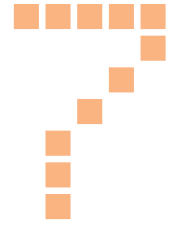


PLAN PREPARATION

Statements of Community Involvement: what are they and why are they important?



This is Sheet 7 of The Planning Pack. This pack has been written by Planning Aid, with assistance from Urban Forum. The Planning Pack is endorsed by the Royal Town Planning Institute

Introduction

This information sheet provides a brief introduction to Statements of Community Involvement. It is Sheet 7 of a series of 17 that forms an information pack to help you understand and get involved in the planning system.

The purpose of Statements of Community Involvement is for the local planning authority to:

- outline its commitments to consultation above and beyond the minimum requirements (see later); also to
- make sure that there are opportunities for you and your community to get involved in planning at the earliest possible stage, so that plans and applications better reflect the needs of the community.

Community involvement in the planning system is not new. People have always had the opportunity to have their say on new planning documents and planning applications. But in the past many people were unaware of these opportunities and unable to get involved. As a result some people have come into contact with the planning system when it is too late to have any influence; for example, when a building is erected or when trees have been removed to make way for development. This gives many people a negative view of planning and they may feel that

decisions are made behind closed doors.

People do not always realise that decisions on individual planning applications are based on the policies set out in Local Development Documents (See Sheets 4 and 5 for more information). So to try to improve and increase public participation in planning, the Government wants local planning authorities to involve the whole community from the earliest stages in the plan-making process and in the development of large planning applications. The Government also wants involvement to be both formal and open so that you know exactly what to expect from the local planning authority and what the local planning authority wants from you. This is where the Statement of Community Involvement comes in.

Statements of Community Involvement

What is it?

The Statement of Community Involvement is a Local Development Document. Local planning authorities must have one as part of the new plan-making system. The local planning

authority should follow their Statement of Community Involvement when preparing their Local Development Documents and considering planning applications.

The Statement of Community Involvement sets out how the local planning authority intends to involve the community in the preparation and revision of planning policy documents known as Local Development Documents, and in making decisions on planning applications. It should clearly set out how the local planning authority intends to inform, consult and involve the community, and what these terms mean.

For example:

Inform – this usually means the local planning authority provides information about planning applications and planning policy documents on their website, in letters or in advertisements.

Consult – this is normally where the local planning authority asks the community for comments on a local development document or planning application in a questionnaire or at a public meeting.

Involve – this is usually when the local planning authority works with the community and includes them when drawing up proposals and options.

What will it tell me?

The Statement of Community Involvement will tell you how to find out what's going on and what opportunities there are to get involved. It may also tell you what happens if you feel the process has failed you and how to seek further advice.

It will explain why the local planning authority is going to engage with the community and what the benefits and difficulties might be - including an honest summary of what resources are available.

The Statement of Community Involvement will set out the types of communities in their area that they want to involve

and the organisations and people they have to consult. In particular it should identify those groups who have not been represented in the past. The local planning authority should set out the steps they will take to involve these groups. The statement won't name all individuals to be consulted, but your local planning authority will have some way of holding and updating their information on individuals, community and voluntary groups who wish to be involved in planning, for example a consultation database.

The Statement of Community Involvement will set out the range of techniques that will be used to inform, consult and involve the community for different documents and planning applications and the reasons for these, and at what stages you will be involved.

The Statement of Community Involvement will also explain how planning links to other strategies and consultations, and which other departments or organisations will be carrying out consultations that planning can link into. For example local authority housing and education departments prepare their own strategies and needs surveys, the outcomes of which have an impact on land use in your area. The work of Local Strategic Partnerships and Community Empowerment Networks are also closely related to planning.

Local Strategic Partnerships are responsible for preparing and revising Sustainable Community Strategies which are documents that provide a vision for your area and a series of actions needed to deliver that vision. The vision and actions set out in the Sustainable Community Strategy should promote or improve the economic, social and environmental well being of your area. The actions carried out through the planning system will help to deliver parts of the Sustainable Community Strategy (those that relate to development and use of land). Community Empowerment Networks are bodies that work to involve people in decision making at a local level such as involvement in Sustainable Community Strategies. Urban Forum has produced a Local Strategic Partnership Guide which provides information for community and voluntary groups on how to get involved in Local Strategic Partnerships (See Sheet 16 for contacts and publications)

What the local planning authority must do as a minimum

The sections below explain the **minimum** requirements for consultation you can expect when the local planning authority is preparing Local Development Documents and consulting on planning applications.

Minimum requirements for consulting on Local Development Documents (including Statements of Community Involvement)

The table below provides a summary of the requirements set out in the **Town and Country Planning (Local Development) (England) Regulations 2004**.

| ISSUE | WHAT THE LOCAL PLANNING AUTHORITY MUST TO DO |
|---|---|
| Who is consulted? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> >> Specific bodies/set out in the 2004 regulations. For example Regional Planning Bodies (the mayor for London), adjoining local authorities, parish councils, and the Highways Agency. >> If the documents are not published in the way required the local planning authority must provide a copy of the document when requested as soon as reasonably practicable after receipt of that other person's request. >> A reasonable charge may be made for this. Other bodies that the local planning authority considers appropriate, for example faith, disability and voluntary groups. |
| Availability of Documents | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> >> Copies must be available for inspection during normal office hours at the local planning authority's main office, and other places within their area as the local planning authority consider appropriate. >> Publish information on their website about the document, where and when it can be inspected and when your comments must be made by. >> Give notice by local advertisement – publication on at least one occasion in a local news paper circulating in the whole of the area of the local planning authority. >> When a document is submitted to the Secretary of State, notice must be given to those persons who requested to be notified of its submission. |
| Representations – Comments on Documents | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> >> Make copies of the representations (your written comments) available at the same places as the document. Representations will also be published on the local planning authority's website and sent to the Secretary of State. |
| Representations on site allocations (where alternative sites have been proposed) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> >> Publish on its website where and when the representations can be viewed and how further comments can be made. The local planning authority must inform those originally consulted (see 'who is consulted' above) and give notice by local advert. |
| Independent Examination | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> >> Inform people when and where the Examination will be held and the name of the Inspector appointed to carry out the Examination at least 6 weeks in advance. This is done via website, notification letters and a local advertisement. >> The Inspector's report, recommendations and reasons must be made available for inspection at places where the document was available, and via the local planning authority's website. >> Notice of the publication of the Inspectors report must be given to the people who asked to be kept informed. |
| Adoption of a development plan document | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> >> Documents must be available for inspection, during normal office hours, at the places at which the document was made available. >> Publish the adoption statement on their website, and give notice in a local advertisement. The adoption statement is sent to any person who has asked to be notified of the adoption and to the Secretary of State. |
| Copies of documents | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> >> If the documents are not published in the way required the local planning authority must provide a copy of the document when requested as soon as reasonably practicable after receipt of that other person's request. A reasonable charge may be made for this. |

Minimum requirements for consulting local communities on planning applications

| ISSUE | THE LOCAL PLANNING AUTHORITY MUST |
|--|---|
| Notification of planning applications | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ display a site notice on or near the land to which the application relates for at least 21 days; or ■ notify in writing any adjoining landowner or occupier. |
| Period for comment | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Normally give you 21 days from the date of the notice to make your comments ■ Please note different notification periods and procedures apply to applications affected by special designations for example Listed Buildings, and Sites of Special Scientific Interest. |

How is the Statement of Community Involvement adopted?

The local planning authority must consult on their draft Statement of Community Involvement for six weeks, before submitting it to the Secretary of State for approval. Once submitted to the Secretary of State you will have another chance to comment on the Statement, again this is for six weeks. An Inspector on behalf of the Secretary of State will consider the comments made on the Statement of Community Involvement and test how 'sound' the document is, meaning whether it covers everything it should and was prepared in the way it should be. A report will then be produced by the Inspector. This report may make recommendations for some changes to the document, which will have to be followed by the local planning authority. Following this the document will then be adopted by the local planning authority.

To keep the document up to date the local planning authority will need to monitor how effective their community involvement techniques have been, who has been involved and identify any gaps. They can then use this information to review and update the Statement of Community Involvement.

For more detailed information on the process preparing and adopting Local Development Documents and how you can get involved please see our information Sheets 4 and 5.

Our Top Tips

For getting involved with the preparation of the Statement of Community Involvement.

- >> Contact your local planning authority to tell them that you would like to be consulted for a specific area or interest, and ask to go on the relevant consultation database.
- >> Think about where you would expect and want to see information about planning. For example, where would you want to be able to view documents? How should significant planning applications be publicised?
- >> Think about what would make it easier for you to get involved.
- >> You have a role in monitoring the progress of a Statement of Community Involvement – tell your local planning authority what has worked and what hasn't worked, what you think they could do better and how.

- >> Find out if copies of documents are free, if you can borrow them or if there is a charge, or if there is a quiet room available to inspect them
- >> Ask questions – for example 'can the public speak at committee meetings?'
- >> Contact your elected representative (ward councillor). You should check to see whether or not they are a member of the planning committee, if they are they should not be lobbied on planning matters, and you may need to contact another councillor.
- >> Find out how your local planning authority intends to exceed the minimum requirements for public involvement set by the government. Get copies of your local planning authority procedures for notification of planning applications.
- >> Contact your local planning authority, local Planning Aid service, if you are eligible, or contact a planning consultant. They can help you make your comments and explain how the planning system works.

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