



**STATEMENT OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT (Part 2)
COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN PLANNING APPLICATIONS**

August 2018

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) (Part 2) sets out how Darlington Borough Council will involve local communities, businesses and key stakeholders in the various stages of determining planning applications.

2. General principles

- 2.1 We will always apply some general principles to our planning consultations / engagement. These are set out below:
- a) We will communicate clearly;
 - b) We will make it easy for you to be involved;
 - c) We will make sure your involvement is effective;
 - d) We will share information and provide feedback;
 - e) We will keep the process simple;
 - f) We will learn from our mistakes
- 2.2 Involvement in consultations will be open to all regardless of age, gender, race, faith, disability or knowledge and experience.
- 2.3 If you have difficulty in communicating with us, we will make information available in other formats such as braille, large print audio, or another language, on request. This service is provided free of charge.
- 2.4 Wherever possible, consultation will be carried out in tandem with other community engagement initiatives. Correspondence will be undertaken electronically if we have your appropriate contact details. The principle purpose of our consultations is to seek to ensure that anyone with an interest in a planning application has an equal opportunity to contribute to the process.

3. What the Council will do

- 3.1 The Development Management Team are available to speak to members of the public regarding planning matters and can be contacted:
- By telephone during normal office hours. We aim to answer all calls however if a specific officer is not available voicemail can be used;
 - By email. We will aim to acknowledge the email within one working day. When there is a general enquiry we will send you a full response as soon as we are able. It is often necessary to carry out further investigations, i.e. an alleged breach of planning control issue. If there is a reason we cannot respond to your email within a reasonable timescale, we will let you know as soon as possible. **Please note that we do not respond to letters of objection or representation to planning applications.**
- 3.2 When a planning application is submitted, the Council undertakes a range of consultation activities. The scale and nature of the activities depends on the nature of the particular application. The processes for community involvement in the various stages of determining applications are set out in the Planning Section of the Council's website.

- 3.3 Planning applications and most of the documents associated with them are available on the Council's website. You can also use a computer in the Council's contact centre to access planning applications. If you would like to speak to a particular officer in person in relation to an application, you must make an appointment, as officers are not usually available at short notice.
- 3.4 When a planning application has been submitted, the Council uses a variety of methods to inform people and organisations who may want to make comments. The methods used depend on the type of application and are set out in the regulations, but can include:
- Sending letters to neighbours, telling them about the application and inviting them to make comments;
 - Publication on the Council website, a list of the planning applications submitted each week;
 - Newspaper advertisements for major applications, applications that are a clear departure from the development plan, or those affecting rights of way, listed buildings and conservation areas;
 - Display of site notices;
 - Consultation processes with specific bodies (e.g. parish councils);
 - Consultation protocols with statutory agencies (for example Environment Agency, Highways England);
 - Placing copies of the application form and plans for all proposals on our website.
- 3.5 Interested parties are invited to make comments on applications in writing, either by post, by email or using our online tool. Our preference is by email or using our online tool. Objections or representations to planning applications, will not be acknowledged. Where comments are material to the planning application, they will be taken into account when decisions are made.

4. What we will expect developers to do

- 4.1 We think that the early involvement of the public and other people with an interest on significant planning applications will benefit everyone. People will have more chance to have their say, and for their views to influence the final details of plans. Developers stand to benefit by identifying, at an early stage, local issues and environmental information to put together a scheme that better fits into the local area.
- 4.2 It is a requirement for certain developments (set out under Section 122 of the Localism Act) to undertake pre-application community consultation. We welcome evidence of pre-application community and stakeholder engagement on all proposals; however **we will expect developers to undertake community engagement in the following instances**. This is not an exhaustive list and developers and applicants are strongly advised to seek our views as to whether a proposal requires pre-application consultation;
- Wind turbine development involving more than two wind turbines or where the hub height of any wind turbine exceeds 15 metres;
 - The winning and working of mineral or the use of land for mineral working deposits;

- Waste development or a change of use to treating, storing, processing or disposing of refuse or waste materials;
- The provision of dwelling houses where there are 10 or more dwellings or (If the numbers are not known) on a site having an area of 0.5 hectares or more;
- The provision of a building or buildings where the floor space to be created by the development is 1,000 square metres or more;
- Development carried out on a site having an area of 1 hectare or more;
- Applications which are subject to an Environmental Impact Assessment;
- A significant development that conflicts with the policies in our development plan or with more up to date government planning policy;
- A development which proposes closing or changing a public right of way.

4.3 There is no set formula for effective community engagement, as every development scheme and every community will be different. However, as a minimum, community engagement usually includes;

- Explaining proposals to residents, workers and users of the area around the site of the proposed development;
- Requesting the views of people in the community;
- Considering those views;
- Amending the proposals to take the views of the community into account where appropriate, or clearly demonstrating why it has not been possible to do so;
- We will expect developers to make clear as part of the planning submission what form of pre-engagement they have used and also make clear what change they have made to their scheme as a result of this pre-application process. It is equally important to explain why it has not been possible to make changes and why. The results of this exercise will be reported to members of Planning Committee before a decision is made.

4.4 Further detail and good practice guidance on engaging the community can be found in the Planning Aid booklet 'Good Practice Guide to Public Engagement in Development Schemes'.

4.5 Where a developer has carried out pre-application community engagement, as a matter of good practice, they should include a statement with their planning application which details what has been done, to include:

- Who was involved in the community engagement exercise;
- The methods used to engage the community;
- How the scheme developed as a result of community engagement, including changes made as a result of community views (where community views have not been reflected in the scheme, this should also be explained);
- How feedback was given to the community.

4.6 The Council will offer to hold a meeting to allow potential developers to present their schemes in initial draft format to Planning Committee members, Ward members, interested local residents, and any relevant statutory consultees or organisations, allowing questions to be asked and feedback to be taken on board by developers.

- 4.7 The main purpose of these meetings is to allow developers to hear important issues at an early stage that can be addressed as part of the planning application. These meetings are not a substitute for the formal planning process and it would not be the role of Members to form a definitive view at this stage.
- 4.8 The Council will publicise the date, time and venue of the meetings on the website.
- 4.9 To ensure that Members do not fetter their involvement in subsequent decision making they would be expected only to ask questions at the formal pre-application presentation rather than to express a view.
- 4.10 In addition to this we will still expect developers to organise, fund and manage their own publicity events at pre-application stage as set out above.

5. Pre-application Service

- 5.1 The Council is committed to providing an efficient and customer focussed pre-application advice service which helps applicants to deliver high quality development. Open and constructive pre-application discussions are an opportunity for the Council and developers to work together to achieve developments that deliver benefits to the community and the economy. This can save time and cost. The benefits of pre-application advice are as follows:
- It gives an opportunity to understand how our policy will be applied to the development and can advise what is required for a development to be determined favourably subject to a formal application and the results of public consultation. It can also indicate that a proposal has little or no realistic chance of success, so saving considerable time and money;
 - It can identify at an early stage whether any specialist advice is needed, e.g. with regard to listed buildings, trees, flood risk, highways, etc.
 - It can provide opportunities to discuss details of the proposal such as its design;
 - It can provide information on what you need to provide in order to ensure compliance with the planning application validation process;
 - It can provide information in relation to our decision making procedures;
 - It is the most appropriate time to consider how the application might be shaped to address local community issues, thereby maximising the benefits of the development and minimising its impacts.
- 5.2 All pre-application enquiries should be submitted on the relevant pre-application form which is available on the Council's website (<http://www.darlington.gov.uk/environment-and-planning/planning/planning-application-and-permission/pre-application-service/>). This should be submitted with as much information as possible. The minimum level of information needed for officers to consider a pre-application enquiry is set out in the Pre-application Charter, available on the Council's website.
- 5.3 A charge, as set out in the Pre-application Charter, available on the Council website, is payable for pre-application advice and is based on the scale / type of development. Fees and charges will be reviewed annually by the Council. Any increased fees will be publicised on the Council's web page.

- 5.4 We aim to provide a response within six weeks of receipt of the submitted information, for most types of minor development, however if this is going to take longer, we will contact you to let you know the reason for this and the amended timescales. For major development proposals we will agree a response timetable based on the complexity of the proposal and the evidence required supporting our advice.
- 5.5 It should be noted that pre-application advice provided by the local planning authority cannot pre-empt the democratic decision making process or a particular outcome, in the event that a formal planning application is made. It is recognised that the outcome of the pre-application process might result in a significantly different or amended proposal being submitted as a formal planning application. Our advice however, will provide an enquirer with valuable information to enable them to make informed decisions on how to proceed with their proposal.
- 5.6 Further information on the pre-application process, is available in the Pre-application Charter, on the Council's website.
- 5.7 It should be noted that the pre-application process is treated with strict confidentiality at all times, unless permission is obtained from the enquirer.

6. Planning Complaints

- 6.1 This section is intended to cover enquiries or complaints about suspected breaches of planning control. These generally include the erection of buildings or structures and the change of use of land or buildings without first having obtained planning permission. It can also include failure to comply with planning conditions imposed on a planning permission.
- 6.2 When the Council receives a complaint it will expect you to:
- Provide information about yourself and how we can keep in touch with you;
 - Be as clear as you can about when, where and what concerns you.
- 6.3 On receiving a complaint we will:
- Acknowledge receipt of the complaint, let you have a case reference number and who is dealing with it;
 - Keep you informed about progress in resolving your enquiry;
 - Keep your identity and contact information confidential.

7. Service Complaints

6.1 This concerns a complaint about the planning service you have experienced. This might be about something we have done or failed to do. This Statement of Community Involvement is not intended to cover those service complaints. Complaints about the service are governed by the Council's Corporate Complaints Procedures and these can be found separately on the Council's website.

8. Contacting the Council

- 8.1 If you wish to know more about the SCI, or any aspect of the planning application process, please contact us at the email /address shown below. Information on the process is also available on the council website:

Website: www.darlington.gov.uk/planning

Email: planning.enquiries@darlington.gov.uk

Development Management Team
Darlington Borough Council
Town Hall
Darlington
DL1 5QT

Phone: 01325 405777

- 8.2 Should copies of particular documents be required, there may be a small charge to recover costs. Further details of these charges are available on the Council's website.