

Development Forum: Community engagement on major planning applications

Purpose

This document sets out how the Council expects developers to engage with the local community, and describes the actions the council will take to facilitate a Development Forum. It refers particularly to engagement with ward councillors and the towns and parish councils, during the pre- application and full application process for major development. It will apply to major pre-application and full application submissions submitted after 1 July 2014.

Context

The Council's Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) encourages applicants and developers to discuss their proposal with neighbours, and to consult with the wider community in respect of planning applications that are likely to have a significant impact.

In line with the Council's SCI, and under the Localism Act, the developer should carry out a public consultation for all major applications ¹ prior to submitting an application. Sometimes the Council is informed about the public consultation; however, there are occasions when the Council only becomes aware of the consultation at the same time as the wider community.

The Council encourages developers to have pre-application discussions with us, offered as a chargeable service, although we cannot require them to do this.

Our proposed new process

We want communities to have an input into proposed major development in their area at the earliest possible stage to help shape the development and to start the process of identifying infrastructure needs.

To aid this dialogue, the Council will set up a 'Development Forum', when pre-application proposals are received for large scale major development ² or where the

¹ major applications are defined by Government as comprising 10 or more dwellings, sites for residential development over 0.5ha, other developments comprising 10,000 sq metres or over of floor space or the site area is one hectare or more or change of use exceeding the above thresholds.

size of the proposed development is significant in relation to the size of the existing community (i.e. where the increase in households would represent a ten per cent or greater increase on the current household level (based on 2011 Census). It will not apply to developments which are permitted development or fall within the 'Other' or 'Minor' category of planning applications.

Some developers require these discussions to be confidential for commercial reasons and where they do, we cannot compel them to take part in a forum, although we will make every effort to convince them to do this.

Where a developer does not enter into pre-application discussions with us we will hold a forum as soon as a formal planning application is registered. The forum does not remove our requirement to carry out formal consultation on applications.

What will a Development Forum do?

The forum, chaired by a senior council officer, will include:

- an explanation of the proposed development by the developer to aid understanding by the local community of the scheme, prior to submission or during the application process. The community includes town and parish councils and other community representatives.
- an explanation by council officers of national and local planning policies and guidance.
- an explanation by officers, where appropriate, of the procedures for the funding of infrastructure and facilities, including developer contributions under S106 of the Planning Act (1990 as amended) and the Community Infrastructure Levy (when appropriate).
- an opportunity for all parties to raise issues and provide constructive feedback about development proposals and associated infrastructure.
- a mechanism to ensure we carry out more meaningful public engagement on large scale major applications and those applications that are significant in relation to the size of the existing community.
- a record of the actions from the forum
- the provision of on-going feedback to the local community on progress with the application.

Who will be involved in the Development Forum?

As a general rule the meeting, which is by invitation only, will involve:

- the ward councillor(s)

² large scale major applications are defined as comprising 200 or more dwellings, sites for residential development of four hectares or more and developments comprising 10,000 sq metres of floor space or the site area is two hectares or more

- up to two parish councillors from each relevant parish
- the parish clerk
- up to three representatives from the developer and, if appropriate, their specialist advisors
- planning committee
- the planning officer and other council officers as appropriate, for example, representatives from leisure, housing and economic development
- Oxfordshire County Council and other statutory organisation representatives where appropriate
- up to two representatives of a recognised community organisation

How will the meeting work in practice?

- a senior officer from the District Council will chair the meeting
- the Council will agree the venue for the meeting with the relevant town/parish. This can be at the District Council offices, the parish hall or any other suitable venue (minimal cost).
- the meeting will usually take place during normal working hours, between: 09:00-17:00 Monday to Friday.
- the planning officer will email an agenda and submitted pre-application plans and documents, a week before the meeting.
- within ten days following the Forum, the planning officer will send a brief summary of the issues discussed at the meeting, any action points and timescales and let all parties know the next steps.

Conclusion

The Council believes that implementing a Development Forum will lead to greater transparency and foster improved communications between the Council and the local community.

The Forum will ensure there is an opportunity for a robust and consistent mechanism to engage key stakeholders early in the development process for major developments.