

# **Building More Than Houses:**

## **Detailed guidance for developers and agents about Community Involvement**

Hastings Borough Council  
August 2007

## Contents

1. Introduction.....	3
2. Benefits of involving the community .....	4
3. Principles of involving the community.....	5
4. Creative ways of involving the community.....	6
5. Planning the Community Involvement .....	9
6. Case Studies .....	11
7. Working with Councillors .....	13
8. Checklist .....	14
Appendix: Extract from Statement Of Community Involvement (June 2006) .....	16

## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 Development is about more than constructing houses. It's about building communities which is why we want people already living and working near to potential developments to be involved at the earliest opportunity.
- 1.2 In September 2004, government legislation replaced Local Plans with Local Development Frameworks (LDF). All district and borough councils must replace their Local Plans with LDFs over the next few years. An LDF consists of a number of documents that can be prepared and updated separately.
- 1.3 Our Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) was one of the first documents written as part of the Hastings LDF, and explains that we expect developers to involve local residents early on in the planning process. This guide goes into more detail about the standard of community involvement that we expect for developments of more than 10 dwellings and/or are thought to be controversial.
- 1.4 You can obtain a copy of our SCI from [hastings.gov.uk/ldf](http://hastings.gov.uk/ldf) or from our Community Involvement Officer. See the back of this document for contact details

<p><b>Action you need to take now:</b></p>
--

<p>A1: Read chapter 8 of the Statement of Community Involvement (Appendix A)</p>
--

<p>A2: Speak to our Community Involvement Officer early in the planning process</p>
---

## 2. Benefits of involving the community

- 2.1 One of the underlying principles of Local Development Frameworks is to make sure local people can influence the policies that will shape where they live. In Hastings, issues about planning, development and design always attract a lot of local interest so we have to make sure community involvement by developers and applicants reflects those local expectations.
- 2.2 Our Statement of Community Involvement doesn't just lay out how we will involve local people in shaping and writing the various LDF documents that will be written over the next few years. Our SCI also explains the level of community involvement we expect for planning applications, with a strong emphasis on community involvement taking place at the pre-application stage.
- 2.3 Involving communities, groups and residents at such an early stage may be a new concept to developers and agents. Whilst some may view it as an additional piece of work that could slow down an application or development, it's essential that existing communities near to the proposed development and groups with an interest in topics such as design, planning and the environment are given plenty of opportunity to comment, and contribute to shaping the place they live in.
- 2.4 The benefits of effective community involvement are clear:
- It gives Hastings' communities an opportunity to use their detailed knowledge of the area to comment on and shape proposals.
  - It allows builders and developers to explain their proposals to all interested parties, and refine their designs to reflect the aspirations and views of local people, and the unique heritage of Hastings
  - Good community involvement helps us make decisions about planning applications knowing that Hastings residents have been consulted. Our Planning Officers reports detail the community involvement and consultation carried out.
- 2.5 Our Community Involvement Officer is available to help and advise developers involve the community to the standard we expect.

<b>Action you need to take now:</b>
-------------------------------------

A3: Include the Community Involvement exercise in your project plan
---

### 3. Principles of involving the community

#### Principle 1: Tailor-made

3.1 There are many different ways of involving the community. The main thing to remember is to make sure that the community involvement is tailored to the development.

#### Principle 2: Accessible

3.2 Community Involvement needs to be accessible to all. That means making sure that information is written clearly, that displays are easy to read and see, and that venues chosen can be easily reached and have wheel-chair access. Also remember to identify any potential cultural barriers; for example try to avoid meeting in a religious hall as the venue may deter some people from coming along.

#### Principle 3: Advertised

3.3 It's vital that any community involvement is widely advertised using a variety of publications and media. Tailor the advertising to the development taking into consideration factors such as location, size of the development, local neighbours and potential controversy.

#### Principle 4: Choice

3.4 The planning system requires comments on applications to be made in writing. However, pre-application community involvement provides an additional opportunity to allow people to make informal comments in different ways. Chapter 4 goes into more detail.

#### Principle 5: Face to face

3.5 Our experience has shown that the most effective community involvement is making sure someone who is knowledgeable about the project is on hand to talk to people, answer queries and help explain proposals.

#### Action you need to take now:

A4: Identify who are the stakeholders that will have an interest in your proposals

A5: Appoint your Community Involvement contact point

## 4. Creative ways of involving the community

4.1 Community involvement can be made more effective by using tailored methods and giving people a choice about how they can comment and contribute.

4.2 To help you we've listed 20 different methods of Community Involvement.

a. Correspondence

Letters and e-mail sent to neighbours, resident groups and stakeholders.

b. Leaflets & Brochures

Produce and distribute leaflets and brochures that give an overview of the proposed development, using a response form to invite comment and ask specific questions

c. Internet based

For example setting up a dedicated website, message boards and e-groups

d. Local media

Make use of the local media including local newspapers (e.g. Hastings Observer), council publications (About magazine), interest group newsletters (e.g. BME News, Hastings Community News), local radio and television

e. Exhibitions and displays

These give an opportunity for proposals and plans to be displayed and feedback to be gathered. Consider making them as interactive as possible and make sure they are staffed so people can ask questions. Displays can be expensive but have high impact, particularly in areas such as community centres, supermarket foyers and shopping centres as they have high visitor numbers.

f. Roadshows

Similar to holding an exhibition, a roadshow will focus on taking the information to local groups and communities - perhaps using a bus, trailer or booking local venues - rather than hoping they will come to you.

g. Surveys and Questionnaire

Evidence shows that surveys and questionnaires are still a very popular way of gathering views. Using well designed forms you can gather a lot of data quite quickly, although return rates can be quite low and they have to be well designed which can be expensive. Surveys can be conducted in writing, face-to-face, over the internet or by phone.

h. Face-to-Face

This approach is a key to successful community involvement. Stakeholder meetings can be used to pinpoint very specific groups with clearly defined interests. The Hastings & Rother Disability Forum say that face-to-face meetings make consultations accessible for individuals and groups with disabilities and special needs.

i. Open Meetings

These give opportunities for a presentation about the proposals, and for people to ask questions. They need to be well advertised, held in accessible venues and at a time convenient to local people.

j. Focus Groups

Focus groups and “facilitated discussion groups can be used to focus on a specific issue and bring together ‘experts’ to consider finer detail or big issues. They are usually tightly structured around three or four key questions.

k. ‘Hands-on’ Workshops

Using tools and techniques designed to stimulate discussion, these can be highly effective. They are very good for breaking down barriers and can be used with groups of people of different language, culture, abilities, ages, knowledge and backgrounds. They are also particularly helpful for bringing professionals and members of the public together. Whilst they can be costly to deliver and require careful planning, they can result in effective community involvement.

l. Connecting with Forums and Groups

Hastings has an extensive range of area and neighbourhood forums, local groups and associations. By connecting with these groups, effective Community Involvement can be carried out through, for example, addressing proposals as a regular agenda item or giving an excellent forum for presentations and plans to be discussed.

m. Planning Aid

This organisation offers an independent source of planning advice to those who cannot afford to employ a consultant. It also trains community representatives so they can get involved in planning. Planning Aid may be able to work with you on involving communities. For more information speak to our Community Involvement Officer or contact the South East Planning Aid office on 01634 831167 or [seco@planningaid.rtpi.org.uk](mailto:seco@planningaid.rtpi.org.uk)

n. Drop-in Surgeries

When offered at easy-to-reach locations, these give local people the chance to see plans and discuss them on a one-to-one basis. Surgeries are useful to gather views and encourage participation but findings cannot be said to be representative of the wider community.

o. Comment Cards

This can be a simple method of gathering views, usually postage paid cards/slips asking for comments on a proposal.

p. Conferences and Seminars

Similar to hosting an exhibition, holding a conferences can provide a range of expert facilitators who give information and facilitate discussion or activity around a particular issue.

q. Open Days/Fun Days

These are family-focused days where the fun event attracts visitors who are then given information or the opportunity to find out more about the proposed development. For an open day/fun day to be successful, it is essential to use of some of the other Community Involvement techniques listed in this section.

r. Question Time Session

Similar to surgeries, there is usually a panel of “experts” who can answer questions and provide information. An effective Question Time session needs to be preceded by an exhibition, leaflet or other information giving exercise.

s. Outreach/Frontline Staff

Customer Service staff and community liaison staff who meet with people on the 'front line' and engage them in the process. This can be an effective way of involving hard-to-reach communities and groups.

t. Video Box

Whilst costly to purchase or rent the equipment required, a Video Box – where people give their thoughts, comments and views to camera – is a very effective way of gathering views, and works very well with younger people, or people who don't feel confident in expressing their views in writing.

**Action you need to take now:**

A6: Consider carefully the type of Community Involvement exercise that is suitable for your scheme

A7: Assign suitable budget for your Community Involvement exercise, in particular design and print costs

## 5. Planning the Community Involvement

- 5.1 Community Involvement events and arrangements should be managed, organised and funded by the potential developer. We can help you identify stakeholders to involve, as well as provide advice on making your community involvement as effective as possible.
- 5.2 When planning your Community Involvement exercise you need to make it clear if you are only giving information or if you are seeking views and comments too. Hastings' residents take a great interest in local issues, and it is important that you make it clear if you are seeking comments, and if so what will happen to those comments.
- 5.3 You will need to identify who the local stakeholders are. Stakeholders may include:
- Residents or citizens
  - Ward and County Councillors
  - Special Interest Groups/Pressure Groups
  - Community/Voluntary Organisations
  - Local schools
  - Businesses
  - Groups of people identified by a common factor i.e. age, disability, ethnicity
- 5.4 Hastings has a wide network of local residents, local groups and organisations and community groups/forum including:
- Senior's Forum and people with physical disabilities
  - Black & Minority Ethnic Community
  - Young Person's Council
  - Area Management Boards
  - Neighbourhood Renewal
  - Greater Hollington Partnership
  - Ore Valley Forum
  - Gensing & Central St. Leonards Forum
  - Castle Ward Forum
  - Sports groups and organisations
  - Wildlife and Conservation groups
  - 1066 Housing Association (largest social landlord in Hastings & St Leonards)
  - The Local Strategic Partnership (made up of community and voluntary organisations, businesses and local agencies).
  - Hastings Community Network (network of community/voluntary groups in Hastings & St Leonards)
  - Hastings Voluntary Action: Directory of Local Voluntary & Community Sector Resources provides a database of contacts from across the Borough  
[www.hastingsvoluntaryaction.org.uk](http://www.hastingsvoluntaryaction.org.uk)
  - Excellence Cluster (makes links with local schools)
  - Safer Hastings Partnership (community safety and crime)
  - 1066 Enterprise (provide links to local businesses)
  - Government Office of the South East
- 5.5 Think about the different needs of the people you need to consult with - some people will find it difficult to participate in consultation exercises, unless their needs have been considered and catered for. These include ensuring that:
- Printed documents are produced in a minimum 12-point type size (although 14 is preferred).
  - A version of the document in large print is available on request
  - Consider making documents in other languages upon request
  - Public meetings are held in accessible Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) compliant venues

### Choosing a Venue

- 5.6 Ideally the venue should be in the locality of the people you're trying to consult so make use of local community centres. A list of these is available at [\(No longer available online\)](#). It's important to choose a neutral venue to avoid alienating or offending a group's sensibilities e.g. it may not be appropriate to hold a community meeting in a church hall if you want to encourage people of other faiths to come along.
- 5.7 Make sure the venue is easily accessible and compliant with the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA). Enquire about disabled toilet facilities and wheelchair access before you make a booking. If possible, ask people in advance if they have any special needs e.g. wheelchair access or hearing loop. Sending out a simple questionnaire along with the invitation can help you prepare well in advance!
- 5.8 The advertising should show a map with directions and a contact telephone number in case people can't find the venue or aren't familiar with the area. Make sure that the venue and entrances are clearly signposted on the day
- 5.9 Decide when to carry out the consultation, allowing enough time and resources for planning, advertising, consulting, collating and communicating the results. Choose a time and date that will allow as many people as possible to take part. It's helpful to check if there are other events taking place. Try and give people a choice of times to attend, ideally including an evening and a weekend.
- 5.10 Think about providing transport for those who may need it or offer to pay their transport costs.

### Gathering information

- 5.11 Think about the questions that you want to ask and the information that you want to gather. Chapter 4 provides several different approaches to involving local people.
- 5.12 When asking for views and comments it is important to tell people what will happen to the results. You can use a variety of methods for communicating the results but you must plan this before you start your consultation. This will help ensure that you use the appropriate form of feedback for your target audience.

### Other sources of help

- 5.13 The East Sussex Compact is a written understanding between statutory bodies including District/Borough and County Councils and Voluntary and Community groups, which sets out a number of commitments about how the sectors work with and behave towards each other. An important part of this is about consultation and how to involve the community. Visit [www.eastsussex.gov.uk/community/partnerships/](http://www.eastsussex.gov.uk/community/partnerships/) for more information about the Compact and its Codes of Practice.
- 5.14 When consulting with children and young people follow the guidelines set out on the National Youth Agency website see <https://nya.org.uk/hear-by-right/>

<b>Action you need to take now:</b>
-------------------------------------

- |  |
|--|
| A.8 Use the checklist in section 8 to make sure your community involvement is as effective as possible |
|--|

## 6. Case Studies

- 6.1 We've included these case studies to demonstrate some recent approaches to Community Involvement. The examples given have been chosen to highlight the wide range of methods used. By including them we are not endorsing or commenting on the planning application, the Community Involvement carried out, or the comments received.
- 6.2 It's important to remember that carrying out effective community involvement doesn't mean that there will not be any objections to your application. In fact, in all of these case studies there was considerable community interest, both positive and negative. However, the Community Involvement did help people find out more, speak to the developers themselves and make their comments known. This helped developers to better understand local people's concerns and to try to accommodate them before submitting an application. It also helped the officers and councillors making the decision to take people's views and suggestions into account.

### **Case study A:**

#### **Application to construct a hotel, restaurant and residential development near the Sea Front**

The applicant met with the Planning Officer and was advised to meet with our Community Involvement Officer. The applicant had read the Statement of Community Involvement and explained that before submitting the planning application they planned to host a drop-in event.

A two-day drop in event was held at the existing site and specific invitations were sent out to local groups giving the opportunity to discuss the proposals face-to-face or on the phone. One local group commented that the applicant "gone to great lengths to consult with this community".

### **Case study B:**

#### **Application to develop housing on unused site as part of the Government's Design for Manufacture competition.**

The Design for Manufacture competition was set up to demonstrate that it is possible to build a high-quality home for a construction cost of £60,000. The applicant was a government agency, and had a clear understanding of the importance of involving the community at the pre-application stage.

Before submitting the application, the applicant briefed our Community Involvement Officer about the scheme. The applicant then attended the local residents' Planning Special Interest group meetings to provide regular updates. The applicant made a special effort to attend the meetings, often travelling considerable distance to provide a five minute update. As a result the group were very grateful for the level of commitment given to involving the community.

The applicant listened to comments made and liaised with architects to revise the drawings on several occasions before submitting the application.

### **Case Study C:**

#### **Application to develop a modern education facility on a former industrial site**

The applicant held a two-day drop-in event at the existing site, inviting local residents and groups. One of the events was held on a Saturday to widen the opportunity for more people to come along. Large images of the proposals were displayed and the applicants were present to answer queries and talk through the proposals. A questionnaire was produced asking 10 questions and provided space for further comments. Responses were summarised and made available in a separate report.

**Case study D:**

**Exhibition of proposals to regenerate vacant and underused land**

Proposals for the area were exhibited in a detailed display containing 19 A1 colour display panels. Two events were held, one at a nearby hotel, the other at a local shopping centre. A smaller display was made available in the Hastings Information Centre.

The events were publicised by local leaflets and posters distributed to nearby residents, with supplies distributed to the numerous local shops to ensure maximum publicity. There was good media exposure following a press release. Advertisements were placed in the local newspapers.

Officers staffed the two exhibitions to enable people to ask questions, and a colour A4 booklet containing all 19 of the display boards was available to take away. Visitors to the exhibitions were asked to complete a response form and were given up to 3 weeks to submit their comments. The information was also available from the Council website.

**Action you need to take now:**

A9: Seek advice about best practice from our Community Involvement Officer

A10: Seek advice from other developers and applicants about their experiences of Community Involvement

## 7. Working with Councillors

### Local members

- 7.1 Hastings Borough Council is made up of 16 wards, each represented by two locally elected councillors. You can find up-to-date information about the 32 ward councillors at <https://hastings.moderngov.co.uk/mgMemberIndex.aspx?FN=ALPHA&VW=LIST&PIC=0>. Planning officers can tell you the name of the ward that your application affects.
- 7.2 It is important to keep local ward councillors up-to-date about your community involvement so make sure you include them in your list of key local stakeholders to contact, and advise them about the community involvement activity you are planning. It is helpful to inform them before any publicity material is issued.
- 7.3 Always remember to check whether the local ward councillors are members of the Planning Committee too. If a local ward councillor is also a member of the Planning Committee, care will need to be taken when contacting them, as Planning Committee members must remain impartial. Please see paragraphs 7.4 to 7.6 for more details.

### Planning Committee

- 7.4 The Planning Committee is the group of councillors who meet on a regular basis to make decisions about planning applications. Although the Committee can make their own decisions on planning applications (they are not accountable to Cabinet or Full Council), these decisions could be overturned at an appeal or, in extreme cases, a judicial review. You can find an up-to-date list of Planning Committee members at <https://hastings.moderngov.co.uk/mgCommitteeDetails.aspx?ID=129>
- 7.5 It is important that the planning process is seen to be open, to avoid possible allegations of unfair influence. Local ward councillors who sit on the Planning Committee must remain impartial until they deal with the application. Applicants, or their agents, should not approach any members of the Planning Committee directly as this could be viewed as trying to influence their decision. Planning Committee members follow guidelines laid down in the HBC Planning Protocol, and are advised not to attend presentations arranged by applicants where only Committee members are present.
- 7.6 Instead when you submit your planning application, you will be expected to include a summary of your pre-application Community Involvement (see Section 7 Checklist and Appendix A). If your application is referred to the Planning Committee, the Committee members will see both your summary and the Planning Officer's report. Therefore this is the most appropriate way for Committee members to be briefed about your application.

#### **Action you need to take now:**

- A11: Make local ward councillors aware of your community involvement activities at the earliest opportunity. You can find contact details on the HBC website.
- A12: Seek guidance from your Planning Officer before contacting local ward councillors who also sit on the Planning Committee.

## 8. Checklist

We hope you have found this guide to community involvement helpful.

Now use the checklist to make sure you carry out all the action required:

### Preparing the community involvement

- Read Chapter 8 of Statement of Community Involvement
- Met with the Community Involvement Officer to discuss and agree the community involvement you will undertake
- Advice sought on good practice examples of community involvement
- Community Involvement event(s) included on your development/scheme project plan
- Budget allocated for community involvement exercise, in particular advertising and printing
- Stakeholders listed and contacted
- All Hastings Borough Council Councillors and East Sussex County Councillors whose ward includes the application site informed
- Advice taken from Planning Officers about contacting local ward members who are also members of the Planning Committee
- Community Involvement contact point identified for residents and local community groups

### Advertising the community involvement

- Local residents and businesses notified by letter of the proposed development and community involvement exercise, stating when and where they can find out more
- Contact made with local community groups and special interest groups, together with other bodies who may have a specific interest in a proposal.
- Advertisement for community involvement exercise placed in the local press at least 2 weeks before the event, detailing the proposed development and stating when and where people can find out more.

### **The event**

- The event/activity includes display materials detailing the proposals for the site and gives scope for public comment. Information is given about how comments will be dealt with and what the next steps will be
- Event is delivered in an accessible manner at accessible venues, and in the vicinity of the proposed development
- Equality and access issues taken into consideration and representative organisations contacted
- Event is timed to enable the broadest participation possible.
- Closing date for receipt of comments is at two weeks after the event

### **After the community involvement**

- Feedback about the comments and suggestions produced
- Comments incorporated into your scheme plan
- Final planning application accompanied by statement setting out details of the community engagement activity / activities carried out, including:
  - the scale of notification including a list of properties and businesses contacted
  - location, date and duration of any events / activities held
  - list of participants
  - summary of the comments received and issues raised
  - a clear indication of which comments have resulted in amendments to the scheme and what those changes are; and also which comments have not, and why not

### **Action you need to take now**

A.13: Use this checklist to make sure your community involvement is as effective as possible

A.14: Enclose a summary of your community involvement with your planning application. The Planning Officer will use this to include a short summary of your community involvement in their Planning Officer's report

## **Appendix: Extract from Statement Of Community Involvement (June 2006)**

You can view the full Statement of Community Involvement at <https://www.hastings.gov.uk/planning/policy/consultations/involvement/>

### **Chapter 8. Involvement in Development Control**

8.1 Hastings Borough Council has, for many years, had the policy of consulting neighbouring residents and other occupiers about planning applications which directly affect them. Law was introduced in 1992 which made it mandatory for Local Planning Authorities to publicise ALL planning applications. This provides an opportunity for public participation in the planning process once an application has been submitted.

8.2 The Local Development Framework system requires us to do more to enable community involvement in planning applications. Through the Statement of Community Involvement we will show how we hope to provide opportunities for public engagement before an application has been submitted, as well as detailing how members of the community can become involved once an application has been submitted.

8.3 This section is divided into four parts:

- What is regarded as a 'major' or 'controversial' application which will require higher levels of community engagement
- The pre-application stage – how you can get involved when a development proposal has not yet been formally submitted as a planning application
- The application stage – how you can get involved once an application has been submitted and is going through the planning system
- The post-application stage – how you can get involved once a decision has been taken, including notifying you of decisions made, appeals and inquiries

#### **What is regarded as a 'major' or 'controversial' planning application**

8.4 The significance of the proposed application will help to establish the minimum level of wider community involvement required.

8.5 Our definition of a 'major' planning application is:

'A development of 10 or more dwellings, or a development of more than 1000 m<sup>2</sup>, or with a site area of more than a hectare'.

8.6 A 'controversial' application would be one where there is likely to be concern in terms of potential social, economic or environmental impacts on the community effected by the proposals. This would cover proposals which may not be significant in size, but may be significant in impact. Development Control officers have a discretion to request pre-application community engagement where it is viewed that there is potential for controversy.

8.7 Where an application is significant or controversial, we will request that the developer to carry out at least the minimum engagement activities described in paragraphs 8.20 to 8.27 below. Where a proposal is of a very large scale in terms of size or potential for controversy, at the discretion of the Borough Planner, we may request that developers carry out a master-planning process.

8.8 Where an application is minor or non-controversial, involvement and publicity arrangements will not change from those required under the old system.

8.9 Whether or not an application is determined to be 'controversial' this will be at the discretion of the Borough Planner.

## **The Pre-Application Stage:**

### **Pre-Application Discussions – pre-application community involvement**

8.10 We already encourage applicants or their agents to discuss their proposals with planning officers before making a formal application (Hastings Borough Council Planning Application Advice Leaflet 1 – Pre-Application Advice, available on [www.hastings.gov.uk/planning](http://www.hastings.gov.uk/planning)). This is done because we know that planning applications properly made can be registered quickly and are easier to process through the planning system to a final decision. Good quality information at an early stage enables problems to be resolved sooner rather than later.

8.11 The objective of pre-application discussions should be to air the issues surrounding the application and to clarify the format, type and level of detail needed to enable use to determine an application. It is at this early stage in discussing planning applications that we propose to require potential developers to engage with local people before a significant planning application is submitted.

### **Benefits of pre-application community involvement**

8.12 We believe that early Community Involvement on major or controversial planning applications will benefit everyone – the wider community, potential developers, potential investors and the local planning authority.

8.13 Our definition of a major planning application can be found in paragraph 8.4 to 8.9 above.

8.14 It is at the pre-submission stage of the planning process that local people can have the greatest influence on development proposals and can feel engaged in the process.

8.15 Pre-application Community Involvement activities will give members of the public the opportunity to have their say whilst the details of the scheme are still being put together. The early exchange of information about the site and its surroundings is likely to produce a scheme that better fits its local environment.

8.16 Pre-application Community Involvement is also important from a business point of view in that it may well prevent abortive work being carried out or unnecessary delay in the planning approval stage.

### **The role of the planning authority**

8.17 We will be producing more detailed guidance on pre-application involvement in a separate advice note for potential applicants. This advice note will also include further information on council members and their role in pre applications discussions. In addition, the council is preparing a protocol, which will when adopted, form part of the constitution. Procedures and guidelines in relation to members and their role in pre-application discussions will also be included in this protocol.

8.18 We will assist developers and work in partnership with them where appropriate to ensure that there is meaningful and transparent community involvement, but first and foremost we must ensure that the probity of the Council is maintained at all times.

8.19 We will have a watching brief in relation to pre-application community involvement to ensure that the process is transparent and we will require the results of this engagement to form part of the submitted planning application.

### **The role of developers**

8.20 All applicants, no matter how small the development, will be encouraged to discuss their proposals with their neighbours and anyone else who may be directly affected by their application.

8.21 Where a 'major' (see paragraphs 8.4 to 8.9 above) or 'controversial' development is proposed, applicants will be expected to carry out pre-application community engagement that is tailored to reflect the nature and scale of the proposed development.

8.22 These community engagement arrangements will be managed, organised and funded by the potential developer. Assistance in identifying 'stakeholders' with whom consultation and involvement should be undertaken will be provided in published guidance for potential developers.

8.23 All developers are strongly advised to discuss community involvement activities with us as part of their pre-application discussions.

8.24 Further information about community involvement activities and techniques can be found in The Toolkit at Appendix 3 (page 44).

8.25 As a guide, in relation to 'major' or 'controversial' proposals, applicants will be expected to at least:

#### **Publicise**

- notify local residents and businesses by letter of the proposed development, and state when and where they can find out more
- place an advertisement in the local press detailing the proposed development and stating when and where people can find out more. Additional information should be circulated by press release.
- The closing date for comments should be no earlier than two weeks after the close of the consultation event

#### **Public engagement event / activity**

- provide details of at least one event / activity in the publicity materials. The event should be held no earlier than two weeks after the publicity has been circulated
- the event / activity should include display materials detailing the proposals for the site and there should be scope for public comment. Information should be given about how comments will be dealt with and what the next steps will be. Events should be delivered in an accessible manner.
- The event should be timed to enable the broadest participation possible and venues should, wherever possible, be in the vicinity of the proposed development and should be, as a minimum, physically accessible
- The closing date for receipt of comments should be no earlier than two weeks after the event

#### **Contacting community representatives**

- Contact should be made with local community groups and special interest groups, together with other bodies who may have a specific interest in a proposal. Appendix 1 provides a starting point and applicants should discuss this with a planning officer. Hastings Voluntary Action is also able to provide contact details for local groups through their Directory.
- due regard to equality and access should be given at this stage and representative organisations contacted
- All Hastings Borough Council Councillors and East Sussex County Councillors whose ward includes the application site must also be informed

8.26 Feedback should be provided to participants in community engagement activities. This should be in the form of a report detailing comments received and how these have been addressed in the final planning application.

8.27 Where additional research has been undertaken by the developer, for example, ecological surveys, the findings of these should be shared with participants in any community involvement exercises.

#### **Example public engagement activities for 'major' or 'controversial' proposals**

8.28 Further detail about engagement techniques, what they are suitable for, for whom they are suitable and what they involve, can be found in The Toolkit in Appendix 3 (page 44).

8.28a. Exhibition

Opportunity for potential developers to display proposals, show illustrative plans, gather feedback etc although they can tend to be one-way communication providing more opportunity to give information than to gather views

Appropriate for - general public, geographical communities

8.28b. Surgery

As above, but with the additional opportunity for local people to discuss issues and options on a one-to-one basis. Useful to gather views but cannot be said to be representative views of wider community

Appropriate for - community representatives, individuals

8.28c. Workshop

These can be held as a one-off to discuss a particular issue, perhaps or design or access, or can form part of a programme of consultation where they may be re-convened several times to fine-tune issues.

Appropriate for - community representatives, representatives or special interest groups

8.28d. Neighbour Notification

Standard letter to adjacent properties / those who are likely to be affected by a proposed development detailing the application and where and how plans can be views/ information gained

Appropriate for – individuals

8.28e. Correspondence

Letter detailing the proposed application

Appropriate for - statutory consultees, neighbouring authorities, parish councils, service / infrastructure providers

8.28f. Focus Group

As above but tend to be one-off discussing a particular issue such as shop-front design

Appropriate for - community representatives, representatives or special interest groups

8.28g. Media

Use of local press, council publications, local community newsletters, interest group newsletters, radio and television. They give information, though can be used to gather views as well

Appropriate for - general public, specific community, interest groups

8.28h. Website

An increasingly effective way of ensuring that information is available in the public domain. It can be used to facilitate communication through message boards, e-mail facilities and so on

Appropriate for - general public

8.28i. Planning Aid

A valuable source of planning advice to those who cannot afford to employ a consultant. Planning Aid will help to up-skill community champions to enable them to get involved in planning. Their resources are limited as it is a voluntary organisation and may only be available to communities in deprived wards.

Appropriate for - communities, particularly in deprived wards

8.29 Where a planning application is close to the District/Borough boundary, or where an application is a major proposal which has implications for the Bexhill, its town centre and the wider district, consultation will be undertaken with Rother District Council, neighbouring Parish Councils and other relevant interest groups.

### **Outline applications**

8.30 Potential developers should provide as much detail as possible about their intentions to enable the community to contribute. In the case of proposals to establish the principle of development, which may result in an “outline application”, developers should be aware that they will need to explain this approach in any presentation to the community, and should attempt to receive responses that address the broad principle of development, rather than the detail, at this stage.

8.31 A further pre-application public engagement event / activity is likely to be needed to address a detailed submission following outline approval and developers should discuss this with planning officers prior to making such submissions.

### **Significant variations to major or controversial schemes**

8.32 A pre-application public event may be needed to address a formal variation to a proposal which has already received planning permission, where this relates to a major or controversial development. This would be requested at the discretion of Development Control Officers. Again, developers should check with planning officers prior to making such further submissions.

8.33 Where an application follows a substantially similar application both in terms of timing and the substance of the application (where the issues have already been debated in some detail), reduced public involvement may then be appropriate.

### **Submitting a major or controversial planning application**

8.34 The final planning application should be accompanied by a statement setting out details of the community engagement activity / activities carried out. This statement should include:

- the scale of notification including a list of properties and businesses contacted
- location, date and duration of any events / activities held
- list of participants
- summary of the comments received and issues raised
- a clear indication of which comments have resulted in amendments to the scheme and what those changes are; and also which comments have not, and why not
- points raised in relation to the public engagement process itself.

8.35 The applicant should retain all responses received.

### **Failure to comply with these guidelines**

8.36 Hastings Borough Council cannot refuse to accept an application just because the applicant has failed to carry out enough pre-application community involvement. However, where this does occur, it could delay consideration of the application, as unresolved material planning objections may need to be referred back to the applicant.

8.37 If a developer fails to carry out enough pre-application community involvement, or carries out engagement which falls short of the guidelines set out in this Statement of Community Involvement (and the separate guidance note that will be available for potential developers), Councillors will be made aware of this in the officer's report on the submitted proposal. If material public objections are also received the Council will have to consider whether refusal of planning permission is justified.

8.38 Where an applicant is genuinely ignorant of Hastings Borough Council's requirement for pre-application community involvement, we will advise them at the earliest opportunity and give them the opportunity to defer submission of the application in order to allow community engagement activities to take place. If the applicant refuses to comply with the adopted guidelines, then they will be made aware of the consequences set out above.

8.39 Please note that even where an applicant complies with our community engagement requirements this does not mean that any application arising will be granted planning permission.

### **The Application Stage**

8.40 We take our responsibility to the public in terms of publicising planning applications very seriously. Our existing arrangements are outlined below. They can be found in Hastings Borough Council Planning Advice Note 3 – Comments and Objections, available at [www.hastings.gov.uk/planning](http://www.hastings.gov.uk/planning)

8.41 The minimum requirement for publicising submitted planning applications are laid down in Article 8 of the Town and Country Planning (General Development Procedure) Order 1995 (as amended). Article 8 requires that the Local Planning Authority must publicise planning applications by way of a site notice and neighbour notification, with provision for local advertisement in some cases.

8.42 Where the proposed development would mean a departure from local planning policies (contained currently in the Local Plan, to be gradually replaced by the Local Development Framework), or where it would affect an established right of way, or where an Environmental Appraisal is required (Article 8, paragraph 2) a site notice and local advertisement is needed.

8.43 Where the proposed development is a 'major' development (Article 8, paragraph 4) a site notice OR neighbour notification is required, along with local advertisement.

8.44 For applications which fall outside Paragraph 2 and Paragraph 4 (Article 8, paragraph 5) a site notice and neighbour notification is required.

8.45 Wider publicity is also recommended for other types of proposals which are likely to have more than an immediate impact, for example, uses causing activity and noise during anti-social hours.

8.46 Whatever the statutory requirements, all applications made to Hastings Borough Council will have some form of notification. Along with site notices and advertisements in the Hastings Observer, we also always send letters to owners / occupiers of neighbouring properties.

8.47 A number of voluntary and community groups also receive weekly planning lists. This facility is available to any group who would like to receive the lists. We aim to improve the format of these lists in order that they can be more clearly understood by members of communities. A summary and explanation of the Use Classes Order will be sent out to the groups who are on our database.

8.48 These planning lists are also available to view on our website at [www.hastings.gov.uk/planning/searching/public-access-guides/where\\_to\\_view/](http://www.hastings.gov.uk/planning/searching/public-access-guides/where_to_view/). The weekly list of planning decisions is also available to view at the above web address.

8.49 Where an application for a significant proposal has been received we also publicise this online in Hastings Borough Council's internet periodical, Planning News. The latest, and all previous issues, can be found at [www.hastings.gov.uk/planning/news](http://www.hastings.gov.uk/planning/news).

8.50 The publicity – notices, letters, or articles in Planning News – will invite the public to view the planning application either at the Hastings Information Centre (at the Town Hall) or at the Planning Services offices at Century House, Menzies Road, St Leonards on Sea. People can come and view plans whenever they want during office hours Monday to Friday at Century House, and seven days a week at the Hastings Information Centre. We endeavour to have someone available to offer advice at all times at Century House although this can sometimes involve a short wait.

8.51 Resources permitting Officers will attend meetings of community fora, residents' groups and other relevant groups, in order to discuss proposals which are of particular concern to that group.

8.52 Planning applications, along with copies of application forms, drawings, supplementary reports, neighbour notification lists, comments, objections, petitions and so on can also be viewed at [www.ukplanning.com/hastings](http://www.ukplanning.com/hastings).

8.53 Comments on applications will be invited, with a minimum period of 21 days for comments to be made. Comments must be in writing, but this does include by fax and e-mail. Comments can be raising objections, support or concern about the application, or they may raise questions about the application. Detail about commenting on planning applications can be found in Hastings Borough Council Planning Advice Note 3 – Comments and Objections. We will notify consultees by letter giving them 21 days, or 28 days in the case of a planning application potentially affecting a SSSI or in a SSSI consultation area

(in accordance with Section 28 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 as amended by Section 75 and Schedule 9 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000), in which to comment.

8.54 Where an application is major or controversial and likely to have an effect on the neighbouring authority or other bodies, such as infrastructure providers, such bodies, including Rother District Council, East Sussex County Council, neighbouring parish councils and other organisations such as SEEDA and the Highways Agency, will be informed of the proposed development and provided with the opportunity to comment.

8.55 Hastings Borough Council also has a statutory requirement to consult East Sussex County Council on planning applications that may impact upon minerals and waste sites, and applications that could prejudice the implementation of county policy.

8.56 New developments need access to essential services. Where appropriate, essential service providers will be consulted on major applications.

### **The Post-Application Stage**

8.57 It is important that we are as rigorous in our publicity of planning decisions as we are in our publicity of planning applications.

8.58 Everyone who has formally expressed an interest in an application, perhaps through making a comment, is informed of the decision. Resources permitting, Officers will attend meetings of community fora, residents' groups and other relevant, groups to discuss why the decision was taken.

8.59 Where members of the public attend meetings of the Planning Board, our Customer Services Officer is present to help explain how the decisions were taken and what the next steps will be.

8.60 Weekly planning decision lists are available to view on our website at [www.hastings.gov.uk/planning/searching/public-access-guides/where\\_to\\_view/](http://www.hastings.gov.uk/planning/searching/public-access-guides/where_to_view/).

8.61 We propose to circulate, along with weekly planning application lists, to all those community groups, organisations and interested individuals who want them, weekly planning decision lists, again, in an understandable and accessible format.

### **Appeals**

8.62 Where an applicant appeals a decision to refuse planning permission, the Council will write to all those people receiving neighbour notification when the initial application was submitted, along with others who have expressed an interest in the application.

8.63 Most applications use the 'written representations' procedure and in these cases, as the name suggests, the Inspector will only accept written comments or objections. Where an informal hearing or local inquiry is held written representations will be accepted and objectors will also be invited to attend in person.

8.64 The progress of appeals can be followed online using the Planning Casework Service on the Planning Portal at [www.planningportal.gov.uk](http://www.planningportal.gov.uk)

8.65 There are no third party rights of appeal.

### **Further Guidance**

8.66 Hastings Borough Council Development Control produce a number of guidance leaflets for developers, householders and members of the public. These are available to view or download on our website ([www.hastings.gov.uk/planning/advice/](http://www.hastings.gov.uk/planning/advice/)) or in hard copy from Century House.

### **Addressing Equalities**

8.67 We recognise and value the diversity of the communities of Hastings and we are committed to ensuring that everyone living, working, or with an interest in the future prosperity of the Borough has an opportunity to influence development.

8.68 In order to ensure that developments in the Borough do not have a negative effect on any group or groups within Hastings we will continue to send weekly planning lists to representative organisations and we will send these lists to any groups that wants them. Resources permitting, Officers will meet with such groups to help them to consider the impact of such applications if this is required.

8.69 Where a planning application or pre-application discussions indicate that there may be a negative impact on a particular section or sections of the community we will endeavour to support potential developers and community and/or representative organisations to hold focus groups or similar to seek to address such issues.

For more information please contact

Community Involvement Officer  
Hastings Borough Council  
Regeneration and Planning  
Century House  
100 Menzies Road  
St Leonards on Sea  
East Sussex  
TN38 9BB

0845 274 1098

[fplanning@hastings.gov.uk](mailto:fplanning@hastings.gov.uk)