Community involvement in the pre application process

What is community involvement?

Community involvement is the process whereby anyone proposing to undertake building works or make changes to a building, discusses the proposed works or changes with people in the local community before decisions about the form of the proposals are finalised, and uses the community’s local knowledge and feedback to help make the proposed works or changes the most appropriate for the area.

How do you do it?

Much depends on what is being proposed. If you are planning an extension at your house, it is always good to talk to your neighbours and let them know what you are planning.

For larger proposals, which could impact on a number of people and the wider community, then community involvement should be firstly through discussion with the local residents’ planning group.

To find out if there is a group in the area you are proposing development, you can contact the Neighbourhood Planning Network.

In addition, the council has set up a network of neighbourhood groupings called Neighbourhood Partnerships, who again may be able to offer help and guidance.

Once you have identified the right group, they will be able to help you identify what will be the main local issues, and can help with identifying the most effective ways of including the wider community at the stage where there is a preferred scheme which you want to get a wider public response on, for instance by setting up a meeting, doing a mail drop, holding an exhibition or developing a website.

Guidelines have been prepared with the Bristol Neighbourhood Planning Network, and they have also prepared a Record of Pre-Application Community Involvement.

The key principle is that you (the developer) approaches these discussions with a genuine willingness to listen to what the local community has to say, and are prepared to take the comments into account when you submit your planning application and record this in a Community Involvement Statement.

What is a Community Involvement Statement [CIS]?

This is a statement setting out:

- how you involved the community during the design process, and
- what issues they identified which have affected the way you have finalised your design,
- or if you have not been able to change your design, the reasons why you cannot.
Major Applications

It is a requirement that you submit this statement for any major development proposals (10 or more residential units/ 1,000 square metres of commercial development or a combination of the two).

Although it is not a requirement, it is good practice to do this for any size of development so that the planning authority and (if the application is decided at a committee meeting) the planning committee can see how the local community have been involved in helping shape development in their neighbourhood.

Contacting a local planning group

Email networkadministrator@bristolnpn.net. Contact Bristol Neighbourhood Planning Network.

Some frequently asked questions about community involvement

Why should I carry out community involvement?
- It is a requirement under the validation criteria for major planning applications.
- It is good practice for all applications that are locally sensitive.
- It may raise concerns and issues that might otherwise be raised in objection to your planning application.
- You can respond in a way that will reduce community objections, and get support.

What is the Neighbourhood Planning Network?
- A network of the 50 or more local planning and community groups in Bristol.
- A contact point for applicants seeking pre-application.
- Provides professional support to local groups.

What are Neighbourhood Partnerships?
- Groups set up to allow residents to raise issues of concern with their councillors. They may meet face to face with representatives to discuss how these issues can be resolved.
- They are based on ward boundaries, and each Neighbourhood Partnership has a named contact officer.

How will I know that the local group are representative?
In order to qualify as a local planning group on the NPN's list, they must conform to the NPN's Terms of Reference, namely:
- membership must be open to all local people
- they must have a committee elected annually by members at an AGM
they must communicate regularly with their members about decisions taken on their behalf.

How do I know that communities will be able to respond to pre-application community involvement properly?

- The NPN holds seminars to help local groups develop expertise, and gives groups advice on specific queries.
- The NPN administrator can help with setting up meetings and makes sure that the process runs effectively.
- The NPN also has a team of professionals (architects, planners) to assist local groups with pre-app responses.

What if there is no agreement?

Community involvement is about trying to find a solution acceptable to both parties, not necessarily complete agreement. The Community Involvement Statement records where you have agreed, and where and why you have been unable to agree.

What if the group will not continue to engage in the community involvement process and will not sign off the community involvement statement?

The NPN will talk with both parties to make sure the process runs properly, and if necessary, can sign off the CIS on behalf of the group.

What is wrong with the traditional methods of leafleting and public exhibitions?

Community involvement is a negotiation and will normally involve more than one meeting. It is always helpful to have an exchange of views, and for local residents to hear the views of other residents.

Why use a standard reporting form?

It is important to keep detailed notes of your discussions with the local group and that both parties agree them.

What is signing off?

The Community Involvement Statement should be signed off by both parties as a true record of the discussions. If you are unable to agree on the content, the local resident group may submit its own version. Please note that a CIS is to record your discussions. Agreement on all points is not necessarily expected.