City Council Deposit Points and Opening Hours

When we refer to planning policy consultation documents being made available for inspection at 'deposit points', we mean the following locations during normal office hours:

Venue	Location	Opening hours	
Oxford City Council Offices	St. Aldate's Chambers 109-113 St. Aldate's Oxford OX1 1DS	Monday Tuesday Wednesday Thursday Friday Saturday Sunday	9.00am - 5.00pm 9.00am - 5.00pm 9.00am - 5.00pm 9.00am - 5.00pm 9.00am - 4.30pm Closed Closed
Oxford Central Library	Information services 2nd Floor Central Library Westgate Centre Oxford OX1 1DJ	Monday Tuesday Wednesday Thursday Friday Saturday Sunday	9.00am - 7.00pm 9.00am - 7.00pm 9.00am - 5.30pm 9.00am - 7.00pm 9.00am - 5.30pm 9.00am - 7.00pm Closed
Summertown Library	South Parade Summertown Oxford OX2 7JN	Monday Tuesday Wednesday Thursday Friday Saturday Sunday	9.30am - 5.30pm 9.30am - 7.00pm Closed 9.30am - 7.00pm 9.30am - 5.30pm 9.00am - 4.30pm Closed
Blackbird Leys Library	Blackbird Leys Road Blackbird Leys Oxford OX4 6HT	Monday Tuesday Wednesday Thursday Friday Saturday Sunday	9.00am - 12.00pm 1.30pm - 5.00pm 9.00am - 12.00pm 9.00am - 12.00pm 1.30pm - 5.00pm 9.00am - 12.00pm 1.30pm - 5.00pm Closed 9.30am - 12.30pm Closed
Headington Library	North Place Headington Oxford OX3 9HY	Monday Tuesday Wednesday Thursday Friday Saturday Sunday	9.15am - 1.00pm 9.15am - 7.00pm 9.15am - 1.00pm 9.15am - 7.00pm 9.15am - 5.00pm 9.00am - 4.30pm Closed

Old Marston Library	Mortimer Hall Oxford Road Old Marston Oxford OX3 0PH	Monday Tuesday Wednesday Thursday Friday Saturday Sunday	Closed 2.00pm - 5.00pm 5.30pm - 7.00pm Closed 2.00pm - 5.00pm 5.30pm - 7.00pm 10.00am - 12.00pm 2.00pm - 5.00pm 9.30am - 12.30pm Closed
Littlemore Library	Oxford Academy Campus Sandy Lane West Littlemore Oxford OX4 5JY	Monday Tuesday Wednesday Thursday Friday Saturday Sunday	2.00pm - 6.00pm 2.00pm - 4.30pm Closed 9.30am - 12.30pm 2.00pm - 4.30pm 9.30am - 12.30pm 9.30am - 1.30pm Closed
Cowley Library	Temple Road Cowley Oxford OX4 2EZ	Monday Tuesday Wednesday Thursday Friday Saturday Sunday	9.15am - 5.30pm 9.15am - 7.00pm 9.15am - 7.00pm Closed 9.15am - 5.30pm 9.00am - 4.30pm Closed

Examples of community involvement in planning proposals (pre-application or at application stage)

As set out in the City Council's Statement of Community Involvement, for major and other significant development proposals, applicants are strongly encouraged to involve the local community and other interested parties at the pre-application stage.

This involvement should try to explain the proposals, offer opportunities for feedback and respond to comments received where appropriate.

Common methods of explaining proposals to members of the community include (also see help sheet which gives an overview of the advantages and disadvantages of these and other methods):

- Leaflets
- Letters
- Exhibitions
- Public meetings
- Websites

Applicants are also encouraged to explore the use of new and innovative illustrative measures to help the members of the community understand the potential implications of the proposal.

We have set out some examples below of commonly-used consultation methods, emerging best practice and newer techniques.

Some further examples of good practice can be found in Planning Aid's 'Good Practice Guide to Public Engagement in Development Schemes

Indicative Height Poles ('Swiss Poles' / 'Ghost Buildings')

Indicative Height Poles can be used to mark out the location and height of a proposed development to help people visualise its scale and potential impacts.

The City Council has a set of six adjustable poles which are available to hire. Each pole can reach up to 10 metres in height.

Scaffolding Covers ('building wraps')

Scaffolding covers which provide an indication of the final design can help people visualise the proposed development and how it might fit in with the surrounding area.

3D Models

Three dimensional models can be useful to show the proposed scale of development and how it relates to surrounding buildings and open spaces.

Computer-Generated Models & Images

Computer-generated models and images can be used to show how the final design might fit in with existing buildings and views. They can also be a good way to show how surface treatments and building materials will look. Digital ‘walk through’ or ‘fly over’ experiences, or virtual tours, can help people to appreciate how the final scheme will look and feel.

Guidance on making a comment on a planning application

As set out in the Statement of Community Involvement, the City Council is keen to encourage public involvement in planning decisions on applications.

The City Council can only take into account 'material planning considerations' when looking at your comments on planning applications. The most common of these (although not an exhaustive list) are shown below:

- Loss of light or overshadowing
- Overlooking/loss of privacy
- Visual amenity (but not loss of private view)
- Adequacy of parking/loading/turning
- Highway safety
- Traffic generation
- Noise and disturbance resulting from use
- Hazardous materials
- Smells
- Loss of trees
- Effect on listed building and conservation area
- Layout and density of building
- Design, appearance and materials
- Landscaping
- Road access
- Local, strategic, regional and national planning policies
- Government circulars, orders and statutory instruments
- Disabled persons' access
- Compensation and awards of costs against the Council at public enquiries
- Proposals in the Development Plan
- Previous planning decisions (including appeal decisions)
- Nature conservation
- Archaeology
- Solar panels

We cannot take into account matters which are sometimes raised but are not normally planning considerations such as:

- The perceived loss of property value
- Private disputes between neighbours
- The loss of a view
- The impact of construction work or competition between firms
- Restrictive covenants
- Ownerships disputes over rights of way
- Fence lines etc
- Personal morals or views about the applicant.

Please note: it is important to understand that the material considerations relevant to any particular application will need to be weighed in the final decision process.

Overview of key stages of Neighbourhood Development Plan process

Stage	Neighbourhood planning group actions:	City Council actions:
Designating neighbourhood area	Requests designation and submits background information required by regulations.	• Checks application • Publicises receipt of application for 6 weeks and invites comments via City Council website • CEB may formally designate neighbourhood area.
Designating neighbourhood forum	Requests designation and submits background information required by regulations.	• Checks application • Publicises receipt of application for 6 weeks via City Council website • CEB may formally designate neighbourhood forum.
Evidence gathering and early public consultation	Gathers evidence and decides on the best way to consult local businesses and residents on issues, information and evidence collected. Need for SEA/HRA to be considered.	No statutory function. Can respond to requests from forum for advice on consultation methods, evidence base, existing policy background and whether it is in agreement with considerations about the need for SEA/HRA, but ultimately it is the decision of the forum.
Pre-submission publicity and consultation on detailed proposals for a neighbourhood development plan (most likely to be in the form of a draft plan).	This is the only statutory stage of publicity and consultation before submission. The Neighbourhood Forum/Parish Council can determine the detailed proposals to consult on. It is most likely to be in the form of a draft plan. Detailed proposals must be publicised for 6 weeks- details are set out in the regulations. A copy of the detailed proposals should be sent to the local planning authority. Consultation with a list of specified range of organisations is also required. Responses must be considered and the plan amended where appropriate.	No statutory function
Submission/publicising of	Submission to the City Council of:	• Must publicise any plan proposal that includes the

the proposed neighbourhood development plan	a) a map or statement which identifies the area to which the proposed neighbourhood development plan relates; . b) a consultation statement giving details of the consultation carried out, issues and concerns arising, and how they were considered and, where relevant, addressed; c) the proposed neighbourhood development plan; and d) a statement explaining how the proposed neighbourhood development plan complies with statutory requirements, has proper regard to national policy and guidance, contributes to the achievement of sustainable development, conforms with strategic development plan policy, and is compatible with European Union obligations.	required documents as soon as possible. • Publicise the draft plan for 6 weeks and invite comments. • Inform consultees that the plan proposal has been received.
Check submitted neighbourhood development plan is legally compliant.		Checks against regulations and legislation to be carried out by officers. Publicise.
Appointment of independent examiner		City Council responsible.
Submission of neighbourhood development plan proposal to examination		To send submitted documents to examiner as well as a copy of representations made during the Council's publicity period on the draft, and any required habitats assessment.
Consideration of examiner's views if changes are recommended		The planning authority must consider the examiner's views and decide whether to make any changes. The examiner's report is not legally binding but the planning authority must have clear reasons for departing from the examiner's recommendations. Officers (in consultation with the forum/parish council) will

		report to CEB on the examiner's recommendations for changes and CEB will consider whether to make those changes. Alternatively it may be recommended to CEB that a plan proposal is declined. A decision statement must be published explaining decisions taken.
Referendum		The City Council must organise a referendum (covering the relevant geographical area,) for any plan that is still proceeding. This will be organised by officers.
Adoption		The City Council is required to adopt any neighbourhood development plan where a simple majority of people who voted were in support of it. The plan will be taken to full council for adoption.
Publicising a neighbourhood development plan		Publicise and make available for viewing the adopted neighbourhood development plan.

Overview of main methods of involvement/communication that applicants may wish to consider, and how they will be used by the City Council

Method of Involvement or Communication	Advantages	Disadvantages	How we use this
Electronic			
Website (www.oxford.gov.uk)	Able to share a wide range of detailed information with a large audience. Is often more accessible to some hard-to-reach groups (e.g. younger people). Information is available at any time. Resource efficient.	Excludes those without access to the internet. Technical problems could hinder access to information. Information can be hard to access if there is too much or it is not well structured/displayed.	The website is the main way that we share information. We currently: ▪ Make sure that the relevant webpages are kept up to date on the progress of planning policy document production (including providing copies of evidence and consultation reports); and ▪ Ensure that information on current planning applications is made available through the electronic publication of the weekly list and via 'Public Access' (see below).
Public Access (Online system for viewing and commenting on planning applications. Accessed via our website.)	Enables people to access a wide range of information relating to planning applications and appeals. Comments are instantly received. Resource efficient.	Excludes those without access to the internet. Technical problems could hinder access to information /submission of comments.	Public Access is currently the main way that we share information about planning applications. People who do not have access to the internet are able to use the computers at our offices in St. Aldate's Chambers or city libraries during opening hours.
QR Codes (Barcode like symbols which can be scanned by a compatible smartphone or tablet that then takes users through to a specific webpage.)	Enables quick and easy access to detailed information on the move. Is often more accessible to some hard-to-reach groups (e.g. younger people).	Excludes those without compatible smartphones or tablets with the necessary app. Smartphone and tablet screens may be too small to view detailed plans and documents properly.	QR codes are currently used on site notices. When scanned, they take users through to the Public Access page on our website where they can view planning application information and submit comments.
Consultee Access (System for notifying local interest groups and other organisations of planning applications within a specified area. Comments can also be submitted via this system.)	Instant notifications. Allows groups to more easily manage their consultation responses. Resource efficient.	Excludes those without access to the internet. Technical problems could hinder access to information or the submission of comments. Operated by third party provider - limited control of service/ technical issues.	Consultee Access is a service that we currently offer to local interest groups and other organisations in addition to Public Access.
Planning Finder www.planningfinder.co.uk (Planning application notification system. Registration via our website. Uses data on postcodes to notify users of planning applications they may be interested in)	People can specify multiple areas that they are interested in. If they 'flag' an application they will also be notified when the application has been determined. Resource efficient.	Excludes those without access to the internet. Technical problems could hinder access to information /submission of comments. Operated by third party provider - limited control over quality of service/ technical issues.	Planning Finder is not the Council's main consultation method for planning applications. However, it provides a useful tool for members of the community to keep up-to-date on planning applications in specific areas.
Email	Direct contact with specific individuals. Minimal delay between email being sent and being received. Resource efficient.	Can only contact those people who have provided their email addresses specifically for this purpose. Email addresses/contacts may change over time meaning that the database can easily become out of date.	We normally use emails in the following situations: ▪ To inform statutory consultees of relevant planning policy and planning application consultations ▪ To inform councillors of planning applications and appeals (by emailing weekly lists). ▪ To provide updates to people who have specifically registered their interest in the progress of planning policy document production.
Facebook (Online social network)	Able to share information with a large audience. Is often more accessible to some hard-to-reach groups (e.g. younger people). Resource efficient.	Excludes those without access to the internet. Could generate online comments and debates rather than formal consultation responses which may be hard to manage, monitor and assess.	The Council's Facebook account will be used as an additional means of notifying people when consultation periods start and close for planning policy documents and major/significant planning applications and appeals.
Twitter (Online social network)	Able to share information with a large audience. Is often more accessible to some hard-to-reach groups (e.g. younger people). Resource efficient.	Excludes those without access to the internet. Could generate online comments and debates rather than formal consultation responses which may be hard to manage, monitor and assess.	The Council's Twitter account will be used as an additional means of notifying people when consultation periods start and close for planning policy documents and major/significant planning applications and appeals.

Online Consultation Portal (Online system available via our website where people can register to receive alerts when consultations are being undertaken and/or complete a questionnaire/survey.)	Automatically alerts people to consultations. People can manage their own profiles and settings. People can submit their questionnaire/survey responses in a simple, user-friendly format. Responses are automatically input into a database. Resource efficient.	Excludes those without access to the internet. Only notifies people who have registered.	The online consultation portal is currently used for the majority of planning policy consultations to allow people to view the documents and to make comments via an online questionnaire.
Printed			
Site Notices	Provides notice of the proposal in the area most likely to be affected. Resource efficient.	May be damaged or removed. May not be seen or be ignored. May be less accessible to some hard-to-reach groups (e.g. people who are housebound due to illness or disabilities).	Site notices displayed on and/or near the site will be the main way that we notify people of planning applications. Site notices will be printed on yellow card to increase their visibility and laminated to protect them from rain. Notices for amended schemes will be printed on pink card so that they can be differentiated from the original notice. Notices will be displayed at least 21 days before the consultation closes in line with statutory requirements.
Paper copies of documents	Accessible to those without access to the internet or who are unable to use computers. Enables large plans to be viewed more easily.	Locations may be inaccessible to some. Opportunities to view documents is limited by opening hours.	We currently: ▪ Make sure that paper copies of planning policy consultation documents are available to view at our offices in St. Aldate's Chambers and city libraries during their opening hours; ▪ Make paper copies of major planning applications available to view at our offices in St Aldate's Chambers during opening hours; ▪ Make paper copies of other types of planning application available at our offices during opening hours upon request.
Letters (Printed letters sent via the post.)	Easy to target people in a specific area. Letters can be sent directly to all properties. Is often more accessible to some hard-to-reach groups (e.g. housebound, disabled and frail elderly people).	Delay between letters being produced and being received. Where properties are rented, the letters may not be seen by the property owner. Not environmentally friendly. Postage and printing costs.	We will not normally use letters to notify people of planning policy or planning application consultations. Letters will only be used be in the following situations: ▪ To notify statutory consultees of planning policy and planning application consultations where we do not have email addresses. ▪ To notify people of planning appeals. (Letters will be sent to adjoining properties and all those who commented on the original planning application.)
Leaflets	Easy to target people in a specific area. Leaflets can be delivered directly to all properties. Is often more accessible to some hard-to-reach groups (e.g. housebound and frail elderly people).	Delivery can be highly resource intensive. Limited information can be given (summary only). Where properties are rented, the letters may not be seen by the property owner.	Leaflets may be used for planning policy consultations where we need to target a specific geographical area of the City.
Paper response forms / questionnaires	Accessible to those without access to the internet or who are unable to use computers.	Locations may be inaccessible to some. Access limited by opening hours.	For planning policy consultations, we will make sure that paper copies of response forms/questionnaires are available at our offices in St Aldate's Chambers and city libraries during their opening hours. A printable version of the response form/questionnaire will also be available on our website.
Posters	Can publicise basic information and inform the public about further opportunities to get involved. Publicity 'in the community' by using local libraries, shopping centres, sports centres and community centres can be the first step to reach those who wouldn't normally seek to be involved.	Can be easily dismissed or overlooked. Information provided is limited.	Posters may be used for planning policy consultations where we need to target a specific geographical area of the City.
Newspaper advertisements a) statutory notices b) press releases	Able to reach a broad spectrum of the community to raise awareness of plans, proposals, and consultations/opportunities to get involved.	Relies on people looking specifically at the public notices section in newspapers, so can be easily overlooked. Information provided is limited. Expensive.	We currently advertise the following types of planning application in the Oxford Times: major applications, listed building applications, developments in a conservation area, developments in the Green Belt, EIA development, City Council applications and departures from the development plan. We also notify the local press (Oxford Times and Oxford Mail) of all planning appeals. Planning policy consultations will only be advertised through a statutory notice in the local

			press when required by the regulations (in most cases, this is no longer required).
Public exhibitions (unstaffed)	Can present information in interesting and easily-accessible manner. Focused attention on specific project(s). Resource efficient. Locations can be targeted to specific areas.	No opportunity to clarify issues or receive feedback directly. Can be missed if not well publicised in advance.	We may hold unstaffed public exhibitions relating to planning policy consultations to raise people's awareness of key issues and to encourage people to look at the consultation documents online/at deposit points. We may also do this for major / significant planning applications.
Verbal / Face-to-Face			
Telephone	Provides an opportunity to explain/clarify issues and answer queries. Is often more accessible to some hard-to-reach groups (e.g. disabled, frail older people and those with literacy difficulties).	Resource intensive. Does not reach a wide audience.	Comments on planning applications and planning policy documents must be formally made in writing and therefore telephone conversations are not one of the main ways that we would usually consult members of the public. However, the Council's telephone number is widely available and officers will discuss cases with members of the public if they call as part of our aim to provide excellent customer service.
Public exhibitions (staffed)	Can present a lot of information. Focused attention on specific project(s). Opportunities to clarify and discuss issues and to receive feedback. Locations can be targeted to specific areas.	Resource intensive. Time limited. Can be missed if not well publicised in advance.	We may hold staffed public exhibitions related to consultations on Planning policy documents to raise people's awareness of key issues and provide an opportunity to discuss those issues with City Council officers. We may also do this for major / significant planning applications.
Structured Workshops	Discussion groups can generate ideas, improve understanding and develop 'ownership' of proposals. Participants get to hear each other's perspectives in the discussion.	Resource intensive. Relies on relevant participants being available at the specified date/time. Requires significant preparation to allow a structured approach	We may use workshops in consultations on policy documents to facilitate discussion and gather different perspectives on emerging policies.
Public meetings	Open to everyone. Means of sharing information with a wide audience. More efficient if part of a pre-arranged external meeting (for example visits to Parish Council meetings).	Potential to be dominated by an un-representative minority. Others may be intimidated so not all views may get heard or put across. Resource intensive. Relies on people being available at the specified time/date.	We may try to reach community groups through existing forums dealing with local issues when undertaking consultations on planning policies relevant to the area in question. This option may be considered for exceptional, significant schemes but is not normally used as a preferred method of consultation.
One-to-one meetings with selected stakeholders	Useful means of identifying key issues and involving specialist organisations in specific topics.	Resource intensive.	Planning policy documents often require on-going informal dialogue, such as with statutory consultees, key delivery partners and neighbouring local authorities under the 'duty to cooperate'. This may take the form of one-to-one meetings.
Steering/advisory group	A way to get key organisations involved in overseeing or acting as a sounding board for the production of planning policy documents. Particularly appropriate for area action plans or topic- based policies. The role of the group needs to be clear (via terms of reference) and there should be a transparent approach to selecting members.	Resource intensive.	Steering groups may be used in overseeing the preparation of technical studies and emerging policies, for example to test key assumptions or methodology, in planning policy.
Radio	Can reach a wide representation of the community and raise the profile of plans and proposals.	Expensive. Time consuming to produce. May only reach some social groups.	Not normally used as a method of informing people about consultations, however this option may be considered for exceptional, significant schemes.

Planning Aid

Planning Aid England and Planning Aid for London together provide free, independent and professional help, advice and support on planning issues to individuals and communities who cannot afford to pay for professional help. The service is delivered through a small team of staff and a network of volunteers, the majority of whom are Chartered Town Planners, who give their time free of charge. Planning Aid also works with developers, local authorities and others to help raise the standard of community engagement on planning matters.

How you can contact us

Planning Aid is delivered through staff and volunteers based in the community:

Planning Aid England

› **Advice Line:**
Tel: 0330 123 9244 **Email:** advice@planningaid.rtpi.org.uk

› **General Enquiries:**
Tel: 0203 206 1880 **Email:** info@planningaid.rtpi.org.uk

Planning Aid for London

Tel: 020 7401 8046 **Email:** info@planningaidforlondon.org.uk

Other Planning Aid contact telephone numbers:

› **Planning Aid for Scotland** 0845 603 7602
› **Planning Aid Wales** 02920 625 009

Full contact details for Planning Aid services are at:

www.rtpi.org.uk/planningaid and

www.planningaidforlondon.org.uk

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Planning Aid England
Engaging Communities in Planning

Planning Aid for London

RTPI
mediation of space · making of place

Communities and Local Government

Good Practice Guide to **Public Engagement in Development Schemes**

Developers

Decision Makers

engage

Communities

Planning Aid England
Engaging Communities in Planning

Planning Aid for London

RTPI
mediation of space · making of place

Communities and Local Government

Good Practice Guide to Public Engagement in Development Schemes

For developers, communities and decision makers, one of the biggest challenges in taking forward a development scheme is to ensure that public engagement is undertaken in a way which is meaningful, inclusive and brings benefits for all involved.

This guide is intended to provide practical advice for all those involved in public engagement in development schemes which require planning consent. It is illustrated by real examples of good practice and provides information and assistance to those planning, engaging in, or assessing community consultation.

Good engagement reduces conflict, results in better development and most importantly allows communities to have an influence over the future shape of the places where they live.

About Planning Aid

Planning Aid offers people the opportunity to get involved in the development of their local areas. We provide free and independent professional planning advice to community groups and individuals who cannot afford to pay professional fees. We work with communities to help them understand and play a role in the planning process. We are an independent source of advice and information on planning issues, and not part of central or local government.

Further information and contact details can be found at the back of this guide.

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Engagement is a two way process of openly sharing and exchanging information, understanding different views, listening and responding to suggestions, developing trust and dialogue to support effective working relationships to the mutual benefit of all involved.

"Good engagement motivates and inspires individuals and communities to help shape the future of their neighbourhoods, with positive outcomes for all involved."

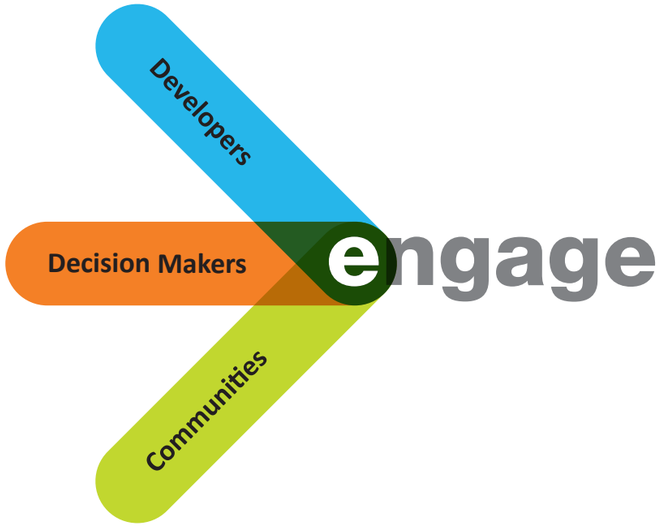
Sue Manns, National Planner, Planning Aid England.

"Effective consultation at the early stages of proposals improves schemes and creates value."

Mike Dunton, Consultant G L Hearn.

There are many challenges to successful engagement with the community on development schemes, but they are small in comparison to the risks of failing to engage in a timely, meaningful and inclusive manner.

Why Engage?



Depending on the size and type of development project, there are different legal requirements for community consultation. Larger projects, including nationally significant infrastructure projects now require considerable consultation by the developer before an application is submitted. Other projects, for example small developments such as a change of use or householder application, may only require neighbours to be notified by the local authority once an application has been submitted. Whatever the requirements, talking to neighbours and others before an application is submitted will often save time, reduce risks and most importantly result in a better scheme.

It makes sense to engage

Good developments are those which work well with their local areas. This means that as part of the design process there is a need to understand how a place works and functions. The community are well placed to help with this information. Good community consultation and engagement is an essential part of a good development process, especially when undertaken early on in the process when changes to a scheme can more easily be made.

For **communities**, engagement means a chance to understand what is proposed, to explore how a development can bring value to an area, to identify which options would work best within a local context, to help shape solutions and to have their say on a scheme.

For **developers**, engaging with the local community can provide vital local knowledge, reduce the risk of challenges and delays, identify how a scheme can bring value to a local area and enhance the reputations of all involved.

For **decision makers**, good pre-application engagement will have identified those issues of importance to the local community and show how the proposal has responded to these. It will be for the decision maker to balance these alongside planning policy and other considerations, e.g. traffic impact, job creation and make a decision on the application.

When making design changes in response to comments from the community, it is important to be sure that the views are representative of the community, because if not, then it might not be the right solution. Inclusive engagement is the key to success.

Good engagement does not mean that a scheme will definitely go ahead as it may be unacceptable in terms of planning policy however, it will play a big part in helping all those involved to understand the issues and risks associated with an application and in reducing delays once an application has been submitted.

Good engagement is about more than just 'ticking a box'. If there is no real commitment, all the key decisions have been made, not enough time is allowed or there are insufficient resources to engage properly, it is likely that at best little will be achieved and at worst, may add to the frustrations of a community increasing the risk of objections, delay and possible refusal of consent.

A recipe for good engagement

There is no 'perfect recipe' for good community engagement. Every development scheme and every community will be different. However this guide describes some good practice 'ingredients' which can be used to develop a positive and beneficial engagement process.

"The typical participants in local decisions vary according to activity, but generally are more likely to be white, older, better educated, richer, middle class males."

Pathways through Participation: What creates and sustains active citizenship? Understanding Participation: A literature review. NCVO, IVR and Involve. Dec 2009

"Change happens – and needs to happen – but people are often very uncomfortable with the uncertainties that change brings to their lives. Early and appropriate engagement in the development process can do much to minimise uncertainty, and help people make a positive impact on schemes rather than just sniping from the sidelines. This Good Practice Guide will help planners and other key players ensure that this happens."

Mark Middleton, Head of Planning, Worcestershire County Council.

Community consultation and engagement should not be carried out just to tick a box – it should have a clear purpose and be of value to all involved, otherwise it might do more harm than good!

Good engagement reduces conflict, results in better planning outcomes and most importantly allows communities to have an influence over the future shape of the places where they live.

When investing in a new product, a good business will invest in 'market research' or consultation to ensure that the product is fit for market. Development schemes are no different.

Principles of Engagement

Research and analysis – explore the context, history, different communities and groups in the area who may affected. Identify what will motivate people, what else is happening in the area, establish if it is connected and if so consider the potential to share events. Establish the goals - what are the benefits of engaging with communities and how will these be realised?

Relationship building, knowledge and skills – develop links with key groups and individuals who can assist and advise on what matters in the area. Consider how existing community groups, networks and representatives might be involved, what barriers might exist and what help might be needed to build the capacity to engage.

Communications – ensure that the information provided is clear, accessible and sufficient to tell people what they want to know, and to allow them to decide whether to engage. Be clear about what is fixed and why, and what is 'up for debate'. Check that mechanisms are in place to allow information to flow in all directions and that response dates are clear.

Learn from the process – identify what people think of the way the consultation has worked. What could be done better, what else needs to be done, was it a balanced and inclusive process. Identify the lessons learned and take these forward into other projects.

Principles of Engagement

Continuing to engage – Has feedback been given and how will the relationships developed be continued into the construction and operational phases of a development project?

Monitor and evaluate – monitor engagement and use the results to identify gaps and inform actions to widen the process and ensure a balanced community response is achieved. Consider the comments received and how they can be taken into account in the design – is further engagement required?

Inclusive – ensure under represented individuals and groups are included and that they have an equal opportunity to be heard. Be clear when making changes that these do not respond to a vociferous minority but are a response to a wider community view.

Timing – be realistic, allow sufficient time to achieve the goals set at the start. Provide a clear timetable for the project identifying consultation opportunities. Ensure engagement takes place when things can be changed and when it is cost effective to do so. Allow sufficient time for considered and informed response. How and when will feedback be provided?

Awareness to Engagement

Moving towards effective community engagement

Every development, no matter how large or small, can benefit from effective engagement. Talking to a neighbour before submitting an application for an extension to an existing building, listening to any views they may express and responding to comments they may make always helps, as does telling them when building work will start. This applies equally to a nuclear power station or major residential development. However, the approaches used, the time taken and the resources invested in consultation will be different, and should be in proportion to the size and impact of the development.

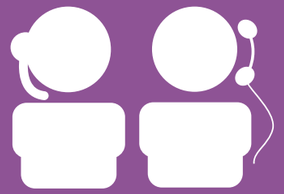
Effective engagement

Build lasting, positive relationships

Discuss and debate

Forum to agree changes, embrace ideas and suggestions, responsive process

Consult and communicate



Invite comments, listen and make changes, provide feedback

Building understanding

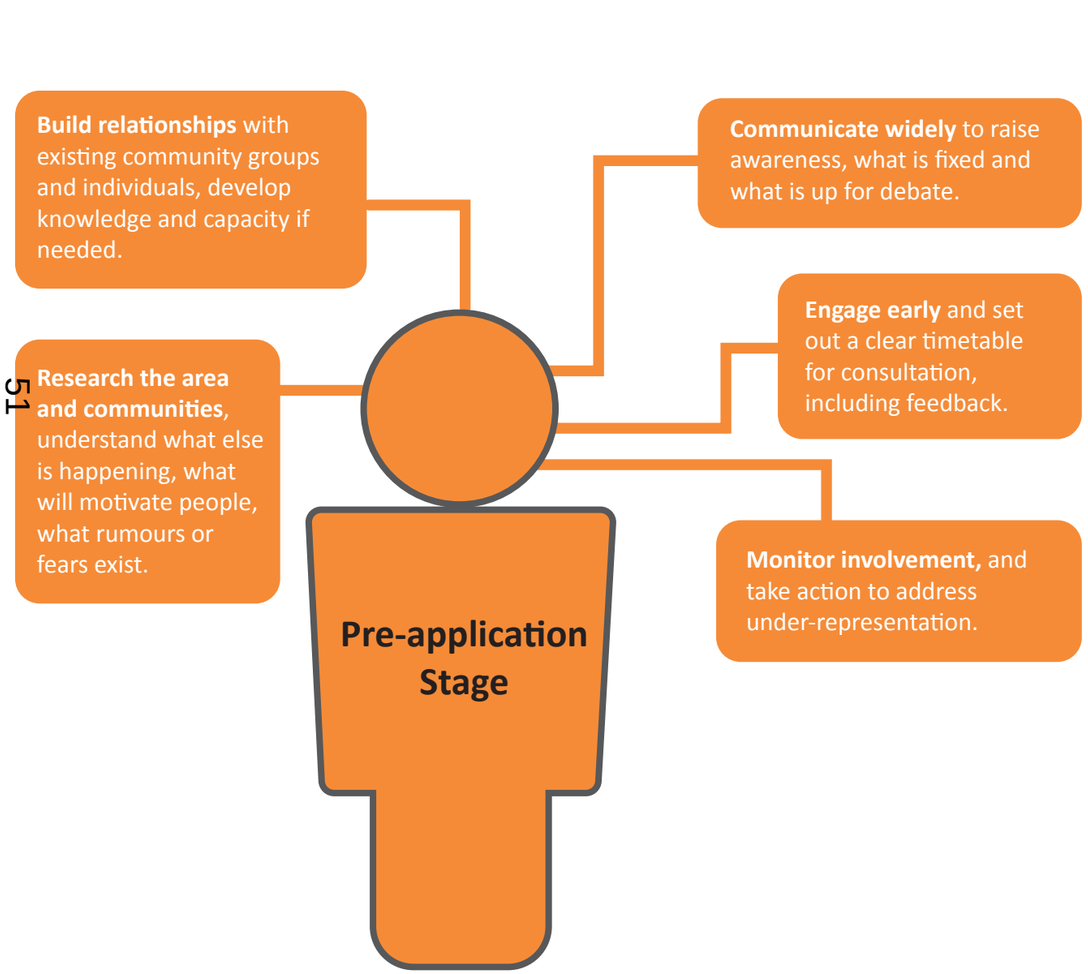
More information about what is happening, where, why and when

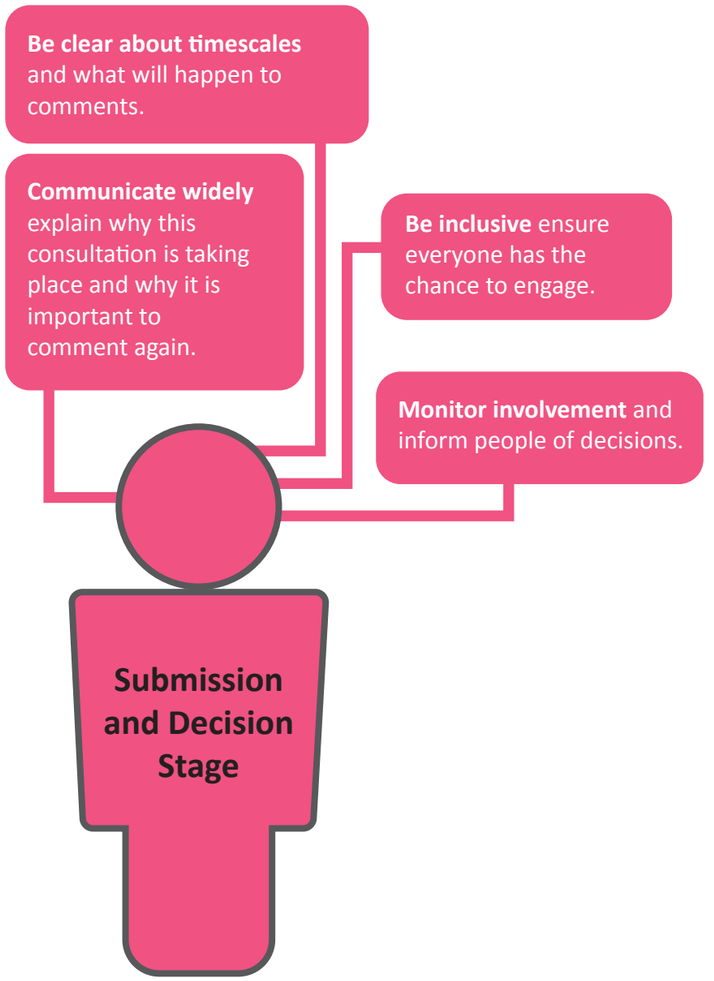
Awareness raising

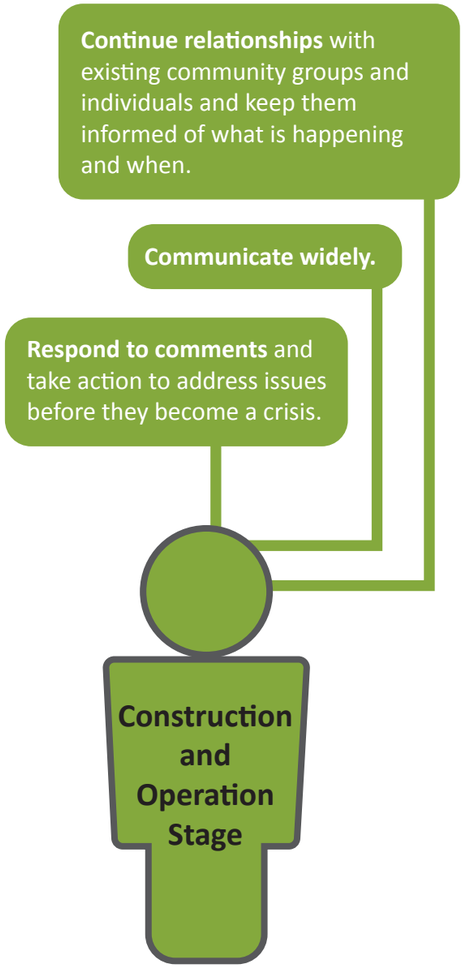
Site notice, press notice, leaflets, talk to neighbours

Planning for Community Engagement

The Different Stages of a Development Scheme







Legal and other requirements

What does the local authority Statement of Community Involvement say about non statutory pre-application consultation requirements?

Pre-application consultation is a statutory requirement for Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects.

Legal and other requirements

Planning application - neighbours notified and site / press notices may be displayed as required.

Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project – Report of Consultation forms part of the application and developer advertises application and notifies all those who have commented at pre-application stage.

Legal and other requirements

Considerate Constructor Scheme.

Pre-application Stage

Good Practice Approaches

Approaches

Good Practice Advice

Examples

Awareness Raising

Press notice

Newsletters

Website

Leaflet drop

Research the communities who may be affected. Identify key individuals and groups who can spread the word.

Consider different levels of awareness raising depending on proximity and location.

Add colour to press advertisements and leaflets to draw attention to them, keep to key information, and notify those most affected in person to ensure they are aware of the scheme.

Explain what is proposed, how to find out more and why views would be appreciated.

Place adverts in public places for example community centres, libraries, in shop windows, bus stops, places of worship.

Consider 'trade' journals, local publications. Monitor responses and address weaknesses.

Develop interactive website.

Building Understanding

Un-staffed exhibitions

Leaflets

Websites

Information sheets

Telephone hotline for further information

Build understanding and awareness.

Arouse interest.

Ensure venue is accessible and material appropriate to the audience and the area.

Consider timing of the exhibition, public transport accessibility, language /style used. Identify whether there is a need to produce material in different languages. Provide clear information about the project, background, explain what is 'fixed' and what is 'up for discussion', identify options, key dates for consultation events and how to comment.

Explain the relationship with other consultations.

Provide a telephone hotline for those wanting more information.

Consult and Communicate

Staffed exhibitions, interactive displays, where questions can be asked and answered

Make questionnaires available for feedback and comments

Offer presentations to local groups

Provide regular updates via newsletters

When appropriate consider requests for facilitated events

Interactive websites

Interest, enthuse and motivate communities to respond and manage expectations.

Consider establishing a residents / community steering group and work with them to identify locations for events and fine tune the content.

Identify and connect with other community events e.g. community fairs.

Seek feedback and be clear what will happen to comments.

Monitor attendance and consider additional venues / events to secure a balanced response. Consider a 'home visit' service.

Re-consult if significant changes have been made to the proposals.

Use interactive websites to reach the 'silent' majority - then focus resources on the disadvantaged and hard to reach.

Discuss and Debate

Liaison groups

Workshops with different groups (local residents and interest groups) to discuss development

Focus groups

Field trips

Online forums

Consensus building and mediation / dispute resolution

Online discussion forum

Build trust, be transparent and manage expectations.

Level the playing field – facilitate the process to allow fair participation.

Listen to views and share tensions between different communities.

Invite new ideas and consider alternatives – provide responses.

Focus sessions on key issues – capture local knowledge and ideas.

Run visits to see similar developments elsewhere.

Provide honest feedback and explain how comments have been included and if not, why not. Do what you say you will.

Keep website up to date.

Consider using independent mediators to find an agreed solution.

Effective Engagement

Community forum

Drop-in sessions

Staffed telephone hotline during construction

Electronic update alerts

Continue to support and involve groups which have contributed to the process.

Invite feedback on issues before they develop into a crisis.

Use engagement to inform decisions on issues such as traffic routing.

Invite participants to share knowledge and experiences with similarly affected groups in the future, acts as mentors for others.

Involve participants in evaluation.

Keep the website up to date with responsive key contact information. Provide electronic alerts at key stages.

Examples

"We aim to meet the challenges of 'consultation fatigue' and raise interest in the planning process by using local people to encourage their friends, neighbours and families."

Mike Dando, Community Outreach Coordinator, Planning Aid England.

Planning Aid for London and Crossrail set up a Community Liaison Panel for residents of Whitechapel to help them be involved in each stage of planning and constructing Crossrail. In areas where English is not a first language, translation services have been offered to enable minority groups to engage.

EDF Energy held a series of workshops for school children and young adults to help to identify the issues and opportunities associated with a new nuclear power station in their area – the suggestions which resulted have influenced the project development.

"The independent research helped to identify who was engaging in our consultation process in the early stages. By comparing these results with the profile of the population as a whole, we were able to identify groups that were missing and take specific steps to engage with them later in the process."

Alex Kaufman, Head of Communications, EDF Energy New Nuclear Build.

"Sharing plans with my neighbour resulted in some good ideas which saved money and improved the appearance."

Member of the public.

- A 'Building Schools for the Future' consultation in Birmingham took place on a vacant site where a new school was to be located.
- A traffic calming consultation event was advertised on road signs at affected junctions.

Submission and Decision Stage

Good Practice Approaches

Awareness Raising

Statutory requirements – either the local authority or developer will notify neighbours about a proposal. This notification could be by letter, site notice or a press notice.

Letters should explain proposal clearly, why views are being sought at this stage and what will happen to comments. Consider drawing attention to the importance of the letter in different languages.

Letters can include reference to Planning Aid where independent advice can be obtained.

Explain relationship to other applications where relevant.

If they relate to an appeal, explain how the views expressed previously will be taken forward, and how people may get involved in the process.

Local Planning Authorities can alert residents to new applications in their area via their websites.

Building Understanding

Application and all associated material made available for inspection. This can be electronic or hard copy.

Ensure that written documents are easy to navigate and where necessary include a non technical summary.

Ensure plans displayed online are legible and it is possible to get an idea of scale – include key measurements in written form on plans.

Where there is a large volume of material break it down into bite sized chunks and link it electronically to avoid the need for those consulted to wade through huge documents to find the parts of interest.

Ensure paper copies are available for those without access to a computer and / or printer.

Ensure those without internet access can access and understand relevant documents – place in libraries and community centres and refer to Planning Aid.

Consult and Communicate

Make plans and application documents available

For major schemes consider staffed exhibitions, where models may be available and interactive displays

Consider presentations to local groups

Make use of a website

Ensure that material is appropriate and accessible.

Models are helpful to show a major project design and how it fits with its local area.

For large schemes consider 3D visualisations, interactive models etc.

Where changes are made consider the need to notify people of amendments and how they can comment.

Be clear about who is undertaking the consultation and why, and who comments should be made to.

Discuss and Debate

Workshops with key groups

Community forums

Mediation

Online discussion forum

Discuss with key parties / communities how conditions could be used to overcome concerns and how section 106 benefits could be used to address issues relating to the scheme for the benefits of those affected.

Consider using independent mediators to find an agreed solution.

Effective Engagement

Community forums

Online discussion forums

Keep community well informed of process, changes, decision and reasons.

If permission is granted, explain what conditions have been applied and what needs to be done to meet them. If permission is refused, explain why and what might happen next.

Examples

Conflict between neighbours arose following refusal of planning consent for an extension which conflicted with planning policy. Due to the wording of a letter, the applicant thought refusal was also due to the objection from the neighbour and a long-standing friendship was destroyed.

Mediation may be a way of achieving an agreed solution where there is conflict between parties.

Kirkstall Forge (Leeds) is a Brownfield mixed use development of over 100,000sq metres. The developer works through the local liaison group to provide regular progress reports throughout the life of the application and subsequent amendments. Regular updates are also provided on the website and each year the developer attends the local community festival (attended by over 20,000 people) and has a stand to provide the latest details of the scheme and answer questions about the proposals.

A number of local planning authorities have a ‘duty’ planning officer available to help people understand planning applications and how to make their views known. In Birmingham there is also help for those who find it hard to use the online information system.

Many councils now include reference to Planning Aid on their neighbour notification letters as a source of independent advice on planning.

Construction and Operation Stage

Good Practice Approaches

Approaches

Good Practice Advice

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Examples

Awareness Raising

Newsletters

Website

Leaflet drop

Notify local residents of when the project will begin and of any proposals to close access roads / pathways or restrict access. Include details of the hours of construction and how long work is expected to take.

Place colourful notices in key locations e.g. stations, bus stops, shops, community centres, places of worship. Notify communities about alterations to time tables, delays, achievements and changes to the scheme.

Building Understanding

Leaflet on progress

Newsletters

Provide contact information for project managers and the construction team who can respond to complaints.

Consult and Communicate

Newsletters

Drop-in sessions on site

Presentations

Website updates

Provide a telephone hotline for information / complaints.

Identify a site officer and ensure they are known to the community.

Include contact information on the website.

Issue electronic alerts to raise awareness of key stages / road closures etc.

Make use of website and include contacts details. Ensure emails received are replied to.

Discuss and Debate

Community forum and resident/tenant groups

Telephone hotline

Update website and electronic alerts

Discuss issues with affected groups / individuals e.g. times when access may be restricted, alternative routes and amend where appropriate.

Solve problems before they develop into conflict.

Make use of website and include contacts details. Ensure emails received are replied to.

Provide contact with designers so that the community can contribute to details such as landscaping materials etc.

Involve residents' steering group in choosing contractors. Consider using independent mediators to find an agreed solution.

Effective Engagement

Community forum, regular updates

Online discussion forums

Involve the project manager with local groups and develop relationships.

Involve communities with the scheme, can local residents be trained to work on the construction or in the building once constructed?

Work with community groups, invite them to see progress of development.

Provide feedback on website to show how comments have been acted on.

Examples

Family Mosaic Housing Association held a competition to award 5 construction job apprenticeships to young people on an estate which was to be rebuilt as part of a regeneration scheme.

"Lockleaze Voice is a Neighbourhood Planning Group open to all those living and working in the local community. Regular meetings are held at which the attendees can discuss and influence local concerns, particularly development schemes."

Peter Whitehead, Community Outreach Coordinator, Planning Aid England.

The Docklands Light Railway employed a 'local ambassador' as part of the launch strategy for Langdon Park Station to promote the use of the station by liaising with the local community and distributing travel cards. This was so successful that local ambassadors will be appointed for future station schemes.

The Channel Tunnel Rail Link – High Speed project established a 24 hour helpline and appointed an independent Complaints Commissioner to oversee the project and report back to the local authorities.

The Bull Ring development in Birmingham included viewing areas and live web cameras where progress on construction could be followed.

Delivering Good Practice

Question:

Consultation and engagement costs money, time and resources, so if it is not a statutory requirement why do it?

Answer:

Good engagement allows key issues to be identified, reducing risk and potential delays post submission for the developer whilst enabling the community to help shape a scheme at the point when changes are more easily made.

Consultation and engagement should be in proportion to the size and impact of the scheme.

Example:

Residents close to a proposal scheme delayed an application for 2 years as a result of a vocal campaign involving local councillors. Planning Aid met with the residents and found that whilst they did not object in principle they had concerns about access and felt ignored by the developer. The problem was subsequently overcome and consent granted. Pre-application consultation had not been undertaken, but could easily have helped avoid this situation.

Question:

When should consultation begin and what information should be provided?

Answer:

Start as early as possible – explain the processes and that early views are sought on key issues / options. Provide sufficient information to allow informed responses to be made. This will allow the early identification of key issues and potential 'show stoppers'. It establishes trust and understanding.

Example:

When designing a flood alleviation scheme in Morpeth, the Environment Agency (National Environmental Assessment Service) approached the community early, were clear about what could be influenced, when, why and how, and kept local people regularly informed of progress. As a result they were able to dispel rumours, address local concerns and develop an option which had widespread support. This not only reduced the project risks, potential delays and complex land negotiations, but has resulted in a close working relationship with several interest groups which will bring longer term benefits.

Question:

Why carry on engaging with the community once the application has been submitted?

Answer:

The nature and type of engagement will change however, good neighbour relationships can avoid potential conflict during construction and operation. This can connect to the Considerate Contractor Scheme. Communities can also act as mentors to others and as ambassadors for a development, enhancing the reputation of the developer.

Example:

The Cambridge Waste Management Park has been proactive in hosting visits to the facilities on site, with public open days, conducted tours and fun events. The development has taken place in stages and these events have contributed to dispelling myths about waste facilities and with the added bonus of improving understanding of recycling and environmental issues.

Question:

How do you ensure that the pre-application consultation comments received reflect the diversity and mix of the local community, both geographically and from a social perspective – if not what action needs to be taken to rebalance this?

Answer:

The community is a kaleidoscope of different groups. Inclusive engagement ensures decisions taken reflect the wider community view, rather than a vociferous minority. It identifies key issues at a stage where they can be addressed rather than when it is too late to make changes.

Monitor comments received, involvement in groups and meetings in terms of geography, age, gender, ethnicity etc on feedback forms, through independent exit surveys, visual recording of visitors.

Reflect on how to fill any gaps to achieve a balanced community response– Planning Aid may be able to assist.

Example:

In response to a number of development and redevelopment opportunities and challenges in the Lockleaze area of Bristol, a Neighbourhood Planning Group was formed through Planning Aid. The group now organise regular open meetings, have an active web site, and engage effectively with development proposals.

Delivering Good Practice

Question:

How should comments received be reflected and what feedback should be given?

Answer:

The supporting papers accompanying a planning application should show how the views of the community have been taken into account in developing a proposal. In the case of nationally significant infrastructure applications this will take the form of a Report of Community Involvement. A good engagement process will also provide an opportunity for feedback which should be linked to key stages set out at the outset of the process.

Example:

Produce regular newsletters.

Direct mail a personal response to those who have taken the trouble to make their views known and let them know what has changed and why.

Planning Aid helped residents to produce a neighbourhood appraisal in Felling, Gateshead to support future regeneration. Residents presented their results to the Council and obtained feedback.

Question:

How should consultation overload be avoided?

Answer:

Those participating are giving up their time to contribute views on a development project. It is important to understand where and when efforts should be focused and to ensure responding to consultations does not become a full time occupation.

Be innovative – connect with other events where possible. Explain the relationship with other consultations and what is different about each. Work constructively with others to ensure comments are passed on where relevant.

Example:

In Herefordshire a consultation event was linked to a village Christmas Fair, with over 500 people visiting the exhibition.

"Joining up with the Christmas Fair meant that we reached a far wider audience."

Sheena Terrace, Planning Aid England.

Question:

Will creative and innovative approaches result in criticism?

Answer:

Consultation should be meaningful, informative and enjoyable. People will not participate in something which is dull or uninteresting. A good event is one where people leave feeling that they have learned something of interest and their time has not been wasted – these people will continue to engage.

What may work one time, may not with a different group, but do not be afraid to innovate and to listen and learn from feedback.

Example:

A cost: benefit analysis exercise with young people helped decide the mix of play equipment which was to be included in a development.

Planning Aid took local residents on an 'eye spy' tour of an area to help them identify local characteristics that could be reflected in a development scheme.

Question:

How can I reach the hard to find, hard to engage, hard to motivate and hard to help?

Answer:

These groups may engage if made aware of a project and its impact on them. There is a need to think through what might prevent them from participating e.g. time of day / location, culture etc and respond positively. Take advantage of existing local organisations, networks etc to disseminate information, use places visited by the wider community e.g. shopping centres, natural meeting places. Good decisions will be based upon an inclusive and balanced response. Advice on working with these groups can be provided by Planning Aid.

Example:

Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council used a public artist to engage Muslim Elders and other under-represented groups within a wider consultation process, to help identify common themes for inclusion within the public realm aspects of a scheme.

Delivering Good Practice

Question:

Can public meetings add value to consultation?

Answer:

Public meetings are rarely an ideal forum to discuss and debate a development. However, if well handled they can be a good opportunity to listen to concerns and to provide information on a development proposal. Key things to consider include: using an independent facilitator who will ensure the smooth running of the event and equal participation for those who wish to speak, setting a clear agenda and rules of behaviour, inviting those 'opposing' and 'supporting' a development from the local community to speak at the start and end of the meeting, ensuring that those attending on behalf of the developer have sufficient seniority and knowledge to provide informed and authoritative responses.

Example:

The Department of Energy and Climate Change, when consulting local communities on possible locations for new nuclear power stations, used an independent facilitator to help run the public meetings. Senior civil servants were also present and at Kirksanton, a community representative was invited to give the opening and closing comments. Effort was made to ensure people had their say and the meetings were generally felt to have been informative.

Question:

Can I use the internet for consultation and if so, do I still need to do exhibitions and community events?

Answer:

The internet is a useful tool to engage with busy people, and those who may not be able to get to exhibitions or events. The technology developed for web-based consultation can also be used at exhibitions and events e.g. fly-throughs and 3D visualisations. It can however, only reach those who have internet access. For the 'hard to reach' and those living in rural areas, access to the internet and / or broadband may be an issue. Schools, libraries and community centres often have web access where help is available to access the online consultation. Good monitoring of the website can help identify areas, groups who are under-represented in a consultation and allow other activities to be targeted to ensure inclusive engagement.

Example:

A 3D virtual model was developed for the Ancoats Urban Village, Manchester. The model is accessible through the web so members of the public could see how Ancoats would look with the development proposals inserted. The use of gaming technology shows proposals in context and from every different angle. It also allows users to walk, drive or fly around the model without the need to purchase additional software. Being portable and transferable onto a big screen, the model is being used to assist consideration by councillors at planning committee and also with other consultation exercises with residents.

RTPI mediation of space - making of place

"The RTPI fully supports the principles in this useful guide and is committed to better public engagement. Better engagement creates better developments and better places for everyone."

Ann Skippers, Past President of the RTPI.

consultation INSTITUTE making consultation count

"Effective consultation of local people is often a rarity, and the greater the pressures for development, the greater the temptation to cut corners and ignore the public's views. However this guide will help everyone to raise their game and meet the challenges of effective and inclusive engagement."

Rhion Jones, Consultation Institute.

iap2 International Association for Public Participation

"As an organisation committed to promoting and improving public participation in local and national decision-making across the world, IAP2 welcome the introduction of this helpful and insightful guide. "

Nicky Leggatt, IAP2 UK Chair.

iema Institute of Environmental Management & Assessment

"IEMA welcomes this guidance, as effective public engagement brings benefits to all concerned helping to identify the issues, explore solutions, improve proposals and support better decision making."

Jan Chmiel, CEO, IEMA.

"Paying lip service to community consultation is no longer enough. Engaging with communities is crucial to capture local opinion, resolve issues and ultimately deliver quicker and better development schemes. We therefore welcome this Guide and the advice it contains."

Jeremy Handel, Director, Political Developments Ltd.

"Raising public awareness and understanding of issues such as the need for new infrastructure to meet national and local needs, economic development, environmental constraints, climate change mitigation are key to securing balanced responses."

Jon Lord, Development Plans Manager, Tamworth Borough Council.

This brochure has been printed on 100% recycled paper and uses vegetable inks in the printing process.

Revised January 2014

Development Management Practice Project Practice Note
PRE PLANNING APPLICATION CONSULTATION BEST PRACTICE

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 There are good examples of best practice in pre application discussions on major planning application proposals involving local communities. Widespread pre application discussion on major schemes takes place where the local authority has adequate resources to provide this service and this approach is supported by the development industry and local authorities.

1.2 The proposed Development Management policy consultation issued by government at the beginning of 2010 (but overtaken by the NPPF) stressed the benefits of effective pre application discussions for communities, councils and developers. Councillors were encouraged to be involved with discussions to act as champions of their communities without prejudicing their role as decision makers on planning applications when submitted. Councils and other service providers were encouraged to provide for and become fully involved in pre application discussions on major proposals and to provide enough resources for such discussions.

1.3 The NPPF states:

"188. Early engagement has significant potential to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the planning application system for all parties. Good quality pre-application discussion enables better coordination between public and private resources and improved outcomes for the community.
189. Local planning authorities have a key role to play in encouraging other parties to take maximum advantage of the pre-application stage. They cannot require that a developer engages with them before submitting a planning application, but they should encourage take-up of any pre-application services they do offer. They should also, where they think this would be beneficial, encourage any applicants who are not already required to do so by law to engage with the local community before submitting their applications.
190.The more issues that can be resolved at pre-application stage, the greater the benefits. For their role in the planning system to be effective and positive, statutory planning consultees will need to take the same early, pro-active approach, and provide advice in a timely manner throughout the development process. This assists local planning authorities in issuing timely decisions, helping to ensure that applicants do not experience unnecessary delays and costs.
191. The participation of other consenting bodies in pre-application discussions should enable early consideration of all the fundamental issues relating to whether a particular development will be acceptable in principle, even where other consents relating to how a development is built or operated are needed at a later stage. Wherever possible, parallel processing of other consents should be encouraged to help speed up the process and resolve any issues as early as possible."

1.4 January 2014 National Planning Policy Guidance states:

"Pre-application engagement by prospective applicants offers significant potential to improve both the efficiency and effectiveness of the planning application system. This can be achieved by:

- *providing an understanding of the relevant planning policies and other material considerations associated with a proposed development*
- *working collaboratively and openly with interested parties at an early stage to identify, understand and seek to resolve issues associated with a proposed development*

- *discussing the possible mitigation of the impact of a proposed development*
- *identifying the information required to accompany a formal planning application, thus reducing the likelihood of delays at the validation stage. The information requested must be reasonable (more information can be found in Making an Application.*

The approach to pre-application engagement needs to be tailored to the nature of the proposed development and the issues to be addressed."

1.5 NPPG advises that parties to pre-application engagement is "a collaborative process between a prospective applicant and other parties which may include:

- *the local planning authority*
- *statutory and non-statutory consultees*
- *elected members*
- *local people*

It is recognised that the parties involved at the pre-application stage will vary on a case by case basis, and the level of engagement needs to be proportionate to the nature and scale of a proposed development. Each party involved has an important role to play in ensuring the efficiency and effectiveness of pre-application engagement."

1.6 In respect of elected members roles the NPPG further explains that elected members are strongly encouraged to participate at the pre-application stage, where it is appropriate and beneficial for them to do so.

1.6 The NPPG continues; "*Pre-application engagement with the community is encouraged where it will add value to the process and the outcome. The Government has announced its intention to introduce* ***compulsory*** *pre-application consultation with local communities for more significant onshore wind development. Cases to which this requirement applies will be specified in secondary legislation in due course.*" The Localism Act 2011 has provision for other types of major development to also be subject to compulsory pre application consultation by order.

1.7 There is no one-size fits all approach to providing efficient and effective pre-application services. Local planning authorities are encouraged to take a flexible, tailored and timely approach to the pre-application services they offer, which are appropriate to the nature and scale of a proposed development. The National Planning Policy Framework recognises that the local planning authority has a key role to play in encouraging other parties to take maximum advantage of the pre-application stage.

1.8 This note summarises examples of such collaborative approaches involving local communities, local authorities, public service providers and developers.

2 PRE APPLICATION DISCUSSIONS

2.1 Some Councils encourage their officers to advise on relevant planning policies and precedents, but without any wider consultation with local communities or elected members until a planning application is submitted. This avoids unproductive involvement for communities and councillors when no planning application is submitted.

2.2 However, there is a risk that issues will not arise until after the planning application has been submitted, causing delay and additional costs for the applicant, and a missed opportunity for the community, which might have been avoided with a more collaborative approach.

2.3 LGA probity in planning guidance 2013 and the Killian Pretty review suggested that for major applications it is good practice to involve communities and local councillors in consultation, without prejudicing the position of councillors who have to decide any subsequent planning application.

2.4 A list of the web sites of councils who previously developed good practice in pre application discussions is given at the end of this note. However not all have been able to maintain these services. Since the original version of this note was prepared in 2008 public sector cutbacks have forced many authorities to prioritise and reduce their service to deal only with statutory duties. Some statutory consultees have also had difficulties responding to pre application engagement requests. In most respects pre application discussions are not a statutory duty. However the experiences gained and potential benefits are included below to assist others.

2.5 The following examples are highlighted:

Chorley Borough Council encouraged developers to have a pre application briefing with councillors on large schemes, to seek to ensure all matters of concern and opportunity have been considered, before a planning application is submitted. However the opportunity was only after a developer has carried out pre application community consultation in accordance with the council's statement of community involvement for such schemes, and the developer is required to report on the outcomes of that consultation and of how the issues raised have been addressed in any revised scheme.
This approach ensures the council is aware of the community's views and the developer's response before any pre application meeting with councillors. Any such meeting is held in accordance with an agreed protocol to ensure that councillors on a planning decision making committee do not pre determine or bias their positions whena formal application is determined.

Waverley Borough Council developed a comprehensive approach to community pre-application discussions. For larger sites it uses public planning forums to structure an opportunity for all those who have an interest in a proposed development to be engaged in an open discussion. The forums are part of a range of pre application advice for which the authority charges. Waverley had used the forums for over 20 major developments since 2005. Waverley planning forums create a means by which councillors and the community could be kept informed and identify issues without risk of councillors pre determining their decisions. The council arranged a forum on an emerging proposal, and the chair of the planning committee explained councillors' roles at the start of a forum meeting. The chairman also ensured all interested bodies were able to explain their views through their spokesperson. The forums were publicised and were public meetings shown on the Council's webcam. A scheme at Dunsford Park attracted over 50,000 visits to the web site.

Wycombe District Council has a development forum as part of its range of pre-application discussions. It is similar to Waverley's approach with developers encouraged to engage with the local community in accordance with a protocol and the statement of community involvement. However the onus is on the developer rather than the council to arrange the community consultation and forum. Council officers and members attend the forum, but as the Council is not chairing the forum, individual planning committee councillors have to preface their remarks by explaining that they will not be expressing a view until any subsequent application is submitted.

Ashford Borough and *West Dorset Councils* have used the Prince's Foundation "enquiry by design" approach for pre application consultation on major urban extensions. They participated with the developer and community in design workshops and consensus building techniques to engage the community in deciding on the kind of development they wanted to see.

2.5 To date, authorities have born the costs of these exercises or agreed with developers their absorbing the cost. The costs are significant and are not covered by planning fees which may explain why more authorities have not followed these examples. However section 93 of the Local Government Act 2003 allows local authorities to charge for such discretionary services and a significant number do charge.

3 ADVANCE PLANNING

3.1 To engage communities as effectively as possible timely preparation of planning briefs and master plans has proved very effective.

• The preparation of a brief or masterplan, with close working between the Proposer, local authority and community, enables consideration to be given to all the issues including sensitivities and opportunities particular to the locality. The landowner/developer would be a key participant in creating the master plan or brief.
• Planning briefs and masterplans are adaptable to meet different kinds of development opportunity and community engagement needs and preferences, and enable the full participation of ward and parish councillors, strengthening local democratic working and understanding.
• Carefully prepared masterplans and briefs, embodying best practice in urban design, will improve the quality of any resultant development, encourage more ownership on the part of local communities, and lead to a better understanding of the changing planning process by local communities.

3.2 A masterplan or brief prepared to meet the requirements of the local Statement of Community Involvement and with the collaboration of the local community, would define what was sustainable development, in the context of a community's needs and constraints, and should acquire the material weight and authority of a Development Plan Document

4 CONCLUSIONS

4.1 However detailed the Local Plan proposal for sustainable development of major sites, there will still be issues benefiting from discussion with local communities prior to the submission of a planning application.

4.2 It would be helpful if the duty to cooperate between local planning authorities and other public service bodies were extended explicitly to developers of major proposals. The duty for public service bodies to engage in pre application discussions could ensure that those consultees currently unwilling to adopt a collaborative approach refocused their resources on this need. Council's Statements of Community Involvement can then ensure that local communities are fully involved in pre application discussions. This duty to engage should include master planning or development briefs, including where there is no local plan framework to ensure community engagement in sustainable development.

The original guidance was "Future of Planning portfolio of advice notes No. 8" -
http://www.planningofficers.org.uk/downloads/pdf/PRE%20PLANNING%20APPLICATION%20CONSULTATION%20BEST%20PRACTICE_031010.pdf

Guidelines on Effective Community Involvement and Consultation

RTPI Good Practice Note 1

About these Guidelines

Professionals in all manner of disciplines are having to come to terms with the intricacies of consultation and effective community involvement.

In the case of planners and those in allied activities, recent legislation adds new obligations to existing, long standing commitments to public participation, and accordingly planning authorities in England are working on Statements of Community Involvement (SCIs). In Wales a similar document is being prepared under the title Community Involvement Scheme (CISs) and in Scotland the issues are being considered in the White Paper, Modernising the Planning System. Specific advice and guidance on the preparation of these documents is available from a variety of sources.

These Guidelines serve a wider purpose. They are intended to provide RTPI members with a corps of *best practice* guidance on key aspects of community involvement, in an easy to absorb format and capable of being amended and updated in the light of experience.

By working alongside The Consultation Institute, the RTPI has sought to leverage its knowledge of *best practice* in those many disciplines where public and stakeholder consultation is well established. It must be remembered that planners are not alone in seeking wider community involvement in the decision-making process, and that stakeholders are right to demand improved co-ordination and consistency between the various public bodies and functions who wish to hear their views.

These 22 Guidelines contain detailed advice under three generic headings – Public Involvement Issues, Enablers and Consultation Standards.

Comments and suggested improvements will be welcome and should be addressed to policy@rtpi.org.uk.

RTPI
mediation of space · making of place

consultation INSTITUTE
making consultation count

Introduction

One of the difficulties in coming to terms with the changes in culture and behaviour that is demanded of the planning profession is that some of the popular concepts of community involvement are still misunderstood by many people, both lay and professional.

In particular, it is important to be clear as to where ultimate responsibility lies for taking decisions on development plans and for processing planning applications. Whilst formal consultation will necessarily be required as part of effective processes in these contexts, there is scope for wider public participation in certain circumstances.

Both the Government, and the RTPI are keen to encourage this broader view of public engagement, but practitioners may need help to crystallise the concepts and make them meaningful in practice. For this reason, Guideline 1 on the use of terminology assumes a special significance.

It is also important to recognise the continuing and pivotal role of consultation in the new planning environment. Despite the growing popularity of interactions where decision-making and operational activities are shared between the parties, development plans and key planning decisions are ultimately taken by accountable bodies which bear the full responsibility for those decisions.

Effective consultation enables such decisions and plans to be approved in the knowledge that stakeholders and the public generally have had a full opportunity to express their views and make representations in a genuine and transparent dialogue. What has been absent in the past is a sufficiently robust framework of guidance so that planning authorities and others recognise if, and whether they are doing the job properly.

To help in this, in Category Three (Guidelines 16-22) we have followed the seven principles of, "The Consultation Charter". Since its original publication by The Consultation Institute in 2003, this has received widespread acceptance and forms a solid basis for measuring compliance with best practice in this area.

These Guidelines exist alongside other sources of guidance and assistance. The resources available on www.communityplanning.net include details of many organisations and contacts active in the subject of community involvement, and interested practitioners are urged to follow developments closely in what is a fascinating and rapidly evolving worldwide activity.

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[1] For a full explanation of The Consultation Charter, see www.consultationinstitute.org

No 1 Using Terminology with Precision

The Issue

Much of the terminology used in the recent legislation and associated guidance refers to various kinds of public participation, and it is sometimes difficult to discern the precise intention behind the use of different terms. Superficially, words such as engagement, participation, involvement and even consultation appear almost interchangeable.

In reality, they are different, and for those working at the practical implementation of these concepts, it is important to understand the precise meaning and usage of each term.

The use of standard definitions will, in time, help professionals to communicate with each other with fewer misunderstandings. More significantly, it should encourage greater consistency in communications with the general public and the stakeholder base.

The RTPI Recommends

- **Public (or Community) Involvement**
  Effective interactions between planners, decision-makers, individual and representative stakeholders to identify issues and exchange views on a continuous basis;
- **Participation**
  The extent and nature of activities undertaken by those who take part in public or community involvement;
- **Public (or Community) Engagement**
  Actions and processes taken or undertaken to establish effective relationships with individuals or groups so that more specific interactions can then take place;
- **Consultation**
  The dynamic process of dialogue between individuals or groups, based upon a genuine exchange of views, and normally with the objective of influencing decisions, policies or programmes of action.

No 2 Community Engagement and Building Relationships

The Issue

The phrase "community engagement" causes considerable confusion for it is often used as an umbrella term to cover the whole range of public involvement and consultation. In fact it has a more precise meaning, and refers to those actions and processes which take place to establish an effective relationship with individual and organisational stakeholders.

This phase is critical, as the future conduct of consultations and other forms of interaction depend upon the nature of the relationship, and the expectations set at the beginning. From time to time, it is necessary to re-engage with those who have ceased to participate, and on every occasion, the basis of trust between the parties is of paramount importance.

It is especially important to ensure engagement with hard-to-reach and other community groups which have traditionally been neglected.

The RTPI Recommends

- Setting clear objectives for community engagement, recognising which sections of society already have a satisfactory basis for public participation, and where greater efforts are needed to engage successfully with specific groups;
- Understanding the key drivers and motivations of groups targeted for community engagement, and devising engagement strategies that recognise the unique and diverse characteristics of such groups;
- Measuring success in community engagement by evaluating the quality and quantity of subsequent interactions, and by periodically reviewing the relationship to determine whether further actions are necessary to engage more fully with all strands of opinion within a defined group;
- Allocating clear responsibility for engaging with particular groups, leveraging historic or issue specific specialist know how, and avoiding disruption of existing long term relations with inherited trust.

No 3 Community Involvement and Consultation Objectives

The Issue

Many forms of public involvement and participation suffer from a confusion of objectives. Whilst some processes can accommodate such vagueness, it is important to have a clearer view of the more formal stages such as a public consultation. Successful consultations depend upon a clear, shared understanding of their objectives.

Because consultation objectives can vary widely, and the outputs used for a wide variety of purposes, it is often tempting to adopt too wide a set of objectives.

But as the consultation objectives should also largely influence the choice of methods, the style of the consultation and the post consultation actions, it is important to focus on key objectives.

Isolating key objectives from peripheral benefits of the consultation process will help those planning public engagement exercises and assist in creating the right expectations.

The RTPI Recommends

- That every consultation exercise possesses a clear mandate which explains the aims of the consultation;
- Identifying precisely *who* are the decision-makers or *which* is the organisation to be informed by the consultation, and the purpose for which they will use the information and opinions gathered in the process;
- Acting in accordance with an approved Statement of Community Involvement[2] (SCI) to ensure consistency of approach;
- Developing a standard format for such mandates and ensuring consistency with other consultations undertaken in other departments of the authority, so that stakeholders' understanding is assisted;
- If a consultation is restricted to a closed list of alternative options, this should be made clear;
- If a consultation welcomes new ideas and alternatives to the proposals published for consultation, then this should also be made clear.

[2] Statements of Community Involvement are a requirement under the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004; in Wales the equivalent document is called a Community Involvement Scheme (CIS)

No 4 Best Value and Consultation

The Issue

The concept of *Best Value* obliges public bodies to review at regular intervals, whether their methods of delivering services or undertaking essential tasks meet the criteria of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.

As public engagement activities in general, and consultation in particular are resource intensive and are likely to involve increasing amounts of public money, it is appropriate that local planning authorities (LPAs) adopt a *Best Value* approach to their policies and their options for implementing them.

This means finding ways to observe the standard tests of Challenge, Comparison, Consultation and Competition in determining the ways in which to undertake public engagement.

The RTPI Recommends

- That LPAs should incorporate the *Best Value* tests into their Statement of Community Involvement (SCIs) or Community Involvement Schemes (CISs);
- Setting challenging targets for operational aspects of public engagement (e.g. advance notice to key stakeholders on time between closing date for consultation submissions and publication of output feedback);
- Establishing relationships with comparable authorities to exchange information for benchmarking purposes;
- Conducting a formal dialogue with stakeholders at least once a year to discover their perceptions of the consultation and public participation processes;
- Periodically seeking information about the likely costs and benefits of using third party or partnership based suppliers of specialist consultation related services;
- Discussing with *Planning Aid*[3] appropriate ways to undertake a *Best Value* review of community involvement.

[3] Planning Aid provides free, independent and professional advice and support on planning issues to people and communities who cannot afford to hire a planning consultant. See www.planningaid.rtpi.org.uk

No 5 Consultation with Hard-to-Reach Groups

The Issue

The social inclusion agenda has identified the need to redress the balance of public involvement and to make greater efforts to hear the views of people and groups that have been traditionally under represented.

The planning system can be inaccessible to such interest groups, and local planning departments may have limited experience of the particular skills and techniques of engaging with them.

Many *hard-to-reach* groups have a limited capacity for involvement and are facing engagement initiatives from several quarters. Making progress in this area therefore requires high levels of co-ordination with other local authority departments and strong working relationships with equality and diversity (where these exist) units or their equivalents.

The RTPI Recommends

- Working from an authority wide database of groups and organisations. Avoid the temptation to compile yet another list of target organisations;
- Identifying and leveraging existing authority relationships whenever possible;
- Avoiding a tick-box approach to the *hard-to-reach*. Engage them in dialogues which are significant and especially when they have specific interests;
- Taking account of *best practice* for the provision of special facilities required by disabled and other disadvantaged groups at public meetings, events or via e-consultation[4] etc;
- Identifying issues and policies that are likely to be of particular concern and interest to specific *hard-to-reach* groups, or those in particular areas; addressing these on a one-to-one basis wherever possible;
- Encourage private sector developers and commercial interests to consider the *hard-to-reach* when responding to plans or making applications.

[4] See the emerging Disability Equality Duty which comes into force in December 2006; see the Disability Rights Commission for details: www.drc-gb.org

No 6 Avoiding Consultation Fatigue

The Issue

The same people are being consulted, and the volume is such that many organisations are now complaining of consultation fatigue. Voluntary and community bodies, many of whom have limited resources are particularly badly affected.

The general public, on the other hand, appears not to have reached this saturation point, and appears ready and willing to engage with public bodies provided the subject matter is sufficiently relevant, and the public is approached in a professional and honest way.

In both cases, groups and individuals have a limited capacity for involvement. Good use must be made of their time, and results must be demonstrable if they are to continue to be motivated to participate.

The RTPI Recommends

- Engaging with key stakeholder groups well ahead of any formal consultation. Use this to reach a consensus on the form and methods of consultation, and its timing;
- Developing a *consultation programme* covering at least a year ahead, and publishing a *consultation calendar* so that key stakeholder organisation can prioritise and plan their involvement with an authority;
- Integrating the spatial dimension into consultations organised by other departments and other public services; ensuring better co-ordination with other departments and other agencies (see Guideline 7);
- Inviting groups with limited resources to identify those aspects upon which they wish to focus, and help them channel their activity to fewer, more relevant actions;
- Finding easy ways for some groups to participate (e.g. *e-consultation* tools and wider use of e-mail and SMS text messaging);
- Developing thematic or geographic panels of people or representatives able to devote time and willing to offer views and opinions;
- Using up to date stakeholder data from a single stakeholder database. Avoid obsolete or inaccurate lists.

No 7 Setting Stakeholder Expectations

The Issue

Making a success of public participation depends upon setting the right expectations.

The process of determining between competing interests will inevitably disappoint some stakeholders, so it is in everyone's interest that individuals and organisations understand how various processes work, and what they can expect from their operation.

Great care is needed in balancing the need to motivate participants so as to secure their involvement, and the need for them to have realistic expectations.

The RTPI Recommends

- That planners take every opportunity to explain that public consultation findings and individual objections are only *part* of the evidence base upon which decisions are taken;
- Building long-term relationships with key stakeholder[5] organisations and their members so that they become more familiar with public engagement processes and are realistic about them;
- Using local authorities emerging role of community leadership to involve stakeholders more systematically and help them understand how the planning process works;
- Using Statements of Community Involvement (SCIs or CISs) judiciously by drafting them to avoid speculative or unrealistic commitments, by publicising them appropriately and by ensuring they are supported by adequate budget and capacity;
- Training all front line planning staff in the need to communicate the limitations as well as the potential of planning processes and the need for *realism* at all points in discussions with stakeholders and the public;
- Restricting the use of jargon and observing *Plain English*[6] standards in documents.

[5] *Key stakeholders* are organisations selected on the basis of their interest in relevant outcomes, and their history of participation and engagement.

[6] See the Plain English campaign and its Crystal Mark scheme - http://www.plainenglish.co.uk/ A Welsh language equivalent is now available - Plain Welsh or Cymraeg Clir.

No 8 Joined-Up Consultations

The Issue

Stakeholders complain that many consultation and other public participation exercises duplicate each other or seek views about similar or overlapping issues, albeit in different contexts.

Given the multi-disciplinary nature of so much planning work, it is inevitable that there is a risk that community involvement will be seen on occasions to cover similar subjects to those covered by other consultations.

Many stakeholders, especially those with good, long standing relationships with an authority will understand the different roles played by different consultation exercises. They may also appreciate that public bodies have to satisfy different statutory requirements and have to proceed with parallel engagement activities. But they are less tolerant of avoidable proliferation of work from autonomous departments within the same authority, and increasingly look for a co-ordinated approach.

The RTPI Recommends

- Ensuring that planning consultations are fully integrated into an authorities' overall strategy for community involvement and/or consultation;
- Assisting other departments and agencies to include the spatial dimension in their consultations;
- Establishing a mechanism to approve all formal consultations undertaken in the name of the local authority, and acting as a clearing house to co-ordinate similar or overlapping exercises;
- Working with other public agencies through Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) or similar mechanisms to exchange information about planned consultations and to co-ordinate as much as possible;
- Inviting relevant public bodies seeking similar feedback from citizens or stakeholder groups, to participate or attend key public engagement events;
- Drafting appropriate data protection clauses for use in consultation exercises to enable relevant external organisations to share access to the outputs of specific consultations.

No 9 Selecting Appropriate Dialogue Methods

The Issue

There are over 40 documented methods of community involvement with ample scope for innovation and a steady supply of imaginative consultants offering ever more sophisticated techniques.[7]

The choice of methods has traditionally been largely a product of custom and practice, and the availability of skills and relevant experience. With the advent of SCIs and CISs, and with greater emphasis on front end involvement and consensus building, planning authorities will need to be more consistent in their methods.

In particular, they will need to consider the most appropriate ways to engage with specific stakeholder groups at various stages of the plan preparation process. In common with other departments undertaking consultation, planning staff will need to understand the stakeholder base better so that the methods they use achieve the goal of better and deeper engagement.

The RTPI Recommends

- Carefully selecting a range of methods and ensuring that trained staff (either within planning departments or available for use by planning departments) can implement these techniques to agreed standards;
- Exploiting new technology - *e-consultation*, particularly for groups with high online access (e.g. young people or businesses) and statutory consultees;
- Building and deploying skills and capability in mediation, consensus building and negotiation to complement skills in formal consultation processes;
- Using specialist techniques for public engagement and involvement in planning environments; making use of *Planning Aid* to supplement in house resources;
- Maintaining an appropriate balance between qualitative techniques (e.g. focus groups or stakeholder conferences) and quantitative methods (e.g. surveys). Look for methods which people find enjoyable!
- Reducing the reliance on documentary (i.e. written) consultation and place increasing emphasis on participative methods where literacy standards are less of a barrier to participation.

[7] See www.communityplanning.net/

No 10 New Technology and e-consultation

The Issue

The Government's 2005 target required local authorities and other public bodies to e-enable all services and make them available online. This includes all aspects of planning and also public engagement and consultation.

Many authorities have already invested in such a facility and others are experimenting. Usage by the public is still slow, but initiatives such as the National Projects for Local e-democracy[8] and PARSOL[9] are developing new ways to increase take up. Whilst public reaction is still uncertain, commentators expect that cost and speed advantages will stimulate wider use of specific applications in the coming years.

Among applications of particular relevance to planners are online consultation directories, e-surveys, online commentaries, e-discussion forums and vip-chat sessions. In addition stakeholder portals will be developed to enable consultees to register for participation in particular consultations.

The RTPI Recommends

- Building awareness of available new technology applications, and working alongside internal and external information and communications technology (ICT) specialists to understand the channel better;
- Finding ways to work with other departments and to share the costs of buying, configuring, deploying and supporting specialist *e-consultation* tools;
- Training *e-discussion* forum *moderators* and publishing clear rules of engagement before deploying such applications;
- Ensuring that the use of *e-consultation* is never such as to exclude those without digital access from participating in specific consultations;
- Publicising the use of *e-consultation* methods so as to increase public and stakeholder awareness and maximise take up of the channel.

[8] See a full list of the e-government National Projects in www.localegovnp.org

[9] Planning and Regulatory Services Online see www.parsol.gov.uk

No 11 Stakeholder Capacity-Building for Public Participation

The Issue

Many of those whose views are most critical for local authorities and other public bodies to understand are relatively less capable of expressing themselves. This situation is not confined to hard-to-reach groups, but they are often among those most inexperienced in responding to consultations.

Whilst part of the solution is to use methods which are more appropriate to such groups, there will still be an increasing need to help them understand community involvement processes and to participate to optimum effect.

Capacity building takes time and costs money, but results in a more inclusive dialogue. By hearing a wider range of opinions, planning can take account of issues and perceptions which have hitherto been relatively neglected.

The RTPI Recommends

- Identifying groups or categories requiring special assistance. Note these are not always *hard-to-reach*!
- Investigating precise requirements on a systematic basis; even handed treatment of stakeholder groups (some of them with opposing views) is essential to avoid suggestions of bias;
- Developing effective training or mentoring both to explain public engagement processes and to motivate groups to wish to participate, but also to provide groups with skills, capability or organisation required to respond and become fully involved;
- Convincing target groups that capacity building is a two way process with advantages for all concerned (e.g. planners learn more about community needs and community groups learn more about planning);
- Budgeting to provide assistance for voluntary and community groups; to fund meetings, facilitate child care or transport and associated costs;
- Working with other departments within a local authority and externally with other relevant public bodies to ensure a consistent approach to capacity building.

No 12 Resources and Budgets

The Issue

The new emphasis on community involvement will require substantial investment in building and deploying the skills of public engagement and consultation.

Part of the rationale is the belief that a bigger effort made in the early stages of the planning cycle (e.g. the preparation of LDF documents) will result in savings later on. Whilst many experienced planners acknowledge this in principle, the lengthy time scales involved and the fear that wider participation may increase costs throughout the cycle, prompts a degree of caution with many planning departments anxious to avoid unrealistic expectations from the new regime.

This makes it even more critical for all concerned to take a fresh look at resource allocation and to make judgements about relative priorities. At all costs, planners must avoid commitments to public engagement that cannot or will not be funded.

The RTPI Recommends

- Statements of Community Involvement (SCIs and CISs) should be costed and an estimated budget calculated for at least three years ahead;
- Discussions with other departments (e.g. communications, marketing etc) using similar methods and committing to comparable projects to investigate cost sharing;
- Optimising the use of specialist public engagement and consultation skills by developing centralised services where appropriate;
- Making use of *Planning Aid* or specialist external consultants and other facilities when economic;
- Seeking opportunities to pass some of the relevant costs of consultation to private sector planning applicants where the exercises are directly related to specific major applications.

No 13 Effective Roles for Elected Members

The Issue

Elected members play an important part in taking decisions about community priorities and in approving or rejecting development applications. In practice however, many Councillors have questioned the value of lengthy consultation phases in the traditional development of local plans.

However, as the role of local authorities evolves towards that of community leadership, Councillors will probably play an even more active part in community involvement and in facilitating the transmission and interpretation of their constituents' views. There is an inherent tension between representative democracy and consultative democracy, and some local politicians will fear that wider consultation undermines their electoral mandates.

Developing an effective role for elected members therefore requires an understanding of these tensions and a search for complementary rather than competing activities.

The RTPI Recommends

- Involving Councillors fully in the preparation of Statements of Community Involvement (SCIs or CISs) and including within them, references to the role which members will play;
- Encouraging Councillors to play an active part in area committees and neighbourhood forums so as to help the local community to articulate its views;
- Discussing with Councillors the most appropriate methods for public involvement for their wards and for the authority as a whole;
- Provide awareness training for elected members on the most frequently used consultation techniques, and particularly how to interpret the results;
- Encouraging Members to attend selected consultation events (e.g. focus groups) as observers;
- Submitting the detailed outputs of key consultations to scrutiny committees.

No 14 Working with Representative Groups

The Issue

Civic society includes thousands of representative bodies and community associations of some kind of another.

Sometimes they exist as long-term, institutionalised bodies representing the interests of defined groups or professions. On other occasions they are transitory pressure groups springing up to campaign for or against specific proposals and mobilising grassroots opinion to participate in the many ways that a democracy allows.

Planners already deal with both types of stakeholders, but will now need to strengthen their capabilities in the context of community involvement. Building excellent relationships with representative groups is a high priority for all public bodies, but is particularly important if planners are to carry communities with them in the interests of sustainable development.

The RTPI Recommends

- Working alongside other departments and other agencies to build and maintain an accurate database of representative groups as part of a single stakeholder database;
- Gathering sufficient information about groups so as to identify which may need to be regarded as key stakeholders. Make a judgement as to how representative they are in reality!
- Exploring the links between various representative groups. Remember that many opinion leaders operate through several different bodies;
- Keeping detailed records of all interactions with representative groups. Consider an ICT solution (contact management for a simple application; CRM[10] for a comprehensive one);
- Understanding how key representative groups determine their positions on key issues in a consultation dialogue;
- Identifying when representative groups need assistance to consider proposals or to participate fully in dialogue; offer capacity building initiatives where appropriate.

[10] CRM means Customer Relationship Management and is the basis for most local authority investment in contact centres and one-stop-shop initiatives.

No 15 Training for Better Engagement and Consultation

The Issue

Although it has always been necessary to familiarise planning staff with the rudiments of consultation and associated processes, much of this learning has been on the job with few formal training opportunities.

In recent years, the body of expertise has grown in this area, and studies leading to the new planning legislation have assembled sufficient best practice to enable the development of training materials and courses on community involvement principles and techniques.

The recent creation of the Academy for Sustainable Communities[11] and initiatives by the RTPI and others will increase the availability of training, but the onus still remains on planning departments to identify and address their own specific training needs.

The RTPI Recommends

- Using the process of preparing and securing support for Statements of Community Involvement (SCIs or CISs) to analyse existing and emerging training needs;
- Collaborating with other departments and public bodies to identify parallel requirements and to share the cost of training provision. Help other service providers understand the spatial dimension of their work;
- Establishing internal self help learning and skills transfer networks so as to disseminate best practice faster;
- Placing a focus on skills required beyond formal consultation processes in particular:

• stakeholder profiling and mapping • stakeholder relationship management
• consensus building • mediation • conflict resolution • negotiation

- Looking for opportunities to undertake joint training alongside Elected Members and also alongside key stakeholders, as a confidence building measure.

[11] See www.ascskills.org.uk

No 16 Standards for Consultation - Integrity

The Issue

Greater emphasis on community involvement will prompt a requirement for a means to ascertain that consultation and other activities are being undertaken to an appropriate standard. The Consultation Charter provides for seven principles, adherence to which can act as an indicator of best practice.

The first Charter principle is **Integrity** and this means ensuring that the consultation has an honest intent. Whilst it is always open for local authorities to engage with stakeholders at any stage in the development of plans and policies, a formal consultation should not be undertaken if the decision has already been taken.

Great care is needed in scoping consultations properly and in providing the clearest possible indication of those matters where the consultor has discretion and is open to be influenced by the submissions and contributions made by those who respond.

The RTPI Recommends

- Authorities should emphasise their commitment to this principle in their Statements of Community Involvement (SCIs) or Community Involvement Schemes (CISs);
- Avoiding spurious consultation exercises where there is no scope to act upon consultee responses;
- Developing strong relationships with stakeholder organisations, based upon trust that their time and commitment will not be wasted on unnecessary consultations;
- Demonstrating how public and stakeholder views have been taken into account in previous engagement exercises;
- Using pre-consultation dialogues to discuss fully with potential consultees, how forthcoming involvement can be best used.

No 17 Standards for Consultation - Visibility

The Issue

Greater emphasis on community involvement will prompt a requirement for a means to ascertain that consultation and other activities are being undertaken to an appropriate standard. The Consultation Charter provides for seven principles, adherence to which can act as an indicator of best practice.

The second Charter principle is **Visibility** and this means that those most directly affected by plans and decisions have a reasonable awareness of such community involvement processes as will take place.

The onus is on consultors to ensure that this visibility is achieved, and that communications with identified stakeholders are such as to create a high level of awareness, particularly of formal consultations, highlighting the ways in which citizens and others can participate.

The RTPI Recommends

- Identifying the best methods of communicating with each stakeholder type;
- Ensuring maximum promotion for each individual consultation as well as the overall programme of community engagement and involvement;
- Engaging with key stakeholders and/or their representative groups in advance of specific consultations to provide them with adequate advance warning, and to seek their views on the most effective means of publicity;
- Publishing a comprehensive consultation calendar;
- Liaison with other local authority departments undertaking consultation and public involvement to reduce the likelihood of overlapping or duplicated exercises and thereby eliminate confusion.

No 18 Standards for Consultation - Accessibility

The Issue

Greater emphasis on community involvement will prompt a requirement for a means to ascertain that consultation and other activities are being undertaken to an appropriate standard. The Consultation Charter provides for seven principles, adherence to which can act as an indicator of best practice.

The third Charter principle is **Accessibility** and this refers to the ease with which potential participants can avail themselves of the opportunity. It means being aware of the greater propensity of some groups to respond to particular methods, and the barriers facing others.

Engaging with the disabled, racial, ethnic, linguistic or religious minorities all require special facilities, and ensuring equal access to the process for such groups is essential.

The RTPI Recommends

- Subjecting all consultation plans to the test of whether proposed methods will be accessible to the target audiences;
- Training all those involved with public engagement processes in *best practice* for meeting the needs of identified groups with difficulties;
- Ensuring that planning departments are involved in the production of Disability Equality Schemes;
- Discussing proposed involvement methods with key stakeholders at the pre-consultation stage to identify unforeseen difficulties;
- Using jargon free language when producing documents intended for non-professionals; observing Plain English and Plain Welsh standards (e.g. Crystal Mark scheme);
- Translating documents into other languages when this is necessary to fully engage specific linguistic communities, and following dialogue with their representative groups.

No 19 Standards for Consultation - Confidentiality and Transparency

The Issue

Greater emphasis on community involvement will prompt a requirement for a means to ascertain that consultation and other activities are being undertaken to an appropriate standard. The Consultation Charter provides for seven principles, adherence to which can act as an indicator of best practice.

The fourth Charter principle is **Confidentiality**, but the real issue is **Transparency**. There are occasions where stakeholder views are properly subject to confidentiality, but in the public sector, the Freedom of Information Act makes those circumstances few and far between.

Commercial undertakings and private individuals may be able to agree with planning authorities that aspects of their discussions may be confidential, but all parties need to be increasingly aware of the need to satisfy a public interest test.

The RTPI Recommends

- Encouraging a culture of maximum transparency, whilst observing the spirit and letter of data protection and freedom of information legislation;
- Advising participants in community involvement exercises on the presumption of transparency, and the duty on local authorities to make documents and information held by them available if requested under the Freedom of Information Act[12];
- Providing a clear reference to the Act in surveys, questionnaires, documents and other materials used as dialogue methods to elicit the views of stakeholders;
- Drafting consultation documents and other materials used in community involvement processes with the citizen's right to know in mind; providing specific authority for statements and assumptions made with clear signposts for citizens to consult referenced sources;
- Providing a clear audit trail of analyses and recommendations so that the influence of consultations upon decisions can be followed.

[12] For full details of the legislation and its implications see www.informationcommissioner.gov.uk

No 20 Standards for Consultation - Full Disclosure

The Issue

Greater emphasis on community involvement will prompt a requirement for a means to ascertain that consultation and other activities are being undertaken to an appropriate standard. The Consultation Charter provides for seven principles, adherence to which can act as an indicator of best practice.

The fifth Charter principle is **Disclosure** and requires both consultors and consultees to be totally open with each other and not to conceal or withhold information which might be relevant to the dialogue.

Relevance is a difficult test to apply, but can be viewed as depending upon the view that one party to a discussion might reasonably take to the information's non-disclosure by the other party. If a stakeholder organisation feels that particular information being withheld by the consultor might have significantly affected the view it had of proposals or plans, then disclosure would appear to be necessary.

The RTPI Recommends

- Scoping a consultation to address those aspects which stakeholders have a reasonable expectation will be covered in the exercise;
- Using pre-consultation discussions with key stakeholders to establish their expectations of the nature and scope of information to be released in the course of a formal consultation exercise;
- Anticipating the most likely questions arising in a public involvement exercise, preparing and publishing comprehensive Q's and A's;
- Advising stakeholder organisations that they will be expected to disclose such aspects of their membership involvement, decision making and governance as would be relevant to an evaluation of their submissions to a consultation.

No 21 Standards for Consultation - Fair Interpretation

The Issue

Greater emphasis on community involvement will prompt a requirement for a means to ascertain that consultation and other activities are being undertaken to an appropriate standard. The Consultation Charter provides for seven principles, adherence to which can act as an indicator of best practice.

The sixth Charter principle is **Fair Interpretation** and this places a strict burden on consultors to analyse and interpret consultation output data objectively.

Clearly there are circumstances where the level of trust between consultor and consultees is high, and where good relations exist between all parties. On occasions, however, controversial proposals or a history of poor relationships can result in considerable scepticism and, in extreme cases, a clear lack of confidence in the impartiality of the consultor.

Public bodies need to be alive to these different scenarios and respond to this standard by taking steps to ensure not only that data is fairly interpreted, but that it is seen to be so interpreted.

The RTPI Recommends

- Publishing raw output data (e.g. public meeting minutes, focus group reports, survey results etc) whenever appropriate;
- Explaining how the data will be analysed, and clarifying the distinction between analysis and interpretation;
- Using established methods of analysis and statistically sound procedures;
- Considering the involvement of trusted third parties, either to advise on the analysis, to undertake the analysis, or to provide independent oversight of the interpretation;
- Discussing the need for independent verification with key stakeholders;
- Using accreditation schemes to demonstrate adherence to best practice standards.

No 22 Standards for Consultation - Publication

The Issue

Greater emphasis on community involvement will prompt a requirement for a means to ascertain that consultation and other activities are being undertaken to an appropriate standard. The Consultation Charter provides for seven principles, adherence to which can act as an indicator of best practice.

The final Charter principle is **Publication** and this refers both to the output of consultation as well as the eventual outcome. This is the practical application of the over riding requirement of transparency and is intended to ensure that everyone who takes part in community involvement activities can see what happened as a result of their participation.

It is not enough just to publish; the method chosen must be such that those with a significant interest can easily access the relevant information.

The RTPI Recommends

- Deciding upon a publication plan at the outset, and publicising this when the community involvement process begins;
- Selecting methods of publication which are appropriate for the participating consultees and also for others with an interest in the issue;
- Drawing a clear distinction between the publication of the *output* and the *outcome*. For *output*, it is helpful to indicate precisely how the data was gathered, and to use consultees' own submissions whenever possible;
- Avoiding crude summaries of complex arguments advanced by stakeholders; publish qualitative and quantitative analyses with explanations of the methods used;
- Showing how the *outcome* of consultation and public involvement has taken account of the contributions made by stakeholders and others;
- Making best use of new technology by posting relevant publications on the internet, whist also providing a facility for non-digital organisations and individuals to obtain equivalent information.

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