

# FIRST STEPS IN GETTING US ALL INVOLVED IN PLANNING!

## Introduction

The Bracknell Forest Borough Local Plan sets out the policies that suggest how land in the Borough could be used, and identifies where major development can take place. The Borough Council is required to review this Plan to make sure policies and proposals are up to date.

Recent reforms to the planning system hope to deliver greater community involvement in planning, with the local community able to contribute to shaping the places where they live, work and play, at a time when they can make a real difference. To help achieve this, the Borough Council is preparing a "Statement of Community Involvement". This Statement will set out **WHO** will be consulted, **WHEN** and **HOW** they can get involved, and the **RESOURCES** for carrying out consultation. The Statement will relate to planning applications and the new Local Development Documents (LDDs) that are to replace the Local Plan.

## The purpose of this newsletter is to:

- Find out more about **WHO** you think we should be consulting
- Identify **WHEN** you can get involved
- Ask for your views on **HOW** you would prefer to be involved
- Outline the **NEXT STAGES** in preparing the Statement of Community Involvement

We hope that you will be able to respond so that we can look forward to your continued input in the process in a way that most suits you.

## Whom to Consult?

The subject matter of a Local Development Document or an application for planning permission will be the starting point for establishing who should be consulted. This means that anyone with an interest or involvement in the subject should have the opportunity to participate in the preparation and consideration of the document or application. Whilst the legislation requires contact with specific consultees, we also need to think about who else might want to be engaged in the process.

## "First find your stakeholders"

Frequently, these are grouped into sectors – such as private, public, voluntary or community. However, we should look at these groups in other ways, and think about how they might contribute to the debate both individually, and in combination with others.

For example:

- We should be reaching a cross-section of the community in relation to social and economic status, ethnic origin, religion/faith, age, gender, physical ability and literacy;
- we should be considering the roles of consultees; are they enablers, partners, funders, decision-makers?
- How much time do they have to contribute to the process?
- Are they professionals, inexperienced, representative of groups, or individuals with an interest in the subject?
- Are they directly affected, or not at all?

**We welcome your views on who we should be consulting.**

**Do YOU want to be involved?**



## When to Consult?

The process for preparing Development Plan Documents and Supplementary Planning Documents is prescribed in the new legislation. For example, in respect of each of the Development Plan Documents, there are a number of stages at which different groups of people can get involved:

### Pre-submission consultation:

- Issues and options gathering
- Scoping Report for the Sustainability Appraisal
- Publication of Issues and Options Report
- Publication of Initial Sustainability Appraisal

### Pre-submission public participation:

- Publication of Preferred Options
- Publication of Sustainability Appraisal

### Submission:

- Publication of Submission document
- Publication of Final Sustainability Appraisal

In respect of planning applications, discussions prior to the submission of applications are welcomed.

With larger applications, this could involve asking applicants to undertake a community consultation exercise in advance of submitting a planning application. For minor and other less significant applications, applicants are encouraged to discuss their proposals with their neighbours.

**The Statement of Community Involvement will set out clearly the stages at which people can get involved in planning processes and decisions. Whilst the stages at which people can get involved are defined in the legislation, you may be more interested in particular stages in the process or subjects.**

- **When do you want to be consulted?**
- **Are you interested in particular types of planning applications?**

## How to Consult?

The methods chosen to consult and engage with all those with an interest will depend on the particular subject and the preparation stage reached. Critically, a distinction needs to be made between consultation undertaken in breadth, and that undertaken in depth.

### Consultation in breadth

In breadth consultation methods generally achieve wide, shallow results, e.g. questionnaires, articles in the Borough Council's newsletter and sampling can involve 'everybody', but will only reach people in a minimal and individualised way. They do not generally provide the opportunity to generate any in-depth debate.

### Consultation in depth

In order to build consensus, and help to achieve some of the Government's aspirations in respect of front-loading community involvement in the new planning system, it will be necessary to select from the broad list of "whom to consult" those who have more influence over, and more impact on, the eventual outcome of the project. It is with these groups that we will need to enter into a more detailed dialogue. We will work with them in depth, and over time, to enable us to engage fully with them and with each other. This could be achieved through for example, focus groups and workshops.

### Hard to reach groups

Whilst a combination of in breadth and in depth consultation methods will touch many people with an interest in the Borough, it is inevitable that further work will be required to engage with traditionally hard to reach groups. Often, building in depth relationships will provide links to hard to reach groups. However, we will need to make particular efforts to go out and meet with these groups.

Some examples of methods of community involvement are set out in the table opposite. At the very least, the consultation tools that we will need to use will include:

- Documentation available at Council offices
- Documentation available at libraries and Parish/Town Council offices
- Documentation available on Borough Council's website
- Newspaper adverts
- Targeted mailings
- Articles in Borough Council's newsletter

However, this will not be sufficient to satisfy the requirements of the new planning system. We will need to draw up a consultation and engagement strategy that delivers the Government's objectives for achieving real community involvement in, and ownership of, planning decisions in the Borough. This involves using methods that are appropriate to the particular stage. Our ability to demonstrate that we have achieved this will be used to assess the soundness of the Statement of Community Involvement at Examination.

**Your suggestions for the best ways to engage with stakeholders are invited. How would you prefer to be involved?**

## Examples of methods of community involvement

Method and Description	Commentary	Suitable For?
<b>Street Stalls:</b> interactive displays held outdoors	Helps secure the views of a larger number of people than normally possible indoors. Useful when views of people using a particular space are sought.	<b>In breadth:</b> Publicising details of the preparation of LDDs and of major planning applications
<b>Targeted Mailings</b>	Direct mailings to specific consultees with an interest in particular subject areas.	<b>In breadth:</b> Can provide general information and ask questions – and could ultimately generate opportunities for more in-depth consultation
<b>Mobile Exhibitions:</b> taken to various locations around the Borough	Allows the Council to take the issues closer to the home of the community.	<b>In breadth:</b> Increasing the profile of the preparation of LDDs
<b>Newspaper Articles:</b> published in local papers circulating in the Borough	Provides a traditional method of reaching local residents, spreading information and generating debate. Achieves good coverage in a familiar format.	<b>In breadth:</b> Publicising details of the preparation of LDDs and of major planning applications
<b>Virtual Consultation</b>	Makes use of electronic communications to contact interested parties and gather views of individuals and groups.	<b>In breadth:</b> Provides a quick way for those with an interest to gain an overview of, and comment on, policies and proposals
<b>Community Planning Forum:</b> a meeting held in the local community	Generates ideas, improves understanding and offers opportunities for interaction between interest groups. Difficult to ensure that attendees are representative of the community. Can be dominated by a few individuals.	<b>In depth:</b> Particularly useful at an early stage in the participation process for LDDs
<b>Interactive Displays:</b> people can make additions or alterations to prepared exhibits	Allows people to engage in the issues and debate, and provides a record of preferences	<b>In depth:</b> Useful at Community Planning Forum meetings
<b>User Groups</b>	Creation of user groups is a key element of community planning. They act as clients in championing the views of those who will use the end product.	<b>In depth:</b> Useful in gathering detailed views on the impact of policies and proposals

Based on examples from the **Community Planning Handbook**,  
Nick Wates, Earthscan Publications Ltd, 2000.



## Next Stages

We want to hear from you with your thoughts.  
Please complete and send back, or write under separate cover, to the address below.  
In summary, these are the things we are seeking your views on:

**Who should we be consulting?**

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**Do YOU want to be involved?**

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**When do you want to be consulted?**

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**Do you want to continue to be involved in the preparation of the Statement of Community Involvement?**

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**Are you interested in particular types of planning applications?**

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**What are your suggestions for the best ways to engage with stakeholders?**

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**How would you prefer to be involved?**

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**Once we have gathered together your views, we will prepare a report detailing the issues that we face in successfully consulting with the community, and looking at the different ways that we could deal with them. We will publish this for further comment in February and March of 2005. We will then prepare a draft Statement of Community Involvement that will be open to comment in the summer of 2005. The Statement of Community Involvement will be submitted to the Secretary of State in the winter of 2005, when you will have a further opportunity to comment on it.**

## Contact Us!

Email: [Development.plan@bracknell-forest.gov.uk](mailto:Development.plan@bracknell-forest.gov.uk)

Post: Development Plans Team  
Environment & Leisure  
Bracknell Forest Borough Council  
Time Square, Market Street  
Bracknell, Berks RG12 1JD

Tel: 01344 351127

This document can be made available in large print, in Braille or on audio cassette. Copies in other languages may also be obtained. Please contact us on 01344 351127.