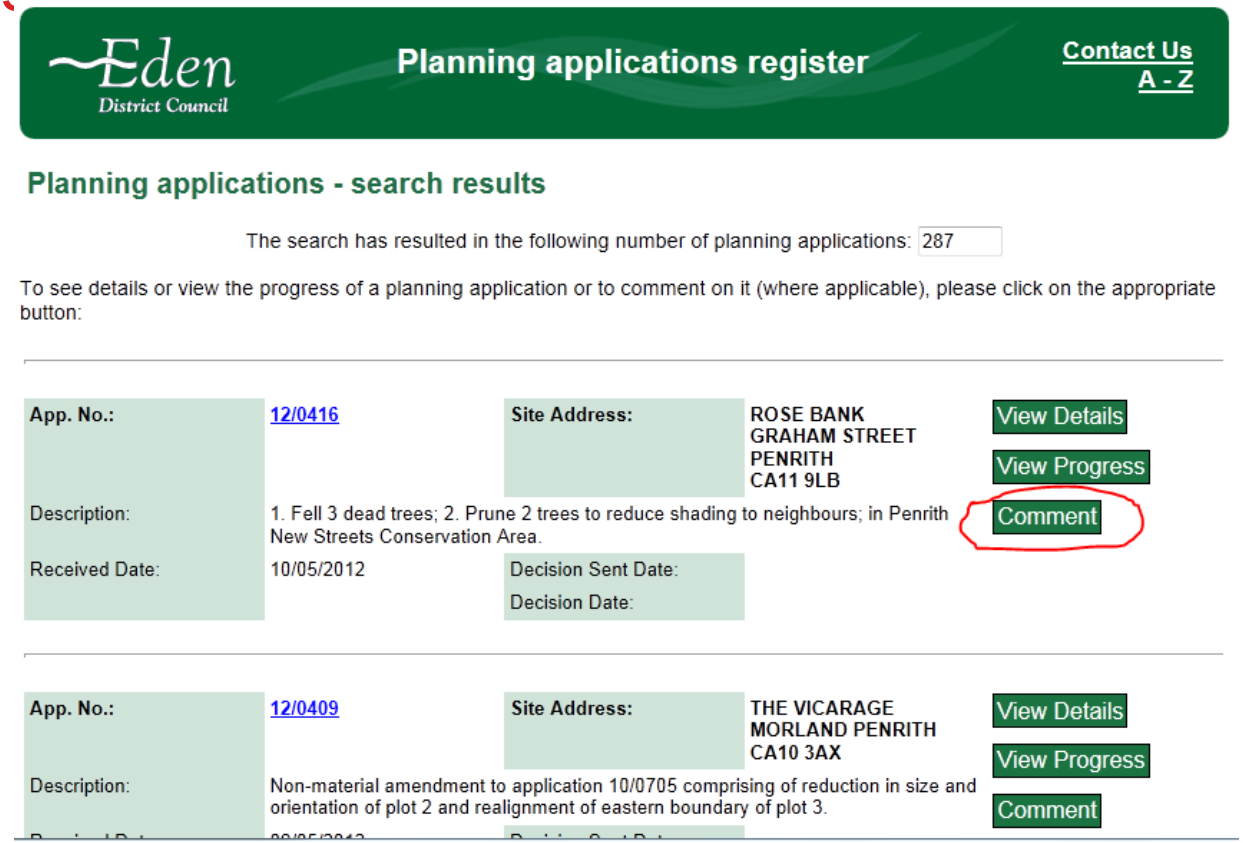
Q97 Am I informed that I can comment on an application if it is still open for consultation?



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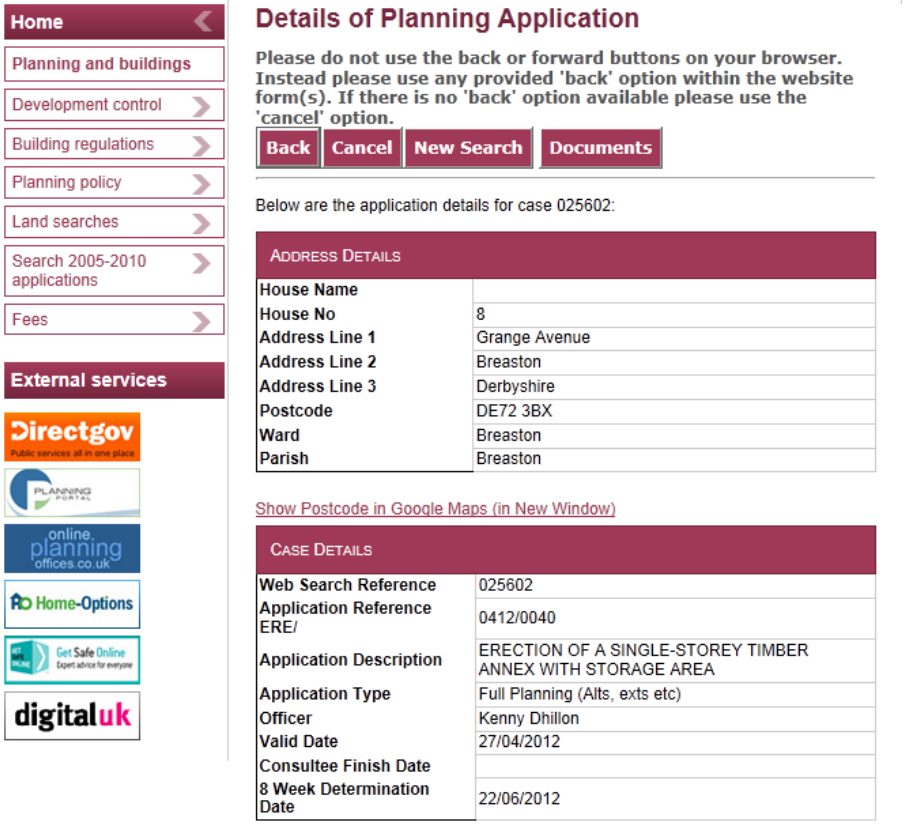

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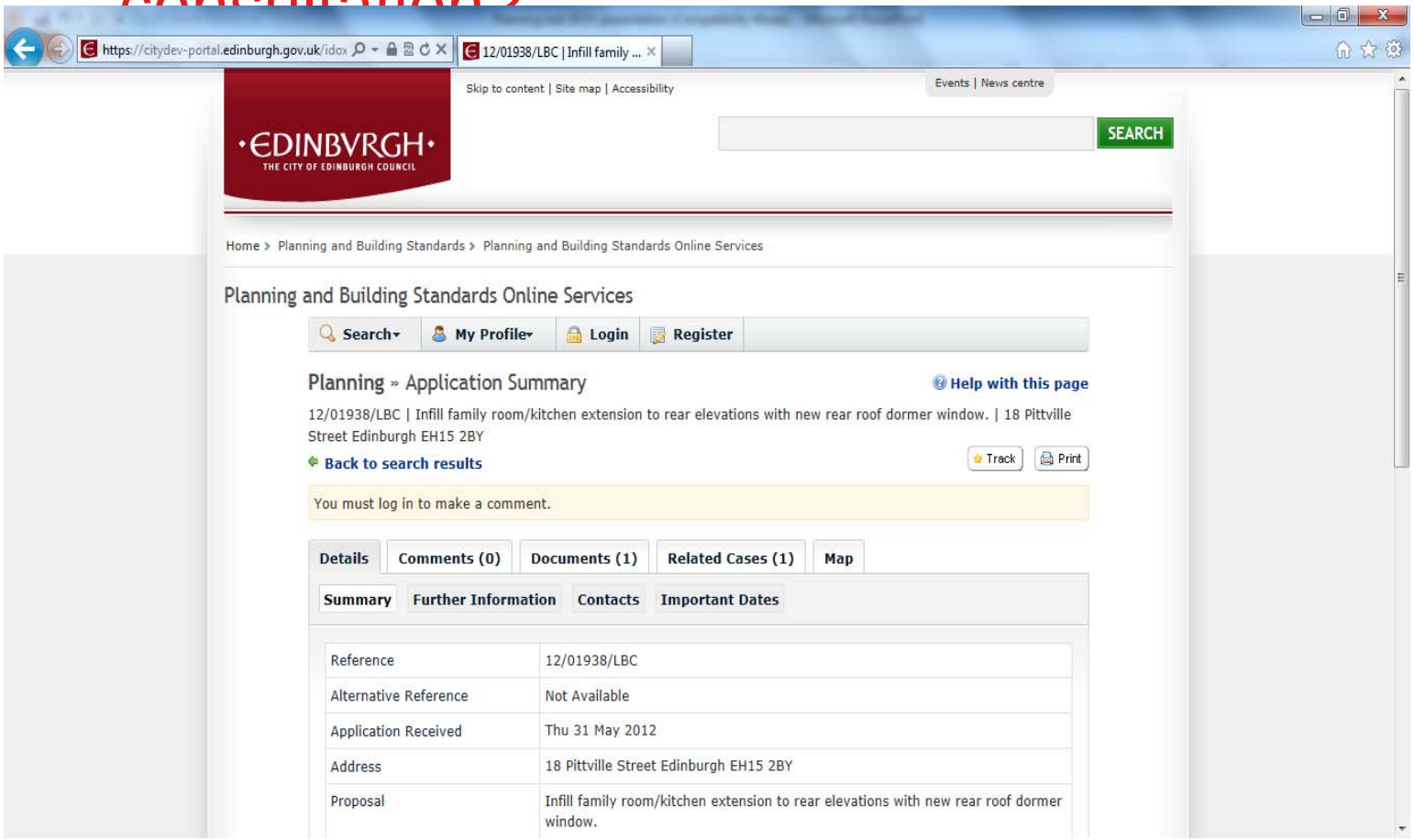
Q22 Am I informed that I can comment on an application if it is still open for consultation?



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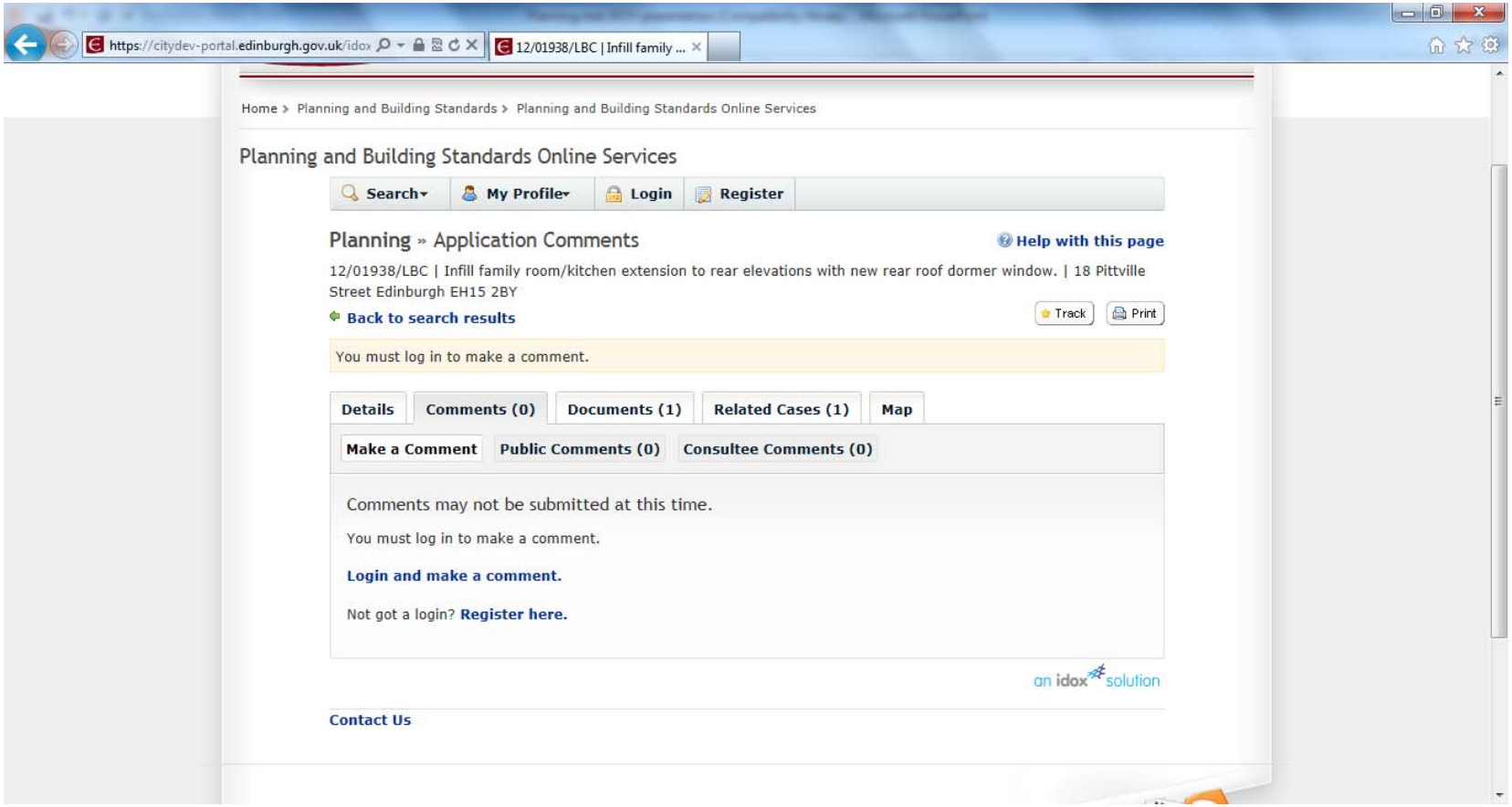
Make a comment



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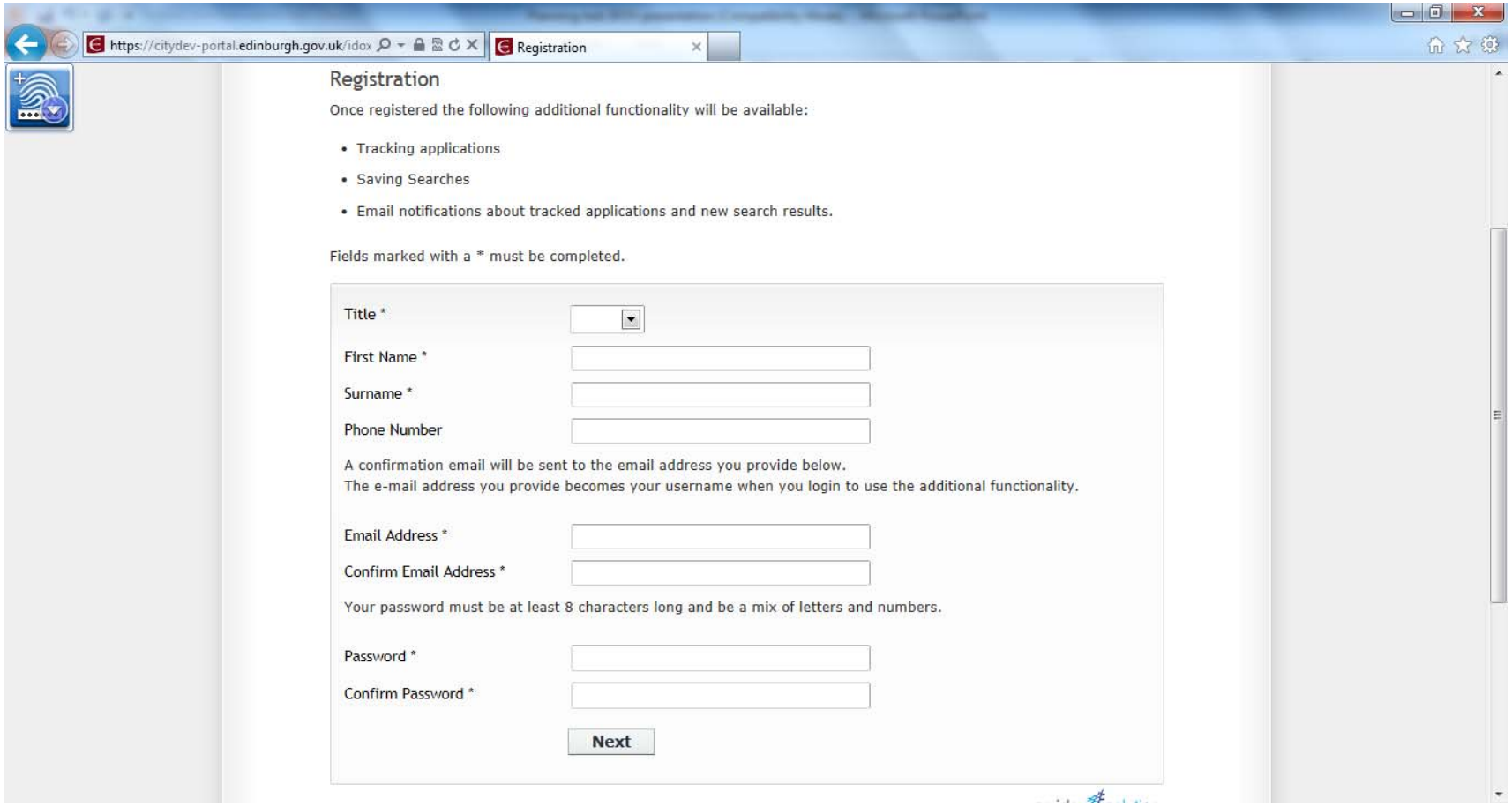
Registration page



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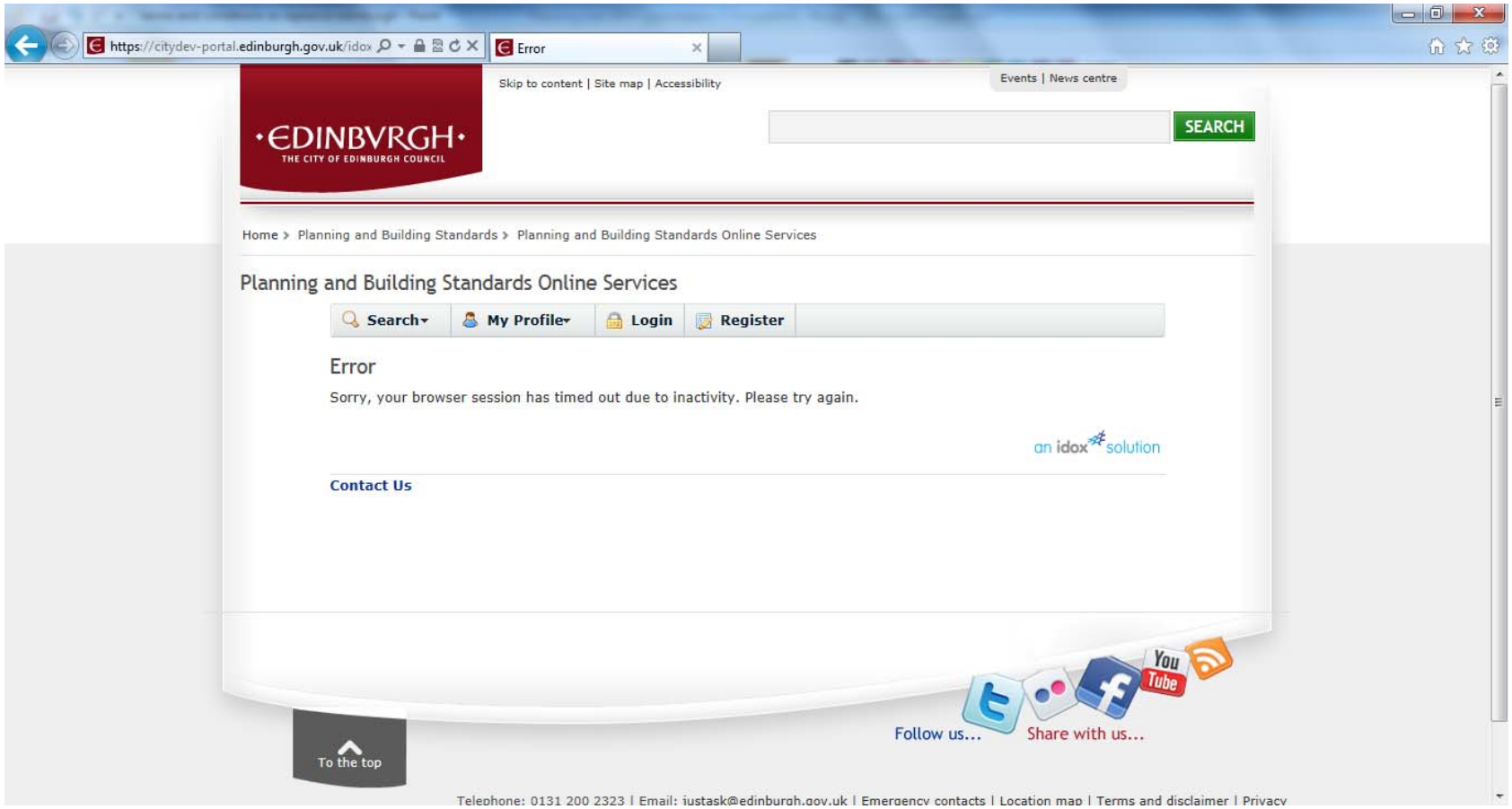
Time out, every time



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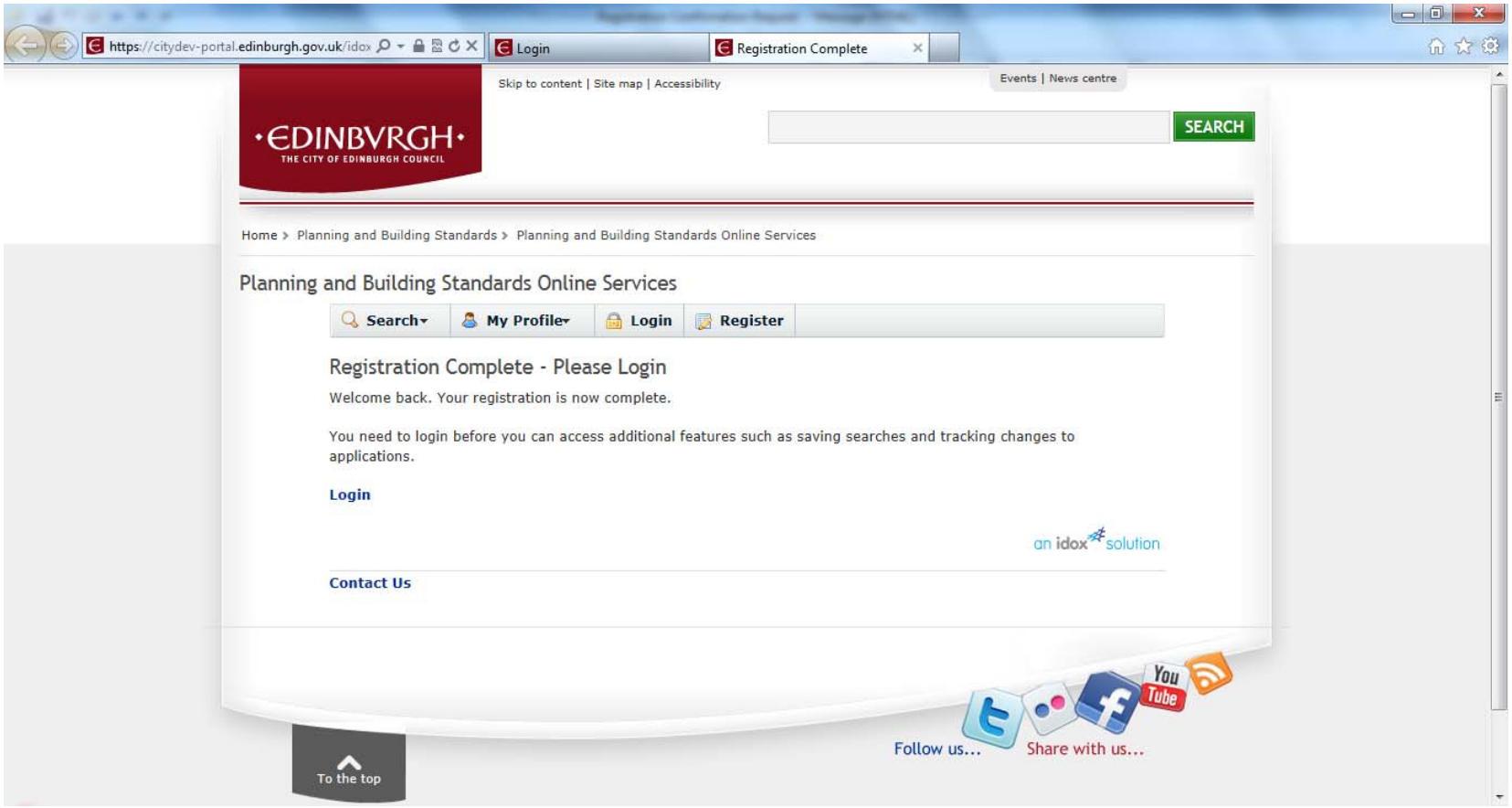
Registration success!



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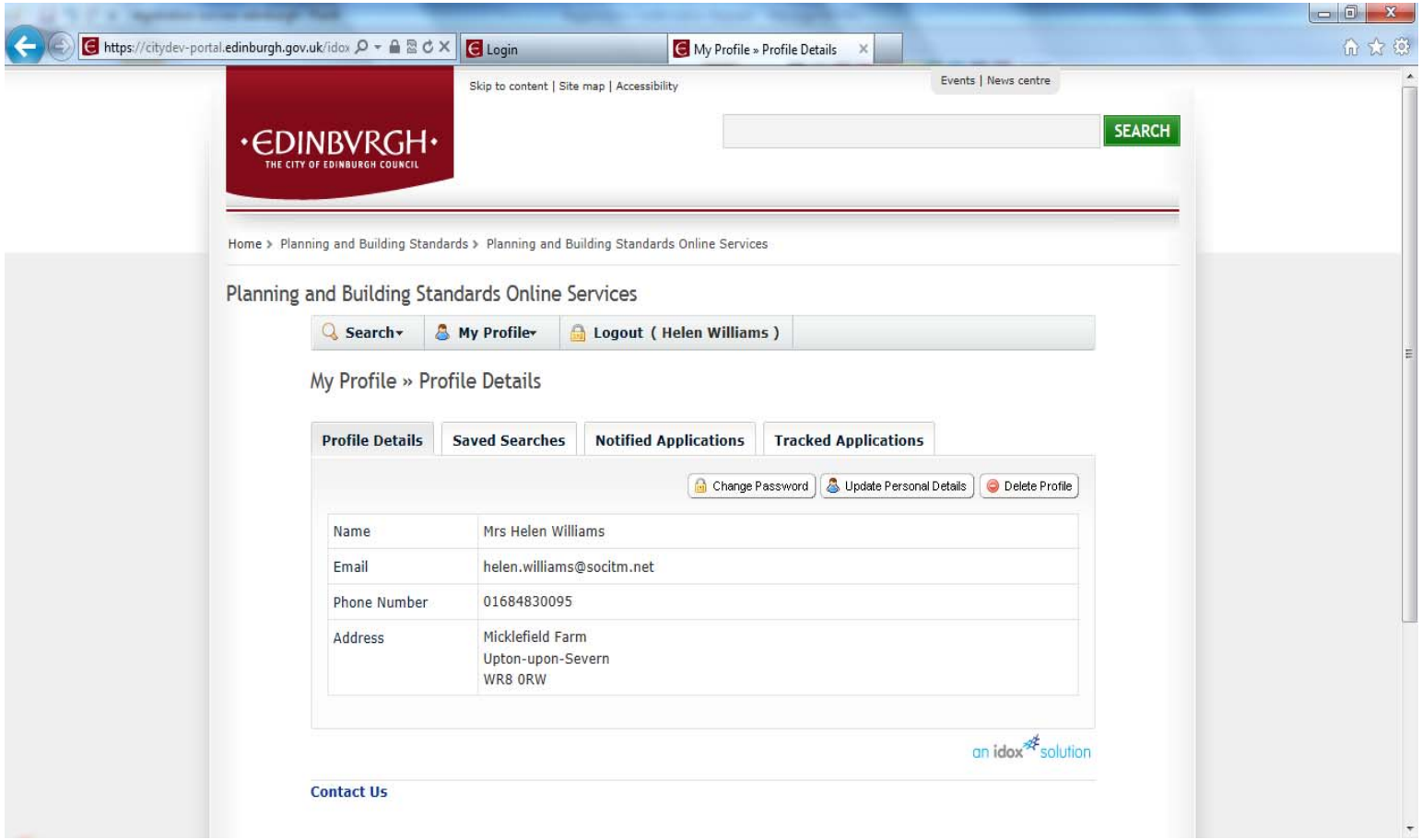
Logged in



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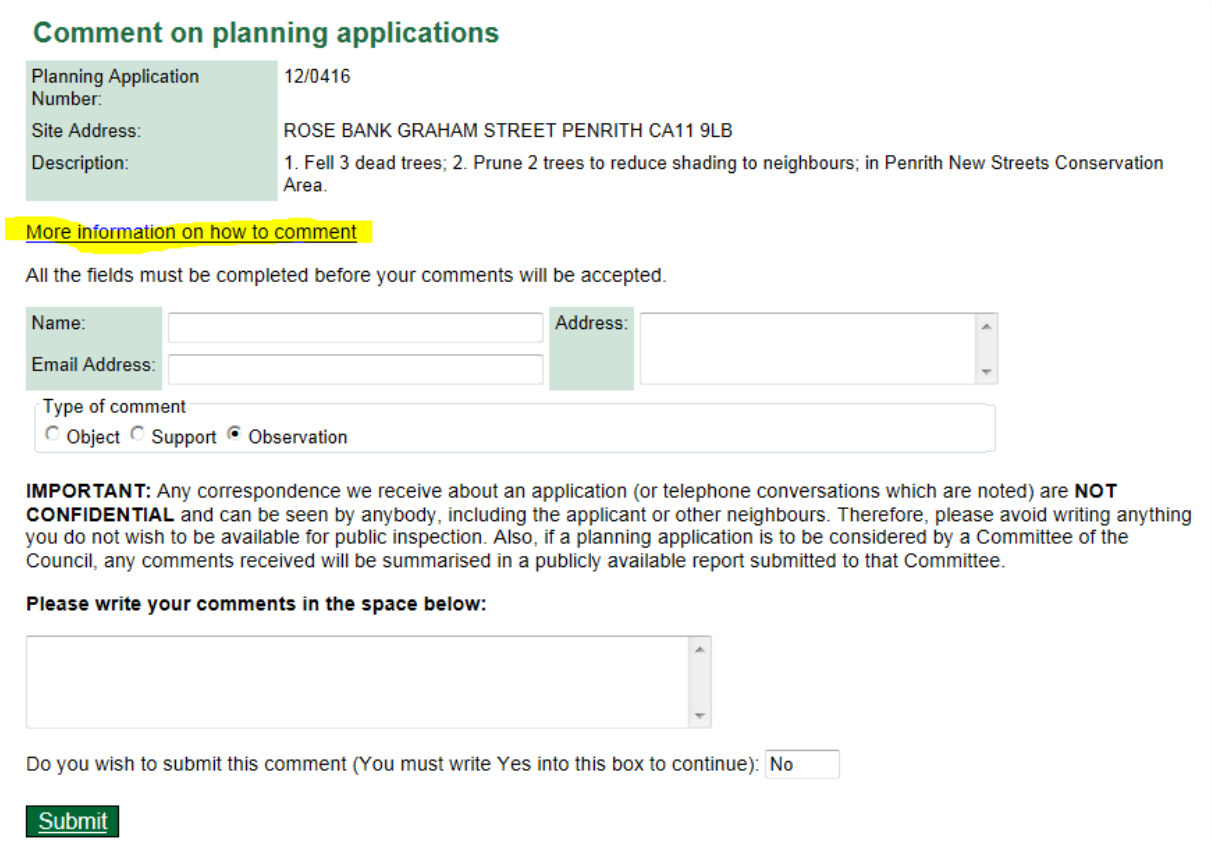
Q98 Is guidance provided at the appropriate step about permitted grounds for objection to an application?



Comment on planning applications

Planning Application Number:	12/0416
Site Address:	ROSE BANK GRAHAM STREET PENRITH CA11 9LB
Description:	1. Fell 3 dead trees; 2. Prune 2 trees to reduce shading to neighbours; in Penrith New Streets Conservation Area.

More information on how to comment

All the fields must be completed before your comments will be accepted.

Name: Address:

Email Address:

Type of comment

○ Object ○ Support ◉ Observation

IMPORTANT: Any correspondence we receive about an application (or telephone conversations which are noted) are **NOT CONFIDENTIAL** and can be seen by anybody, including the applicant or other neighbours. Therefore, please avoid writing anything you do not wish to be available for public inspection. Also, if a planning application is to be considered by a Committee of the Council, any comments received will be summarised in a publicly available report submitted to that Committee.

Please write your comments in the space below:

Do you wish to submit this comment (You must write Yes into this box to continue): No

Submit

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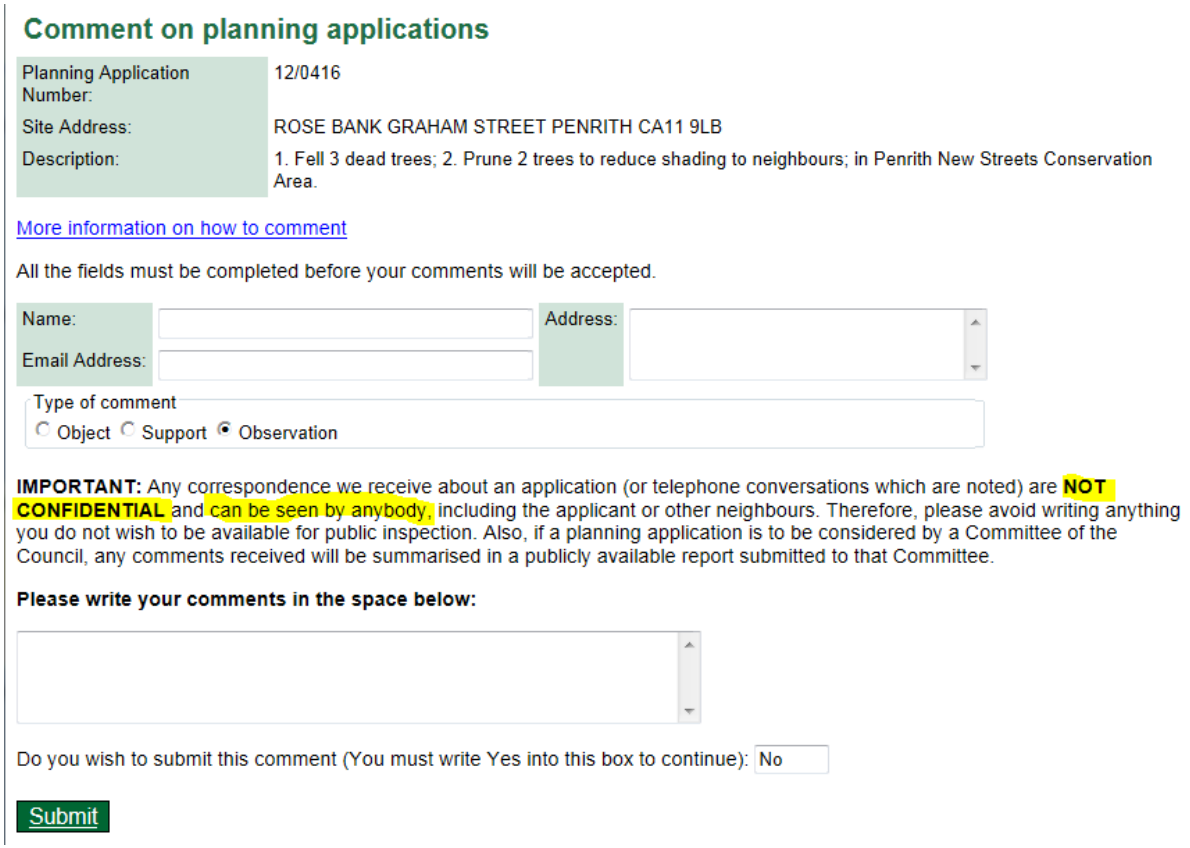
Q98 Is it clear that any comments you submit will be published, along with your name…



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Please write your comments in the space below:

Do you wish to submit this comment (You must write Yes into this box to continue): No

Submit

South Tyneside reviewer comment

- Could not fail to miss this signposting from the landing page; the first link presented was 'search and comment on planning applications.'
- Clear statement provided saying that if the application was open for comment I would see the 'comment on this application' link within the application itself.
- Lots of useful quick links for finding new planning applications, recently decided, even a useful map where I could click on an application number and be taken straight to the application

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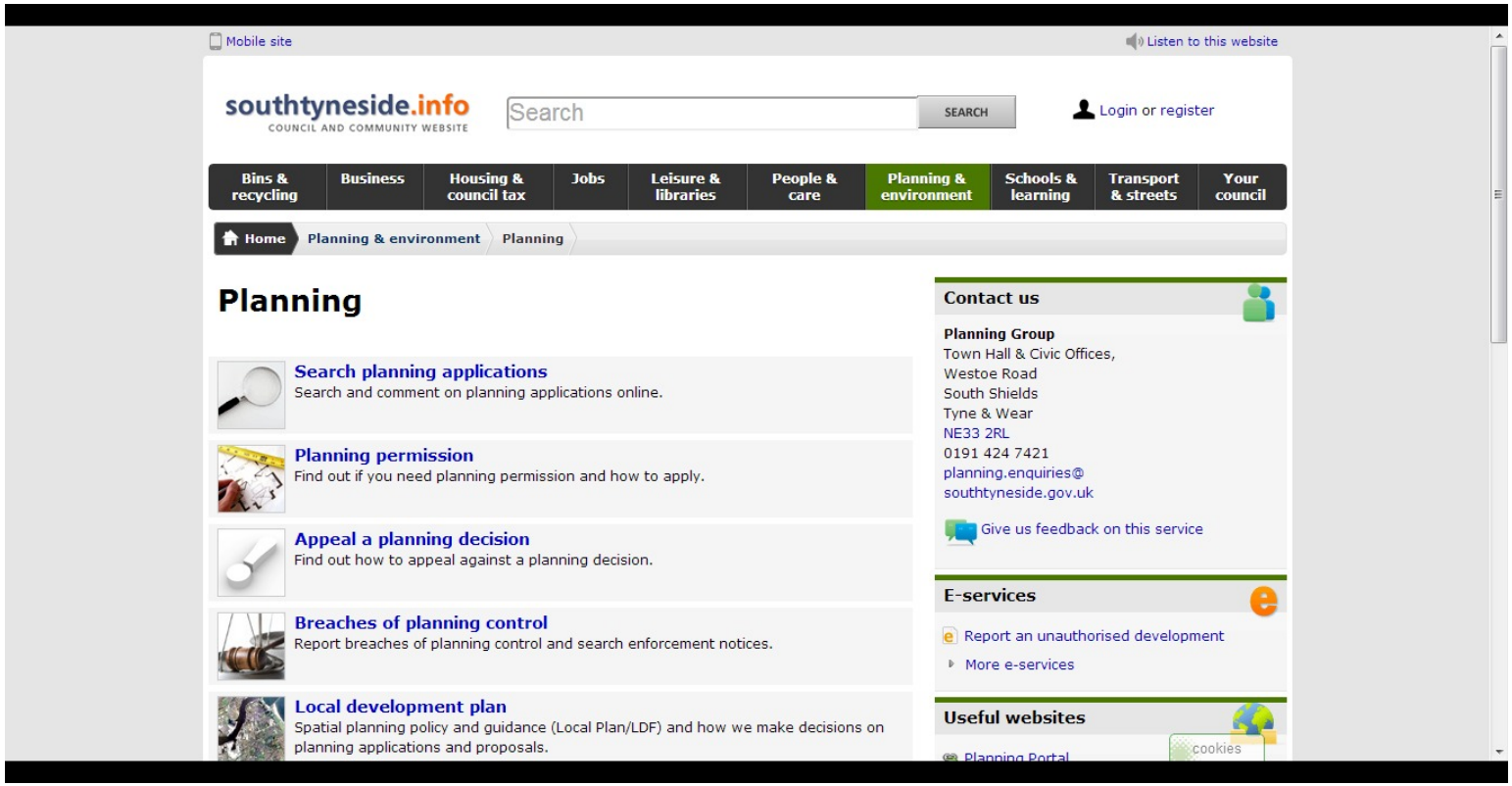
South Tyneside landing page



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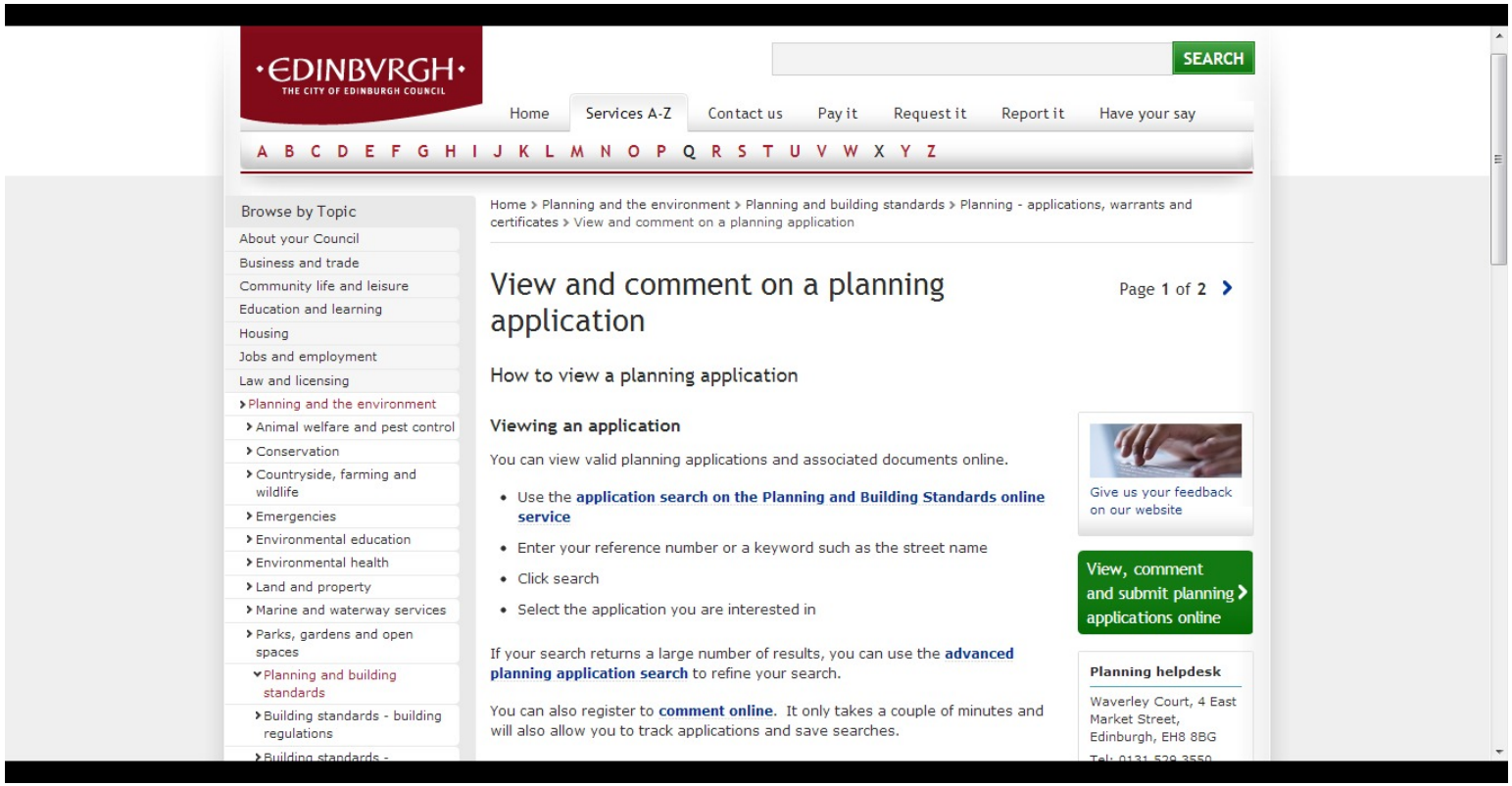
Edinburgh landing page



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South Cambs landing page

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South Cambs landing page

Certificate of Appropriate Development: CD

Variation of Condition - VC

The Queen's Diamond Jubilee - June 2012

See below for advice on the need for planning permission to celebrate the Queen's Jubilee.

The Queen's Diamond Jubilee 2012

See below for the organisation staff charts for building control, planning and new communities.

Organisation Charts - Building Control, Planning & New Communities

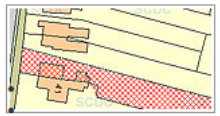
The planning service offers five main functions:

Planning Policy

Prepares the Local Development Framework (previously the Local Plan) which sets out planning policies that guide the development and use of land in the district.

For more information, visit:

- LDF News - for the latest information on the preparation of the Local Development Framework
- Local Development Framework (LDF) - for information on Development Plan Documents (DPDs), Area Action Plans (AAPs) and the Proposals Map
- Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs)



Development Control

Implements planning policy through the processing of planning applications:

- view planning applications and planning appeals
- seek general planning advice and pre-application advice
- find out if you need planning permission for your development
- submit a planning application online or download planning application forms

You can also find out about:

- making a complaint about a development
- Section 106 Contributions - what are they and how do they work?

- How can I inspect a planning application?
- How long does a planning application take to process?
- More planning FAQs

EXTERNAL LINKS

- Planning Portal
- Planning Aid
- Town & Country Planning Act 1990
- Planning Obligations Circular 2005
- Planning Act 2008
- Community Infrastructure Levy Regulations 2010
- Planning Portal advice on planning appeals

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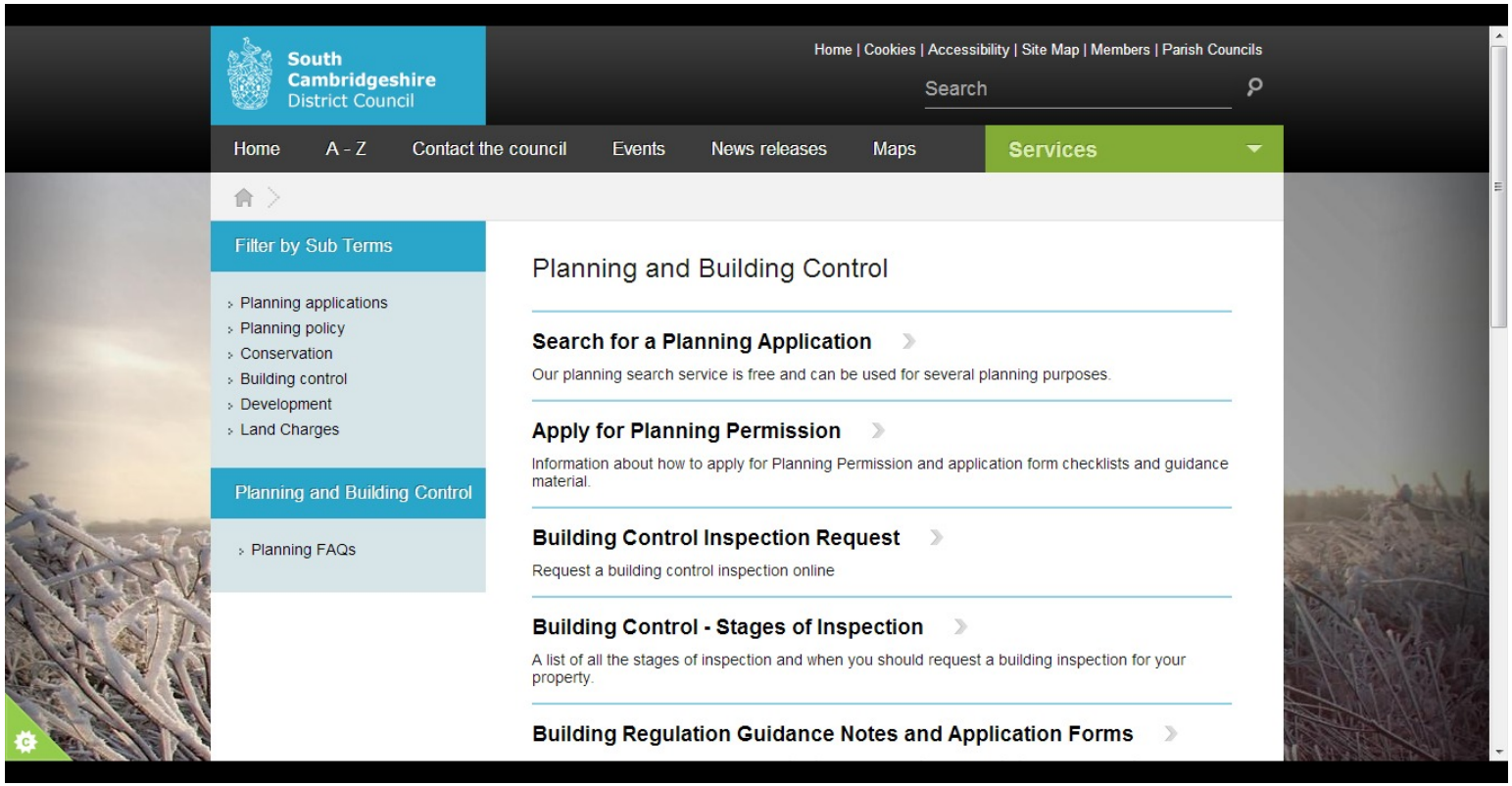
South Cambs new landing page



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South Cambs planning system

PLANNING APPLICATIONS - LAND AND PROPERTY ADMINISTRATION

Home

Welcome to the planning search facility. The service is free and can be used to:

- Search for planning applications in your area
- Read details about applications, including descriptions
- Print or download a list of applications for an area
- View the weekly applications received and determined list

Planning

Search For a Planning Application
Find location on a map
Planning Committee Agendas
Planning Weekly Lists (Applications Determined and Applications Registered)
- NEW! North-West of Cambridge Planning Application
- NEW! Northstowe Planning Application

In order to submit a pre-application enquiry, make an enforcement complaint or receive notifications applications of interest, please register below.

Log-in

Log-in
Register

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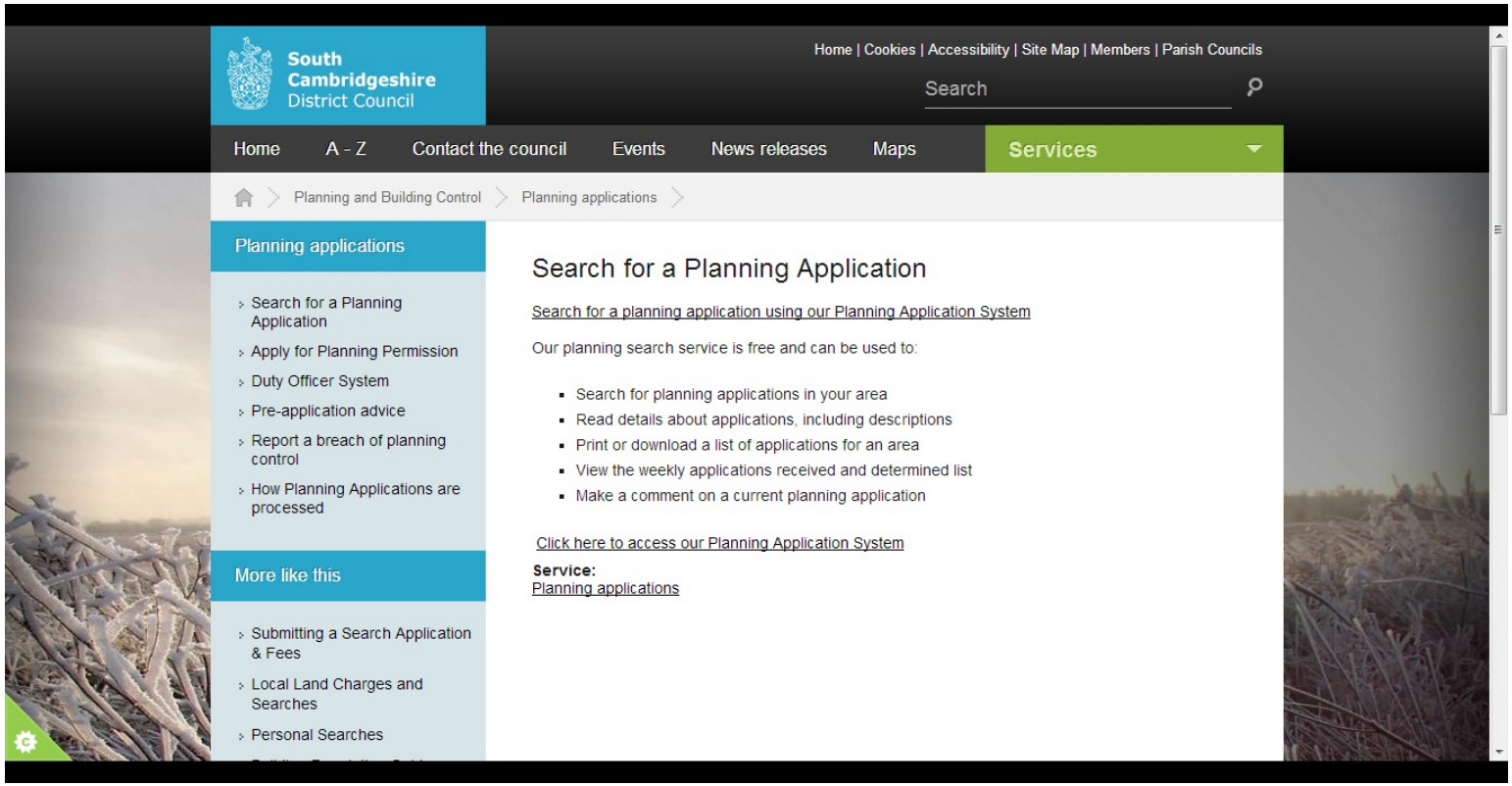
South Cambs new application search



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Website take-up service comments

- Very confusing, too much text, too many links, poorly written, very difficult to find what you're looking for. I would suggest dramatically reducing the amount of text per page with clearer links to information.
- It did not accept my reference numbers being searched even though I had typed correctly. I finally got what I wanted through advanced search. It should have taken a fraction of the time.

Website take-up service comment

- Tried to leave comments on a planning application - torturous process! Keep saying it had timed out despite no time lag, so I had to repeatedly re-enter comments. I'm sure many just can't be bothered and give up before submitting their thoughts. Not sure if problems are due to lack of site mobile optimisation? If so, it would be a worthwhile investment.

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Website take-up service comments

- ‘Details of a proposed planning development. Will try to telephone planning when the holiday is over.’
- ‘Will phone on Monday, as searches returned zero, except for one that was completely incorrect by referencing wrong information.’
- ‘We are looking for planning decisions but the information is not up to date. This results in making contact by telephone’
- ‘Wanted to know how my planning application is progressing. Will telephone instead.’

IDOX PublicAccess meeting

- Review customer journey and terms used in new releases of PublicAccess
- Review some of product functionality (e.g. search configuration option to include recent apps, add link to guidance)
- Configuring options to improve customer experience – best practice guide, potentially reduce options available
- Ongoing dialogue with Socitm *Insight*

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How well are planning services presented? *Better connected 2013*

- ‘Generally very poor. Not helped by weak (or missing) content about how to actually comment. Given that a large percentage of commenters may be ‘first-timers’, this really isn’t acceptable.
- The application search functions ranged from average to awful, often requiring advanced knowledge of how planning works to really get anywhere.
- I simply don’t understand why councils fail to provide guidance on permitted grounds for objection a) in a logical place on a user journey and/or b) at all.
- Once again, many councils were providing very good signposting but, once you got to the task, the information was poor and you are often faced with a log-in at the last hurdle.’

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Better connected 2014 timetable

- Sites reviewed between 27 Oct and 7 Dec
- Report published 3 March 2014
- Mobile survey integrated into main survey (using smartphones)
- Provisional task list at www.socitm.net
- Final task list publication 30 September
- Two mystery tasks
- Planning task – find out about a planning decision

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Preparing for *Better connected 2014*

- User / usability testing
- Review software configurations
- Check and tweak search results
- Review planning landing pages
- Check signposting and info for planning decisions

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Thank you

Helen Williams

Better connected reviewer

helen.williams@socitm.net