



Statement of Community Involvement

October 2012

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Central Bedfordshire Council

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Introduction

The Council is committed to engaging individuals, interest groups and stakeholders in the planning process which involves preparation of documents setting out the future development of homes, jobs and community facilities in Central Bedfordshire, as well as consulting on planning applications. The purpose of this document is to set out who can be involved and how everyone can be involved from the earliest stages of the planning process through to development on the ground.

Planning the future development of the area will affect everyone. So it is right that people should be able to take an active part in the process. Early and continuing involvement gives the community a sense of ownership of local policy decisions. The benefits of involving a wider range of people extend to individuals, the communities and the Council. They include:

- a greater public ownership and sense of democracy;
- more attention to public priorities;
- more opportunities to work collaboratively;
- consistency with the aims of the 'Big Society' and the Localism Act.

There are a number of key priorities, principles and ambitions which set the context for all activities carried out by the Council as set out below.

Central Bedfordshire Council context

Our ambition for Central Bedfordshire is

“To keep Central Bedfordshire as a great place to live and work”.

In order to achieve this ambition, the Council is committed to six key priorities which are;

- Enhancing Central Bedfordshire – creating jobs, managing growth, protecting our countryside and enabling businesses to grow.
- Improved education attainment.
- Promote health and wellbeing and protecting the vulnerable.
- Better infrastructure – improved roads, broadband reach and transport.
- Great universal services – bins, leisure and libraries.
- Value for money – freezing council tax.

The Medium Term Plan 2012-2016 sets out more detailed information on how these priorities are to be achieved. Planning policy and decision making are core components of the activities the Council carries out which will contribute to the successful realisation of the ambition. Targets in the Medium Term Plan which involve planning include the provision of high quality, well designed housing including affordable housing, housing for the elderly, economic growth, improvements to town centres and leisure facilities.

Working in partnership with other organisations and stakeholders is vital in delivering the ambition and priorities of the Council and this is as important in planning as in other areas of the Council's work. This document sets out how partners, as well as residents and those with an interest in the area will be involved in the planning process. One group which brings many organisations in the area together is 'Central Bedfordshire Together', the local strategic partnership, which has produced two strategies relevant to planning issues and community involvement.

1. Community Engagement Strategy 2010-13

The Community Engagement Strategy (CES) was developed by Central Bedfordshire Together (CBT) following a formal consultation with Ward Councillors, partners and stakeholders and adopted by the Council in September 2010. An annual review and refresh of the Strategy and its delivery plan is undertaken to ensure it is aligned with the latest national policy and local aspirations.

The aim of the CES is to deliver greater added value to our citizens by understanding their needs and issues, and giving them greater involvement in the decision-making process and access to services.

The strategy is based on the following five key principles:

- Giving more people more opportunities to inform and influence decisions.
- Enabling Ward Councillors to be leaders in and for their communities.
- Enhancing the role of town and parish councils.
- Building the capacity of local people to engage.
- Ensuring a strategic and joined up co-ordinated partnership approach

2. Sustainable Community Strategy 2010- 2031

The Sustainable Community Strategy sets out the high level actions that need to be taken to improve local services and to ensure that growth is managed effectively and that communities are strong and sustainable. It is an overarching single strategy for Central Bedfordshire.

The vision statement for the area as set out in the SCS is:

'Globally connected, delivering sustainable growth to ensure a green, prosperous and ambitious place for the benefit of all'

There are two key themes to delivering the vision,

- Creating the conditions for economic success and community prosperity
- Raising standards and tackling inequalities.

Central Bedfordshire Together may be consulted as an organisation in its own right and the constituent organisations (such as the fire service and police) are also consultees in the community involvement processes outlined below.

Who will be involved and how?

The Council already has a well-established network of stakeholders within the local community. Along with statutory consultees (those we must consult by law), this existing network will form the basis of a consultation database, which will gradually be increased by adding new contacts. Individuals and groups can be added or removed from this database at any time by contacting us.

The word 'stakeholder' simply means those who have an interest in the services and activities of the Council. Stakeholders will always be involved in early consultation as they can provide specific knowledge to help form options for wider public consultation. For example, if preparing a transport-related document, a local bus company would be a key stakeholder. The list below gives examples of the different groups/individuals who may be consulted for the formulation of a planning document. This is not a definitive list.

- Community/Stakeholders/Statutory Consultees
- Parish Councils
- Town Councils
- General Public/Residents
- Landowners/House Builders/Agents/Housing Associations
- Local Groups, Clubs, Organisations
- Environmental/Community/Voluntary Groups
- National Government
- National Organisations
- Regional Government
- Seldom Heard Groups
- Local Government (i.e. Local Business Community Councillors/Council Committees)
- Local Forums/Partnerships
- The Highways Agency

Central Bedfordshire Together (CBT)

Central Bedfordshire Together is the name for the local strategic partnership for Central Bedfordshire. It comprises senior representatives from Local Government, Police, Fire, Health, Education, Business, Town and Parish Councils. It is made up of five Statutory and Thematic partnerships that work to develop and implement strategies and action plans for each of the priorities set out in the Sustainable Community Strategy.

These Partnerships are

- Children's Trust
- Healthier Communities and Older People Partnership
- Community Safety partnership
- Stronger Communities Thematic Partnership and
- Environment and Economy Thematic Partnership

Seldom Heard Groups or individuals

Within the community there are certain groups of people who are 'seldom heard', meaning that they have been under-represented in consultation in the past. Particular effort will be made to get these groups involved in the consultation process for planning documents and we recognise that these groups may require direct engagement to allow them to effectively participate in consultation. These groups could include:

- People with Disabilities;
- Black and Minority Ethnic Groups;
- Young people;
- Travellers and Gypsies;
- The homeless
- Older People.
- Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual;
- Transgender;
- People living in deprived areas

All planning documents will be screened to see if an Equalities Impact Assessment is required, although it is anticipated most planning documents will be subject to an Assessment.

Questionnaires and surveys will include equality monitoring questions to give the Council a picture of who contributes, so that we can try to ensure that all consultation is as inclusive as possible. There are some existing forums, groups and services which may be accessed to ensure that seldom heard groups are consulted on planning applications and during the preparation of planning documents.

Housing Services: Some tenants of Central Bedfordshire Council owned properties are representative of seldom heard groups. A Tenant Participation Officer is in post to manage tenant consultation and liaise with various tenant groups and will be approached to facilitate consultation

Young Peoples Services: The Tactics Centre in Leighton-Linslade is a drop-in centre for young people which can be utilised for future consultation.

Gypsies and Travellers: A countywide Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessment has been undertaken and a Travellers Study Group was set up. This group could also be accessed for future consultation in particular for the Gypsy and Traveller document.

Voluntary and Community Sector: The important role this sector plays in the consultation process is recognised. There are a wide range of representative voluntary and community groups within Central Bedfordshire whose knowledge and links are vital in reaching certain groups.

Methods of Consultation

Some methods for community involvement that are proposed are listed below. They include methods for simply giving out information or publicising a consultation when feedback is invited and direct methods of consulting. The list below is not definitive but includes those methods considered to be the most effective and practical. It is not the intention to use all these methods for each consultation. A variety of methods may be used as and where appropriate. Some are statutory requirements, meaning that they will always be used for any consultation.

Methods for notifying and consulting

Placing documents 'on deposit'	It is a statutory requirement that all documents are placed on deposit for the public to view in the offices of Central Bedfordshire Council. They will also be placed in Customer Service Centres and major libraries in the area.
Website	It is a statutory requirement that documents are available to view on line on the Central Bedfordshire Council website www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk and occasionally other external websites. Links will be provided from the Council's website. Information and updates will be displayed, downloadable documents, and opportunities for immediate input using an online response form.
Social Media	Social media can be used to inform residents, local groups and organisations about consultations and progress on the development of the DPD
Letters	It is a statutory requirement that all statutory consultees are notified in writing when a document goes out to consultation. A number of general consultees; to whom a particular document may be of relevance, will also be notified in writing. In the case of planning applications in conjunction with or as an alternative to other means of notification.
Consultee database	For each document, a database of contacts will be maintained and letters or emails sent out to inform them of the various stages that the documents go through. Consultees will also be informed of the adoption and publication of documents.
Response forms (paper)	The Council accepts comments and feedback in writing as well as requests for updates and queries.
Email	Everyone with access to a web enabled computer will be able to submit comments and feedback, and may request updates and queries on planning policy documents. A dedicated e-mail address has been set up for this purpose.
Telephone:	The planning staff at Central Bedfordshire Council are always willing to provide advice or discuss planning matters by telephone 0300 300 8307

Leaflets and Newsletters	These are an effective way of accessing the whole community and gaining interest in a particular matter. Leaflets containing a summary of the document which is out for consultation have been published in the past. It is acknowledged that they need to be attractive with a distinctive message to be effective and that overuse of this method can sometimes be ineffective.
Questionnaires and surveys	These are an effective means of gaining views of documents and proposals. They can be aimed at a small group or included in leaflets and newsletters to reach the wider community. The questionnaires need to be designed in such a way to gain useful information from the respondent, which can be used to inform planning documents.
Media releases/ Newspaper Adverts	It is a statutory requirement to publicise certain consultations in the press. The Council aims to ensure as full coverage geographically as possible. Regular media releases may be issued to keep residents informed.
Council publications	News Central is the Council's quarterly residents' magazine which is delivered to all households in Central Bedfordshire. Information and updates could be included in this publication if the timing is appropriate.
Television and radio	Can be used to inform the community of key community involvement dates and to report on feedback received.
Posters, displays and banners	These may be displayed in key public locations, including Council offices, supermarkets, leisure centres, libraries and village halls, with the aim of attracting interest and providing information.
Community Involvement Events	A range of community involvement events may be organised at accessible locations in order to capture community views. They will allow all those interested in the planning process to directly discuss the relevant issues, options and planning proposals with planning officers and other staff. They may utilise "hands on" consultation exercises such as "Planning for Real" for which the community are asked to identify what they would like to see developed in their area on a scale model or map. This method would be particularly relevant for master planning larger developments
Public Exhibitions	Public exhibitions provide a good visual means of displaying draft proposals. When manned, visitors will be able to discuss these matters with planning officers and other staff and submit their comments at the time.
Workshops and focus groups	These are increasingly being used to encourage discussions around particular issues, and can offer an opportunity to develop community capacity and offer training.
Town and Parish Councils	These play an important part in the community and officers will attend these groups where possible. For major planning proposals, developers will be encouraged to hold meetings with

	these groups.
Councillors	Elected Councillors are community representatives and play an important role in guiding the planning process
Use of existing partnerships, forums and panels:	These can provide representative views from a range of organisations/ agencies, such as the Local Strategic Partnership, as well as specific groups within the community.
Client Side panel	This will be used as a platform to engage with landowners and developers.
Site notices	These are used to advertise applications either singly or in conjunction with consultation by letter.

Dealing with Racist or other Discriminatory Representations

The Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 requires any material which is defamatory or likely to incite racial hatred or contempt, to be marked 'confidential' and not disclosed to the public. The Equality Act 2010 makes it unlawful for anyone to induce or attempt to induce another person to discriminate on the grounds of the following protected characteristics; age, disability, gender re-assignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. It also makes it a statutory duty for Central Bedfordshire Council to promote equality of opportunity and makes it unlawful for the Council to aid and abet discrimination by failing to challenge a discriminatory pressure. Anyone who, either in writing or verbally, objects on discriminatory grounds to a planning proposal is potentially contravening one of these Acts, by applying pressure to discriminate.

An example of a racist representation is one which includes words, phrases or comments which are likely to be offensive to a particular racial or ethnic group; be racially abusive, insulting or threatening; apply pressure to discriminate on racial grounds and stir up racial hatred or contempt. The same criteria would apply in relation to other protected characteristics. Where a representation is wholly discriminatory, and contains no material planning consideration, the representation is unlawful and cannot be considered or disclosed. Its receipt will not be identified in any committee report as it is not material. If the representation is discriminatory, but also contains material planning considerations, the Council may write to the respondent, explaining that only those valid planning matters will be considered or disclosed. If the Council does not write to the respondent, only valid planning matters will be considered or disclosed and content deemed to be discriminatory may be removed from the representation.

Main valid planning matters include:

- Amenity - impact on neighbours;
- Highways - suitability of access, parking, traffic generation etc.;
- Policies - are there any government policies which are relevant?;
- Design; and
- Planning history.

The Local Plan

The timetable associated with the preparation of the documents is set out in the Plan-Making Programme (Local Development Scheme) which is a project plan for the Local Plan. Copies are available from Council Offices and available to view or download from the Council's website.

The Local Plan will be made up of three types of document which have differing requirements in terms of publicity, consultation and process:

Local Plan Documents which have to go through certain stages of community participation before being submitted to a Government Inspector for examination and approval.

Supplementary Planning Documents which will also be subject to public scrutiny, but will be adopted by the Council itself.

Neighbourhood Development Plans which are produced by Parish Councils for their communities and following examination and referendum will be adopted by the Council.

There will be a number of documents, a mixture of the above types, together comprising the Local Plan.

The Local Plan Documents may include all or some of the following elements;

- The 'Development Strategy' will set out an overarching vision and principles necessary for managing development and change over the next 20 years.
- 'Development Management Policies', comprising general policies for the control of development for example, the protection of the natural, visual and residential environment.
- 'Site Allocations' policies which will address the location of new development for all types of uses including housing, commercial development and recreational development

All the policies and proposals will be illustrated in a 'Policies Map' covering the whole of Central Bedfordshire.

Supplementary Planning Documents may be site specific, such as development briefs guiding development on individual sites. Alternatively they may be topic based such as a detailed Design Guide.

Neighbourhood Plans or Orders may be produced by Town and Parish Councils for their communities. They will comprise a set of policies specific to the needs of the community and will vary enormously in the range of their content. They may include policies covering design, protection of green space etc and/or allocate land for specific purposes. A Neighbourhood Order can effectively grant planning permission for a particular type of development or a specific development.

Key Stages of Documents

Key Stages of Local Plan Documents

In accordance with Government Guidance, there will be several stages as set out below.

Stage	Description
Research and Issues Phase	The Council will gather information about the area in order to assess and identify issues and options for addressing the needs of the area. This may be technical information or it may constitute the views of stakeholders. At the same time, the Council will assess the requirements of Government Guidance, corporate strategies and technical information in order to put together a draft document.
Draft Plan Phase (optional)	A draft plan or parts of an emerging document may be published to get some feedback from the community and stakeholders. These will be made available for a six week period allowing written representations to be submitted. Workshops, exhibitions and other consultation methods may be used to engage with different groups. The feedback received will be considered and used in the preparation of the Local Plan document which will be considered by the Council before proceeding to the next phase. All these documents will be subject to a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and a Sustainability Appraisal (SA).
Submission Phase	Each Local Plan document will be published for a formal six week consultation period, allowing written representations to be submitted. The consultation will be advertised widely. Comments received will be summarised and passed to the Planning Inspector for consideration.
Submission	The document will be submitted to the Secretary of State (as represented by the Planning Inspectorate) for independent Examination. Also all background material and the Sustainability Appraisal/ Strategic Environmental assessment and a statement of public involvement in the process will be submitted for Examination and published on the website.
Examination	An Examination will be carried out by an Inspector from the Government's Planning Inspectorate. This comprises a period of familiarisation by the appointed Inspector who may ask for more information from the Council. There may be a Pre-Hearing Meeting held by the Inspector to explore the main issues. Hearing sessions will be arranged with six weeks notice being given in advance of the beginning of the hearings. Only those who submitted representations at publication stage will be entitled to be heard. The Inspector will assess 'the soundness' of the Plan and will produce a report with recommendations which will be considered by the Council.
Adoption	The Council will adopt the Local Plan document as soon as practicable following consideration of the Inspector's Report and it will become part of the Council's Local Plan. It will be published on the Council's website and all those who made comments will be informed. Hard copies will be available to view at Council Offices and may be available to purchase on request.

Key Stages of Supplementary Planning Documents

Supplementary Planning Documents may include site or issue based guidance. Supplementary Planning Documents will generally relate to policies or proposals in a Local Plan Document. They do not form part of the statutory development plan and are not subject to independent examination, but will still be subjected to community and stakeholder involvement.

Stage	Description
Research and Issues Phase	Background information will be gathered (including community input where appropriate) and government advice will be assessed and a draft document will be published.
Consultation Phase	The draft will be subject to involvement by people and the community in a similar way to Local Plan Documents, for a minimum of 4 weeks. All comments will be considered and fed into the final document if appropriate.
Adoption	The Supplementary Planning Document will be adopted by the Council and published on the website along with a statement of the representations received and the response to those representations. All those who made comments will be informed. Hard copies will be available to view at Council Offices and may be available to purchase on request.

Key Stages of Neighbourhood Plans or Orders

In Central Bedfordshire, the whole area is parished, so Neighbourhood Plans or Orders will be produced by Parish and Town Councils, if they wish to do so. They set out policies for a prescribed area and may combine more than one parish or only relate to a particular part of a parish. They will become a formal part of the Local Plan if successful. More information on Neighbourhood Planning is available from the Government Department of Communities and Local Government.

Stage	Description
Initiation	The Town or Parish Council will resolve to produce a Neighbourhood Plan/Order and approach the Council, submitting a plan showing the extent of the Neighbourhood Area for agreement by the Council. Generally, a Steering Group will be set up as a sub-group of the Parish or Town Council to actually carry out the production of the Plan or Order.

Stage	Description
Research and Issues Phase	The Group will gather information about the area in order to assess and identify issues and options for addressing the needs of the area. This will be technical information and will also constitute the views of the community and/or adjacent communities. A vision and objectives are likely to be identified in the case of a Plan. It is expected that a number of consultation exercises will be undertaken with various sectors of the community at this stage.
Consultation Phase	The Neighbourhood Plan or Order will need to be published by the Town or Parish Council for a formal period, allowing representations to be submitted. The consultation will need to be advertised widely and the document will be available for comment to statutory consultees, stakeholders and any other interested parties. Comments received will be summarised and any changes made to the document. The process, comments and outcomes will be recorded in a Consultation Statement.
Submission	The document will be submitted to the Council for a check that it complies with legal requirements and planning policies. Also the Sustainability Appraisal/ Strategic Environmental assessment and the Consultation Statement will be submitted. The Council will arrange for a further consultation and gather comments to pass on to the person carrying out the Examination.
Examination	An Examination will be carried out by a suitable person who may be an Inspector from the Government's Planning Inspectorate. It may be examined by written representation or by a public hearing. The Inspector will assess the document and will produce a report with recommendation whether it should proceed to referendum.
Referendum	A referendum will be held to see if the community is in favour of the document. A simple majority is sufficient for it to succeed.
Adoption	The Council will adopt the Neighbourhood Plan or Order as soon as practicable following a successful referendum and it will become part of the Council's Local Plan. It will be published on the Council website and all those who made representations to the Council will be informed. Hard copies will be available to view at Council Offices and may be available to purchase on request.

Strategic Environmental Assessment/Sustainability Appraisal

Local planning authorities are required to undertake a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Sustainability Appraisal (SA) of plans likely to have a significant effect on the environment, under the SEA Directive and the Planning Act. Detailed information on these requirements are available on the Government's website. SA assesses the potential social, environmental and economic effects of policies, whereas SEA looks at the various environmental impacts of policies. The Directive requires that the public and relevant authorities are consulted as part of the SEA & SA process. Consultation will be undertaken as part of the screening process, when deciding the scope and level of detail to be included in the report, and when the submission report is published. It is a requirement of the Directive that comments

received on consultations will be taken into account during the preparation of the plan or programme before its adoption.

Links to other strategies and plans

The Local Plan is a key component to the delivery of priorities promoted by the Council in its Medium Term Plan. There are numerous links with other Central Bedfordshire Council Strategies covering issues such as transport, economy and leisure. Within the Council we will ensure a joined up approach so that these documents are all working towards the same aim.

In addition, as referred to above, there are strategies which have a wider remit, but seek to serve the best interests of people who live and work in the area. The Sustainable Community Strategy of Central Bedfordshire, produced by Central Bedfordshire Together in consultation with public, private, voluntary and community sector organisations and individuals is a good example of this type of strategy which sets out a vision for the future, describing how key issues will be attended to so that people will be happier, healthier and more prosperous.

There is a separate Statement of Community Involvement dealing with minerals and waste development, this can be found on the Council's website.

Monitoring Feedback

The Council will ensure that when consultation with the community is undertaken, their comments will be used to inform the content of the planning documents. Consultation will not just be a 'ticking the box' procedure. Careful consideration will be given to how responses to consultation are addressed. Undoubtedly there will be conflicts and differences arising from these responses and there will be a need to balance these accordingly when considering responses at each stage.

At the end of every statutory consultation period, the Council will analyse the responses received and prepare a summary report. This will be presented at the Executive or Council meeting with recommendations for required changes. Following the final stage of consultation, a consultation statement will be produced that will summarise responses received and the main issues arising.

All comments and reports will be available to view at the offices of Central Bedfordshire Council on request.

Anyone or any group making comments on this SCI, future Local Plan documents and Supplementary Planning Documents, will be included in an electronic database and automatically kept informed of all future consultation stages by either letter or email, unless they make it clear that they do not wish to be included in the electronic database.

Planning Applications

The responsibility for publicising planning applications falls to local planning authorities and the requirements are set out in Government guidance and regulations, which this Council meets. Information is available in a series of leaflets from Council offices or from the Council's website outlining how people can become involved in the planning process, how Committees work, etc.

The Council encourages applicants wishing to submit a planning application to enter into pre application discussions with the Council's planning officers. This should help resolve any problems that can normally hold up the planning application and possibly help to address any objections likely to arise. Consultations with the public may be seen as necessary through negotiations taking place prior to determination of a planning application.

When the Council receive and register a planning application the minimum requirements of consultation and publicity are carried out, in accordance with the Town and Country Planning (General Development Procedure) Order 1995. However the Council will choose to carry out further publicity and consultation in specific circumstances. This may include effective and creative strategies to engage with seldom heard groups, examples of which are set out earlier in this document.

The Council produces a weekly list of all of the planning applications received, which can be viewed at the Council offices, local libraries and on the Council's website. To find out more about a particular application, members of the public can visit or telephone the Council offices.

Applications are dealt with by Planning Officers in accordance with the Council's approved scheme of delegation set out in the Council's Constitution. Applications that are more complex or controversial may be reported to Development Management Committee, in accordance with the scheme of delegation. The Committee is made up of Councillors and meets every four weeks. Committee meetings are open to the public and provided it has been arranged in advance, anyone has the right to speak. Details of the arrangements regarding the number and time given for the right to speak are available from the Council.

When a decision is made, it is publicised on the Council's website.

Key Stages of Planning Applications

Stage	Description
Pre-application	Applicants are encouraged to discuss proposals with the Council before submitting a planning application so that potential issues can be identified at an early stage. Developers are encouraged to engage with local people and where appropriate, Town or Parish Councils and to incorporate the feedback obtained through that engagement into their proposals before submitting a planning application.
Submission of application	The Council will write to any addresses that would be directly affected by a development when a planning application is received and will ask for people's opinions on the proposal. Additional consultation will be carried out where appropriate. The application will be available to view on the Council's website and at other outlets and the file will be available to view at the Council offices.

Stage	Description
Consideration of application	Any responses that are received will be considered before a decision is made on a planning application. Where comments have been made and are relevant, they will be addressed in the planning report.
Decision	A decision will be made by the Council either by officers (under their delegated powers) or by Councillors at a Development Management Committee. The decision notice will be published on the Council's website.
Appeal (if refused)	If an applicant appeals against a decision made by the Council to the Secretary of State, the Council will write to people who commented on the planning application. They will be given the opportunity to write directly to the Planning Inspectorate, who will inform people of an appeal decision if asked to do so.

Standard Planning Applications

When a planning application is received, for example for an extension to a house, the Council follows a certain procedure to allow anyone who is likely to be interested to be made aware of the proposal in the first instance and allow them an opportunity to make comments. Details of every application received are sent to the Parish or Town Council. Statutory and non-statutory consultees are notified in some circumstances and weekly lists are available for people to look through what applications have been received and request details. Individual letters are sent out to any identifiable addresses adjoining the site. Occasionally, letters are sent to properties separated from the site by a road or footpath where they are considered to be affected by the proposal. If no addresses are identified or if the proposal raises issues of general public interest, a notice will be put up on public land where it can be seen by people who may be interested in or affected by the proposal.

In addition, newspaper advertisements are used in local newspapers to notify people about an application in the following circumstances;

- If the site is in a Conservation Area or a listed building
- If the site is a departure from the Local Plan
- If the site affects a footpath or Right of Way
- If the application needs an Environmental Impact Assessment
- If the site is a major development

Major applications

Planning applications may be received that are considered to be 'major' as defined in the planning regulations. These include applications

- where the number of dwellings to be constructed is 10 or more or a site area of 0.5 hectares or more
- for all other uses where the floorspace to be built is 1,000 metres or more, or where the site area is one hectare or more
- a major change of use will also count as a major development

These proposals may not be controversial. The exact scale of the consultation process will need to be suited to the size and likely impact of the development.

A number of situations may arise where it is felt necessary to engage people more closely in the decision-making process, for instance where community facilities are affected, or where a proposal is likely to affect a large proportion of residents. For these proposals the Council would wish to see:

- Developers or landowners take a key role in this as part of their obligation to the local community
- Consultation carried out at the earliest stage of the application process with local people to explore their reactions and optimise potential community benefits as part of the development
- Extra effort made to engage with "seldom heard" groups
- Exhibitions, and/or workshops being held to involve people in a non-confrontational way, if appropriate

A range of appropriate methods of involvement is set out earlier in this document. A statement setting out what consultation has taken place should be submitted to the Council for consideration as part of the planning application process.

'Beyond' major applications

There may be occasions where a proposal constitutes a separate order of magnitude which will have widespread implications for a large number of residents, the environment, the landscape and traffic/ travel choices. It will be for the Council to decide which applications fall into this category but examples include a major holiday village, a new settlement etc. In these circumstances the Council will require much more effort and resources to be put into the consultation process, much of it prior to the submission of a planning application. In some cases a Development Brief will be required for the proposal which would involve stakeholders in its production. A Development Brief intends to provide firm guidance for prospective developers and the community on the form and quality of development the Council envisages for a site. A Development Brief would be used to guide the Council in making development control decisions. However, in circumstances when a proposal has already been subjected to a considerable amount of public involvement, for example, a site allocated for development in the Local Plan, less public involvement may be required.

For these developments the Council would wish to see:

- Developers or landowners take a leading role in this as part of their obligations to the local community
- Local people in the settlement affected or nearby settlements consulted
- A considerable amount of exhibitions/workshops run with the local community
- Extra effort made to engage with hard to reach groups
- Optimal community benefits identified through effective (and demonstrable) engagement with local people,
- The setting up of focus groups to help resolve the particularly important issues

Any scheme for development must be drawn up with considerable (and demonstrable) local input, and local support as far as possible. A range of appropriate methods of involvement is set out earlier in this document. A statement setting out what consultation has taken place should be submitted to the Council for consideration as part of the planning application process.

Appeals

Planning applications may be refused by the Council. Applicants have a right of appeal against a planning application decision. There are no third party appeal rights. Appeals are made either by written representations, a hearing or a public inquiry. When an appeal is received by the Council, all those who were consulted on the original application and those who have made comments will be informed and advised how they can make their views known. All new appeals will be displayed on the Council's website. If the appeal is to be heard at a public inquiry, a site notice will be displayed showing the time, date and location. Details will be published in local newspapers.

All representations submitted during the application stage will be forwarded to the Planning Inspectorate who decides the appeal. If there is a hearing or a public inquiry, it is normal procedure for the Planning Inspectorate to invite main parties to prepare a joint statement of agreed facts of common ground. Appeal hearings and inquiries are open to the public. The Planning Inspector may also arrange for a public meeting with residents at a local venue in order to hear issues directly. The Council will encourage this type of meeting in cases where there is considerable local interest. Anyone involved in the Appeal process will be notified directly by the Planning Inspectorate of the outcome of the Appeal. The relevant Council will inform Councillors of the outcome of appeals. Appeal decisions are also displayed on the Council's website.

Implementation and Review

During the preparation of the documents making up the Local Plan, there may be circumstances where additional community involvement would benefit those documents, for example if issues are raised during a workshop that merit further investigation. The Council reserves the right to exercise its judgement in these matters and will act in the best interests of the stakeholders, taking into account resources and deadlines.

Resources

The consultation and participation outlined in this Statement of Community Involvement will be lead by the Development Plan Teams within the Planning Division, with the assistance of other departments and external Agencies where required. Staff within the Council's Development Plan Teams will primarily carry out the consultation processes for the preparation of DPDs and SPDs. Officers from the Community Services Team may also provide specialist skills to involve people in the SCI consultations, such as engaging with young people. Staff within the Development Management and Technical Administration Teams will primarily carry out the public consultation processes associated with planning applications. Given the potential scale of consultation, it may be necessary or beneficial to use consultants for certain pieces of work. Examples of such are listed below, however these are by no means exhaustive and serve as an indication of where the Council may look for outside assistance if required:

- Staging and running of public meetings/workshops
- Publication of summary leaflets/flyers
- Development of any online, interactive exhibitions

Funding of the procedures laid down by this SCI will be incorporated into the appropriate budgets for the forthcoming financial years. The annual budget making process and the medium term financial strategy will determine whether further resources are required to effectively deliver the Council's programme of community involvement.

The Council is aware that residents and organisations have already been asked to comment on documents and strategies and are anxious where possible to avoid 'consultation fatigue'. Where there is existing information, the Council will take this information into account. Opportunities for joint consultation exercises will be sought, such as those which are seeking input into the Community Plan.

Review

The Statement of Community Involvement will be kept under review and revised when necessary. Each Local Plan document proposed will be subject to different procedures and techniques to engage stakeholders, and it is therefore unlikely that a full review of the SCI will take place until all of the document types referred to have been completed. In reviewing it the local planning authority will be required to follow the same procedures for preparation as the first statement. Revisions will be made where statutory regulations change, significant changes have been identified in the methods used to engage in consultation, or where the type of groups identified have changed.

Contact us...

by telephone: 0300 300 8307

by email: customer.services@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk

on the web: www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk

Write to Development Plans, Central Bedfordshire Council, Priory House,
Monks Walk, Chicksands, Shefford, Bedfordshire SG17 5TQ