



# How to submit a good consent application

Missing documentation and poorly executed drawings are two of the main reasons a consent application may be returned with a request for information (RFI). Levy-funded research found there's room for consistency and clear guidance on building consent drawings to improve them and lift the understanding of those reading them – thereby streamlining the consenting process.

A key task for a building designer, after agreeing on a design with a client, is to transform that design into a set of construction documents that facilitate the accurate construction of the building.

The documents also form the basis of a building consent application. Obtaining a consent will allow construction to proceed.

## What's the problem?

Importantly, the documents need to be understood and followed by all those involved in the building process, including the client, the building consent authority (BCA) officials who process the consent application and review the construction, builders and associated subtrades doing the pricing and carrying out construction, material suppliers ... the list goes on!

*The vexed issue of requests for information in Build 205* looked at the behaviours of those preparing building consent applications and the BCA staff processing them and discussed some associated problems.

It noted that the BRANZ external research report *ModelDocs: Transforming building consenting behaviour for better housing* found a significant difference between what designers believe is sufficient documentation for a consent application and what BCAs require to process the



application. This means there's a high number of RFIs issued following consent applications, creating delays in the process and causing frustration all round.

## Complex designs

The ModelDocs report also showed that

some of the documentation issues may relate to the complexity of buildings being submitted for consent.

Most consents lodged are for R1-R3 type residential buildings (as defined by MBIE's national BCA competency assessment system levels). The difference in complexity ►►

between an R1 building and an R3 building is significant, with a corresponding difference in the documentation required. The complexity levels of C1–C3 non-residential buildings are different again and require another level of documentation.

### Look to MBIE for guidance

A surprising finding of the report is that the industry may not be fully aware of the guidance currently available on building consent documentation requirements – yet MBIE's Building Performance team provides plenty.

For example, *How to support your building consent application* provides guidance on a range of supporting documentation – from Acceptable Solutions and Verification Methods to producer statements and design features reports. The guidance also includes a standard order of documents checklist for building consent applications with information about building plans (drawings) and supporting documents such as geotechnical reports and H1 *Energy efficiency* calculations. The guidance clearly identifies what plans are required and what they should include.

Guidance on the building consent process is also available. *Understanding the building consent process* covers everything from RFIs to start and end dates.

Then there's the Co-ordinated Building Information (CBI) system – a classification system for the construction industry covering the five main information sources associated with construction: drawings, specifications, quantities, technical and research information, and trade information and publications. This is also a useful aid to preparing consent documentation.

Further, all BCAs provide building consent lodgement checklists. While these vary in detail, they cover all the information needed to process a consent, clearly define the sequence of documents and provide clear guidance on drawings that need to be included with each aspect of a project. They

also differentiate between requirements for residential and commercial buildings.

Regardless of what documentation is submitted for consent, the main area of conjecture often relates to the relevancy and quality of that documentation, particularly the drawings.

### No professional guidance on preparing drawings

What appears to be missing is specific guidance for those preparing consent drawings from the professional bodies that represent them. Designers produce most of the documentation but lack supporting information from their representative bodies.

Building officials often encounter drawings that not only lack adequate detail but are also difficult to follow and comprehend. While commercial pressures or budgetary constraints are often given as reasons for these deficiencies, ModelDocs also identified a frequent lack of knowledge about what's required by the BCA and the compliance requirements of some Building Code clauses.

ModelDocs also found varying ability among building officials to understand drawings, so there's a need for drawings to be prepared in a way they can be read and understood by all involved in the consent and building process.

On the other hand, it's often noted by building officials and builders that sets of drawings contain too much information – adding to the processing time and creating confusion.

Drawings in a digital format or at a smaller scale are often given as reasons for rejection. Small-scale drawings often lack sufficient identification or explanation of critical aspects of construction.

Relevancy is another concern. Often drawings don't accurately relate to a building because they have been cut and pasted or use inappropriate details from a common library. Designers need to be more diligent about selecting details that relate specifically to the design.

There is also often a disconnection between the drawings required to construct the building and those required to get the consent. Some designers are said to prepare construction drawings suitable for builders and subtrades to price and construct the building and then add the minimum extra information that will allow the building consent to be processed.

### Examples of typologies should be available

There's an opportunity to provide clear guidance on what's required for building consent drawings. Improving the content and quality of drawings should not only streamline the consenting process but also improve the understanding of all those needing to read and interpret them.

An openly available exemplar of acceptable consent and construction drawings, across a range of typical building technologies, would be useful for designers and should be relatively easy to compile.

Similarly, more consistency among BCAs on the required components of consent documentation such as a standard building consent lodgement checklist would improve the quality of that documentation.

Also required is a focus on consent documentation in continuing professional development across all industry professions.

With the potential for AI to be used for building consent processing soon, consistency and conformity of documentation across the industry will become even more critical. ◀

#### FOR MORE ▶

See MBIE Building Performance *Understanding the building consent process* ▶

