Appendix D

Action Plan for Community Involvement in Planning

This Action Plan for Community Involvement in Planning sets out actions to support improvements in the quality, process and impact of engagement in planning processes. It is not intended to be an exhaustive list and will be kept under review.

The Action Plan is a supporting document for the Statement of Community Involvement (in Planning) (SCI(P)(2015), to set out the more detailed or specific actions that the Council is committed to in its aspirations for continuous improvement of community engagement in the planning process. In this way, the Action Plan clarifies how the Council is intending to deliver the SCI to address ideas and suggestions that were raised in the consultation responses.

The Action Plan illustrates, using practical examples, that the Council is committed to effective community engagement both now and in the longer term. The Action Plan also reflects that some changes are not achievable instantly but will take some time to resolve and/or decisions which impact more widely than the planning processes of the City Council, such as IT systems.

The actions are framed by four key principles for effective engagement in planning processes:

1. *Timely and sustained* – events and activities should start before any planning decisions are made and engagement should last throughout the planning process and beyond;
2. *Inclusive for all local people* – those living and working in an area have a right to be involved, all parties are welcome, and process must take account of peoples' varied needs;
3. *Two way, open and responsive* – communication should be discursive not prescriptive, so that information can be debated and ideas exchanged; and
4. *A matter of public record* – the processes must be documented and published[1].

The Action Plan will be reviewed periodically, and at least annually, to update on progress.

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[1] Roger Dudman Way Review 2013, paragraph 91

Version 1 – July 2015

Action Plan for Community Involvement in Planning

Effective engagement and customer service criteria	Community Involvement Actions	Targets or milestones	Progress / achievement (at July 2015)
Standardise the operating procedures for the planning authority (the City Council), for applicants, and for communities to use in engaging in planning issues. Standardising procedures helps transparency, and to set out clearly what people can expect from the City Council or applicant. It will also clarify what we will or won't be doing, and about what we expect from applicants.	**At Pre-application stage – standardise guidance for applicants** Prepare guidance for applicants about carrying out consultation as early as possible at pre-application For Major applications: Work with applicants to promote and agree tailored consultation plans, particularly focussing at the pre-application stage, taking into account latest best practice. Also encourage compliance to principles/standards, by formalising it within Planning Performance Agreements (PPA) where applicable. Guidance for applicants on visualisation techniques to help members of the community understand what a development will look like and how it will relate to its surroundings. Explore commissioning a 3D City-wide model, to aid visualisation in consultations. **Standardise post-application guidance (ie for live applications under consideration)**	Apply for external ISO9001 accreditation Autumn 2015. This involves preparing Standard Operating Procedures for key areas for independent assessment. Apply for external Customer Service Excellence (CSE) accreditation June 2015 because effective engagement is important part of customer service. Annually review SOPS and help sheets to see that they remain up-to-date.	Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) established and written for key work areas. Best practice guidance (guidance produced by RTPI and POS) about pre-application engagement is being promoted via the website. Application for CSE submitted and being assessed. Verification procedures being introduced for processing of planning applications eg officers taking photos of site notices to record the date, location, and presence of the notices. Publishing a summary of these procedures online. Guidance is being produced to encourage standardised processes eg: A Help sheet – 'Helping the community to understand development proposals' (published online). Also guidance is in progress - Improving the visual quality of drawings and documents submitted

Version 1 – July 2015

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	Potential future help sheet topic: consultation checklists to prompt applicants on key matters to cover. Review verification procedures to provide reassurance to public whilst being proportionate and reasonable. Eg ways to verify that site notices have been displayed, in the event that they are removed or fall down. Review structure of Committee reports to clarify decision-making process, and also to provide clearer feedback to public about how comments have been taken into account. **Planning Policy** Standardise the approach to using the City Council's online consultation portal (eConsult/Inovem) for policy consultations, so that the public can get more familiar with the format and functions. **For both policy and applications** Continue to work with Public Involvement Board and the City Council Consultation Toolkit, to plan and implement effective		with a Planning Application: A guide for applicants and agents.

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	consultations to a consistent standard across the Council.		
Working with community forums/groups as a channel for hearing views and sharing information It is recognised that an effective way of engaging and reaching more people, is through representative groups and organisations across the City. Helps to develop insight about our customers and community groups, to better understand their needs and preferences for engaging with planning. Building capacity in the groups and communities, to improve skills and confidence to engage in planning process and to be more effective in influencing decisions made about their communities and quality of life. Build relationships and trust between the groups and the City Council, facilitating constructive dialogue and minimise consultation fatigue of repeated	Across the City there are existing groups which could play a role in facilitating community involvement in planning, and reaching a wider audience. Actions are therefore: a) Explore the existing groups/networks of interest, what interests they represent, and consider their potential roles in facilitating engagement. b) For willing groups, build relationships and explore best communication channels for more of an on-going dialogue (rather than at specific 'consultation' points) c) Explore setting up regular (electronic) newsletter for these groups and others who have expressed interest in engaging in planning process. d) Commitment also required from the groups, to act responsibly as a channel for views and to make themselves accessible to the City Council and applicants. Identify examples of best practice to promote. e) Groups have offered to help	Maintain an accurate and up-to-date database of representative groups and contact details for formal consultations. Check annually. Establish regular 6-monthly meeting with Localities team to improve engagement with the groups they work most closely with in the regeneration areas. Produce quarterly electronic newsletter (also see separate Action below about newsletter). Explore options for working with groups over next 12 months, including providing deposit points, then review.	On-going discussions with Localities Team about linking in with Community Partnerships, and effective ways to reach communities in the regeneration areas. Informal dialogue meetings held with OPT and OCS, to explore further some of the issues raised by them about consultation.

398

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consultations. Sharing and disseminating information about planning decisions, and more broadly about the planning process, will help to address comments about people not knowing how or when to engage, and generally raise awareness.	provide additional deposit points that could make documents accessible to people to view outside of library/office hours. Explore the legal implications of this.		
IT systems to support engagement Appropriate and reliable IT systems are essential for clear information-sharing from the Council, and for people to access documents to view or comment on. Also helps us to share documents and evidence, for increased transparency.	Set up regular review meetings with IT and with the Corporate Engagement Team, to highlight key issues and complaints raised by public regarding accessing planning consultation documents (especially planning applications). Regular review of planning pages on Council website to ensure easy to use, information is up to date and easy to locate. Identify opportunities to provide clearer links between different pieces of guidance and between planning policy and development management. Review public access to the computers in the public Self Service area at St Aldate's.	Establish regular quarterly review meetings with IT, including addressing the IT issues raised through the Statement of Community Involvement in Planning consultation and through other channels. Establish regular, at least 6-monthly, review of the planning webpages.	Regular reviews of the webpages are underway (at least quarterly). Last comprehensive review April 2015, and ad-hoc updates in between. Improved computer facilities arranged for public area at St Aldate's for people to view planning documents or submit comments electronically. Review underway of the corporate online consultation tool (Inovem) with the Corporate Engagement Team.
Efficient sharing of planning information, and documents	Set up regular review of mailing lists and those registered for notifications about	For planning policy: establish annual check of	SCI(P) consultation in January-February included asking people to

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for commenting on Clearer and more efficient information-sharing for people via electronic means (eg website, planningfinder notifications, or email).	planning policies, to check up to date contact information. Regularly check number of people/organisations using the planningfinder notification system for planning applications, and promote it as an easy way for people to self-service to keep updated about applications in their local area. Explore whether IT systems could support automatic electronic-updates about planning applications, to people that have made comments on those applications. Continue to promote electronic communication options when people contact us by written letter.	statutory consultees, Duty to Cooperate partners, and other stakeholders to check they are all on the consultation database and details are all up to date. For applications: Do an annual check of people/organisations registered on planningfinder tool. Target to increase the number of people registered on PlanningFinder. Monitor usage statistics for the planning webpage, at least 6 monthly, to inform reviews about layout and content.	confirm if they wanted to continue receiving letters about policy consultations, or whether they would like to switch to electronic.
Explore more effective use of social media to share information, and raise awareness amongst a wider audience Clear information sharing from the Council, and general awareness-raising about planning decisions, so that people can then choose whether they wish to engage in consultations.	Review best practice from elsewhere regarding, how social media might be used relevant to the specific nature of planning policy-making and decision-taking. Specific media to explore: twitter, videos, Council app. Explore use of the existing local Online Neighbourhood Discussion Forums as alternative channel for engaging with people.	Explore improving/extending the planning functions of the Council app, in phase 2 of the roll-out (2015-16) Trial tweeting on planning matters at least weekly. Explore options for increased use of social media over next 12 months,	Discussions underway with corporate engagement team and IT about use of the City Council corporate social media accounts (twitter, youtube, facebook), and about future development phases of the planning functions on the City Council 'app' for mobile phones which was launched in 2015. Trialling 'tweeting' on planning

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Shows that we are changing practices and seeking to engage in a manner which is more relevant to many people now and in the future. Will help us to provide our customers with the information they need, in ways which meet their needs and preferences, using a variety of appropriate channels. Will help to make our services easily accessible to all customers through provision of a range of alternative channels.	Explore use of video / audio versions of presentations e.g. a case officer explaining an application, or a copy of presentations given at consultation events, for those that can't attend events in person, and to offer more interaction than just consultation documents online. Could also potentially be used by applicants as part of their consultations	then review.	topics, eg about the Planning Advice Duty Officer drop-in facility for people who wish to come in and ask a planning officer questions about an application, and about commencement of major development sites (e.g. Barton).
Reaching a wider audience and 'hearing the seldom heard' Monitoring shows that the people or groups responding to planning consultations are often skewed towards more affluent parts of the city, and certain sectors of the population. It would be desirable to encourage more equal access to and engagement with the planning process, and to make consultation more inclusive and involve representatives of groups of the population who are	Explore working with existing neighbourhood/area forums, or other representatives of different groups, as a means to facilitate engagement. Also explore working with institutions such as schools and further education colleges to build up a regular working relationship. Implement a programme of training for staff to raise awareness about communication needs of equalities groups. Develop better understanding of the needs and preferences of equalities groups in terms of engaging in planning decisions, and then develop services to	Explore working with groups relevant to the topic or geographical area of the subject matter or application (not yet known). Review in 12 months.	Staff training undertaken at Away Days and lunchtime seminars, about equalities groups.

401

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currently rarely involved in planning decisions. This may also involve capacity-building, particularly those who are less experienced or less confident in responding to consultations. Groups to target for involvement may include under-represented social groups such as youth groups, religious groups, mums, or specific interest groups such as organisations which represent disabled people, young or elderly people, or ethnic minority communities.	respond to those needs.		
Undertake reviews and use feedback mechanisms to learn from our experiences, and from best practice in other authorities Reviews and learning from our experiences, helps to improve the range, content and quality of verbal, published and web based information we provide to ensure it is relevant and meets the needs of customers.	Undertake staff reviews of processes after each major public consultation on planning matters, including working with the Public Involvement Board. Benchmark what we do against best practice elsewhere, including direct contact with other local authorities or through POS groups, PAS events, and monitoring research by the two universities. Explore training or accreditations that could be sought by individual officers,	Staff review of consultation to follow each major Council-led consultation (as and when consultations occur). Improve ways that customers can feedback on customer service, by adding survey link to email signatures. Carry out bi-annual departmental customer	General discussion at DMUG about SCI and consultation. Review of best practice in what local authorities require from applicants in terms of consultation, undertaken to inform drafting of SCI. Also review of best practice in visualisation tools undertaken to inform the help sheets, published on the website. On-going monitoring of the potential legal

402

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Benchmarking against other organisations, and learning from best practice within the organisation or elsewhere, helps to improve service. Reviews give an opportunity to identify any dips in performance against our standards, together with action we are taking to put things right and prevent further reoccurrence. Regular review of our strategies for consulting and engaging helps to ensure that methods used are effective, and provide reliable and representative results, as well as better customer satisfaction.	teams or the whole service for engagement techniques. Explore support available from PAS to trial processes as best practice examples	satisfaction survey (one due in 2015).	position/enforceability of proposed measures in other local authorities, to inform decisions about whether they are transferrable to Oxford context. Email signatures being updated to include link to customer feedback form.
Effective roles for elected members Local ward members can be an additional channel to help deliver clearer information sharing from the Council, and general awareness-raising about planning decisions, to local people.	Work with City Council members to explore opportunities for raising awareness of consultations and forthcoming planning decisions. Explore ways to ensure they are kept informed about significant planning issues in their areas and so are able to help facilitate two-way dialogue with their constituents' within the Code of Practice. Explore whether IT systems could help to automatically notify ward members about planning applications in their area.	Training for members including topics about getting involved in planning, and getting their ward residents involved, to be delivered either as topics arise or at least annually.	Member Planning training sessions in May 2015 incorporated community engagement issues, and sessions were well attended.

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Regular electronic Planning Update Newsletter Regular communication via a newsletter could have several benefits by encouraging more continuous information sharing with internal and external customers rather than just at specific consultation points. It will help with clearer information sharing about emerging policies and progress on decisions, so that people can engage more effectively at the appropriate times. Regular feedback can help to develop relationships local groups eg we can use the newsletter to demonstrate how public and stakeholder views have been taken into account in previous engagement exercises. People will be clearer about what consultation will be taking place and when as we can use the newsletter as a further channel to publicise and give advance notice.	Explore producing a regular Planning Update newsletter to be circulated electronically and also published on the website.	Produce at least quarterly an electronic newsletter to send to: all those registered on Inovem database, all councillors, DMUG and others as appropriate. Review in 12 months to decide if effective means of communication, and feedback from users about the content.	Aim to publish first edition in July/August 215.

404

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Establish a reference group/user group for major consultation events Involving customers in the setting, reviewing and raising of our local standards/delivery standards, will help us to deliver good customer service by helping in evaluating how customers interact with planning and to use this information to identify possible service improvements and offer better choices. Also the review process helps to improve the range, content and quality of verbal, published and web based information we provide to ensure it is relevant and meets the needs of customers.	Explore setting up a user group/review panel (approx 4-6 people) to review major consultation events run by the City Council, and to get insight into people's experiences of engaging. Learning will also then help to shape future consultation events eg. Seek feedback about location and venues, and consultation materials.	Establish parameters for possible group: terms of reference, scope of membership and issues discussed.	Not yet started
Supporting best practice in applicant-led consultations Pre-application engagement by applicants is a key part of the planning application process so it is important to keep this under regular review and to promote innovation and best practice.	Work through DMUG and other channels, to encourage earlier engagement on majors and to take applications where appropriate through the ODRP process. Publicise case studies of best practice that demonstrate what can be achieved in Oxford and set the benchmark for future. Monitor the quality of applicant-led	Monitor as examples become available and then review annually. Report a sample of examples in the AMR (annually)	Monitoring and review of examples of current major applications is underway.

405

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	consultation on major applications: - monitor the statements of community involvement submitted with planning applications in terms of range/type of pre-application consultation undertaken, and how it has influenced the application proposals - work with case officers to ensure reports also clearly report consultation that has shaped the proposal.		

406