

Involvement Guide



Guide 2: July 2009 version How to respond to pre-planning application community involvement

Established Procedure

Bristol City council, as the Local Planning Authority, in agreement with NPN, have adopted the following procedure: For planning applications above 10 dwellings or 1,000 m² of commercial floor space, a developer is now expected to involve the local community in discussion on the planning and design of a scheme and on any obligations on the developer to contribute works or finance in the locality that might be necessary to accommodate the scheme [called Section 106 obligations]. The developer should meet with local groups 'at the early ideas stage', before proposals are fixed on the type of use, site layout and design of scheme, 'when significant options are still open' and 'while there is still the potential for the community to make a difference'. The developer is required to submit a Community Involvement Statement with the planning application. (*see Statement of Community Involvement Adopted Version October 2008 published by the Council*).

How To Guidelines

Step 1: The Developer contacts the neighbourhood group.

Usually the NPN administrator will contact your group to let you know that a developer is asking which community group to approach to discuss a development. The developer may approach you direct, in which case let the NPN administrator know by email at alison@rcas.org.uk. Sometimes more than one group will be affected by a proposed development and the NPN administrator will arrange that the other groups are given the opportunity for involvement.

Step 2. The local planning group organises representatives.

If your planning group is usually run as an open meeting, it is better to appoint a small number of your group to meet with the developer and to report back to the group. Meetings with a small number of people who have knowledge of the site are more effective than large meetings. Large meetings can become confrontational and are therefore not a good way of working towards an agreement. Both sides should treat each other with courtesy. If a number of groups are involved, it is a good idea to appoint one of your number to be lead coordinator on behalf of all groups, to make sure that the discussion is accurately recorded, to liaise with any other groups involved and to chair any subsequent meetings you may have with the developer. The different groups may have different responses and not agree with all of each other's points. The process can still continue. The important thing is to look for consensus. Ensure that all the points are recorded.

Step 3: The local planning group and developer meet.

At the first meeting you should concentrate on finding out what the developer proposes and agree a timetable for further meetings. Remind the developer that this group is the sole channel for his community involvement responsibilities. Point out that you would like to sign off the Community Involvement Statement before it goes to planning. It is better to avoid expressing opinions on the scheme directly to the developer at this first meeting before you have had a chance to discuss it within the group and with members of the community most affected by the proposed development. If a number of community groups are involved on a single development, it is important that they are all at the same meetings to hear the same information and to hear each other's opinions. You can ask for drawings from the developer to show the rest of your group. If needed, free of charge, NPN has a list of professionals (architects and planners) who can assist you with understanding developer proposals and with drawing up your response. Contact the NPN Administrator.

Step 4: Check that what you are saying is supported by your community.

If your group is not composed of those who live immediately around the site, you should check your views with those who do. This might be by circulating a leaflet which lays out your conclusions and asks for their response. Better still you might offer a meeting with those people to take account of their views. If the development affects a large number of people you should consider carrying out a short questionnaire poll on a sample basis. Guidance on how to do this is available from NPN. You could also draw up a planning statement that sets out the type of development your community agrees is acceptable in the area. This will then be useful for checking your responses to the developer of any site. The developer may wish to hold public exhibitions or events. It is best to agree with the developer the content of the exhibitions and the form of any questions that might be asked beforehand. Exhibitions are not usually an effective form of involvement and cannot be a substitute for the process set out in this Guide.

Step 5: Group response to developer and suggestions for s106 obligations.

It is good practice to send the developer a written response within 14 days of the first meeting. Tell him what you like about his proposals as well as what you don't like. The aim should be to work towards a mutually agreeable proposal, and to show the developer that community involvement is useful to him, not just another hurdle. You can express your opinions about anything that you feel is important but remember that the Planning Authority can only take account of issues that are relevant to town planning and in particular the current planning policies in any official town plans that cover the site. At this stage you should start to consider if the development might have an impact that requires changes in the locality beyond the site, in addition to any changes to the proposals on the site. You should also consider the order of priority for changes to be made. For example, dealing with additional traffic on the local road system or requiring more community facilities. It may be possible to make these changes by asking the Planning Authority to require the developer to make a financial contribution to improving local facilities or to carry out additional works beyond the site, through a "Section 106" Legal Agreement [For the type of developer contributions that are normally considered see Supplementary Planning Document SPD4 published on the council website]

Step 6: Remember this is a negotiation.

Remember and remind the developer, that this is a process of negotiation and that you would welcome further meetings, once he has considered your initial response and that his Community Involvement Statement should be signed off by your group representative as an accurate account of the process, what was said and what effect the process had.

Step 7: Developer response and revised design.

Ask the developer for a further meeting when he can give you his reply to the group's initial response. This meeting should include a discussion of how each of the points in the response will be handled. Invite the same people to this [and subsequent meetings if they occur] as have already been involved in the first response, to make sure there is continuity and that each meeting does not have to go over the same ground. The outcome should be that you have an understanding of what can be changed to accommodate the group's response and what cannot. This should all be recorded.

Step 8: Record your meetings and discussions.

Use the Community Involvement record [CIS].doc - available on the Bristol NPN Website in the Library Section. This record can also be offered to the developer to use as the Community Involvement Statement to attach to his planning application. If there are any minutes of meetings between you and the developer, make sure that they are accurate since the group or developer may use these minutes as evidence in the Community Involvement Statement.

Step 9: Agree a Community Involvement Statement :

This is submitted by the developer with the planning application. The summary page of the NPN Record Form makes a useful signing off page which gives the planning officer the information he needs to understand the preapplication community involvement process. The developer can draw up his own Community Involvement Statement if he does not wish to use the group's NPN Record Form. If so, he should send it to the group for them to agree. If the group wishes, it can ask him to amend the record before signing it. If the group or groups can agree the statement, then the lead representative should sign it as a true record. If you do not agree with the developer's final Community Involvement Statement, tell the planning case officer at the Council. You can send your own Statement that can be supported by your Record Form, telling the planning officer about the involvement process and the developer's response to your views. The planning officer will use this information in his report to the Planning Committee when the Committee decides upon the planning application.

Step 10: Keep the planning officer and NPN informed.

Copy in all your responses to the planning officer and the NPN administrator. If the planning officer is aware of the community's views at the earliest stage he can use them to guide him in his responses to developer enquiries. The NPN will monitor Community Involvement cases in order to improve the process.