



NORWICH
City Council

Involving the community in the planning process: guidance for developers

May 2010

For further information please contact planning services:

t: 0344 940 3333

e: planning@norwich.gov.uk



Involving the community in the planning process – guidance for developers

Why do it?

Individuals come into contact with the planning system rarely, unless they are already connected to it in some way, e.g. by being a member of a local group that comments on application proposals. This means that the level of knowledge about the planning system and the development process as a whole is limited. And yet, by encouraging wider participation in the process, the benefits are direct and measurable.

Meaningful community participation results in a development process that can tap into local knowledge and additional resources, help to strengthen the community in which it is located, can shape designs to address issues and result in more appropriate solutions that are responsive to the environment (in its widest sense) and which satisfy local demand.

The key for many developers is that meaningful participation can result in speedier decisions and a more sustainable development. The participation process enables the development to evolve to become a scheme with local support and if people have been actively involved in the process, they are more likely to care about the end result and look after it when it is built.

What is ‘meaningful participation’?

Traditional approaches to participation have tended to focus on publicity and interaction with key stakeholders. These both have value but, on their own, do not represent meaningful community participation.

There is a tendency to adopt a ‘one size fits all’ approach to community involvement. To do the bare minimum or the easy (and cheapest) option and consider the box ticked. But to reap the rewards set out above, care needs to be given to approach adopted.

At the very start of the development process, a **community involvement strategy** should be devised, which sets out **when, why, how** and **with whom**. This can then form part of the Design and Access Statement at the planning application stage or, if the development is of a large scale or controversial, may form the basis of a separate Community Involvement Report.

To be meaningful, the participation of the community has to be timely and tailored to reflect the nature of the development proposals and the characteristics of the community in which it will be built. You also need to know why you are doing it – what are you seeking to get out of it.



To have a positive impact it will require resources (time, money and staff) at the start of the development process. It will have to meet the challenges of public apathy, lack of knowledge, changing and diverse issues and unrealistic expectations. Trying to identify and reach the wider community can be hard and there is a risk that the process will be dominated by one or two loud voices if not handled carefully.

But if adequately resourced and managed, development deadlines are easier to meet and real value can be added to the end product.

When should it be carried out?

There are different types of community engagement and each performs a different function. The purpose behind the engagement should determine both the timing and the type of engagement undertaken.

At one end of the spectrum, you can **inform** people (this is what we want to do) and this is the cheapest and easiest and, if used on its own, tends to have the least value in terms of the benefits set out above. However, publicity is an important tool if used with other methods.

The next stage along is **consultation** (tell us what you think about what we want to do). Traditional approaches to community involvement in the planning process have focused very heavily on this level of engagement. Again, it has value but can cause problems if managed inappropriately.

Often this is the only type of community engagement traditionally carried out in respect of development proposals. Traditional consultation methods tend to be skewed to favour those who are sufficiently literate, articulate, confident, aware and interested to put their own views forward. This can result in a very narrow section of society participating in the planning process. It is often undertaken at the end of the design process, with no clear guidance to those consulted as to the stage in the process that the development has reached or the scope of things that they can influence.

As a result, developers may get unexpected and unwelcome views expressed at this late stage, from consultees and the community, which they feel are unable to be addressed. The scheme is already finalised, the planning application is about to be submitted. The process of community involvement and other pre-application consultation (such as local design review) is seen to be a negative and critical part of the process which adds time and money and has little benefit to the developer.

To overcome these negative perceptions and avoid creating these problems for developers, it is necessary to be very clear about what you are asking people to comment on and why.

Carrying out a community consultation exercise two weeks before you have programmed the submission of an application does not allow sufficient time



for the design to evolve and be influenced by issues raised. To consult people at this stage and allow them to think that their views will influence the end product is misleading and likely to lead to negative views of the development, the developer and the planning process as a whole.

If this type of engagement is the only type carried out and is done at this stage, it would be much better for everyone involved if there was an air of honesty about the exercise (we do want you to tell us what you think, but only about the colour of the doors, everything else is fixed).

However, if used with other methods or at a different stage of the development process, consultation can be extremely beneficial to all concerned.

Ideally, consultation exercises should form part of a wider community **involvement** approach (what do you think we should do). People will often want to put forward alternative proposals or raise issues about the site or the development which could be addressed. These views are very valuable if raised at an early stage and used to help inform the development proposals.

In this way, people can comment not just on the colour of the doors but on wider issues too – is there enough parking, is the children’s play area in the right place, is it a good idea to have a shop within the scheme?

But to be meaningful and to be viewed positively, the involvement has to set clearly the parameters of influence.

If the site is proposed to be developed for a mix of offices and shops with only a small amount of residential and there is no scope for this to change, then this needs to be made clear. If there is a minimum number of units required on the site for funding or viability purposes, then this needs to be set out and made known. If there is a need to provide two-bedroom flats and this is an absolute, people can take this on board when they express their views. If this has been explained (with reasoning) then people are less likely to put forward proposals for three bedroom houses.

Further along the engagement strategy are methods involving **collaboration** and **empowerment**. Depending upon the type of development scheme proposed it may be possible to incorporate these levels of engagement into parts of the scheme. You may be able to work with community groups, for example, to design an allotment area within the scheme. You may want to involve local artists to ask them to design a sculpture garden.

Summary:

Inform	this is what we want to do (publicity)
Consultation	tell us what you think about what we want to do
Involvement	help us shape what we want to do
Collaboration	work with us to develop the proposal
Empowerment	you design the scheme



Methods of community involvement

The question is often asked of local authorities, how do we do it and with whom? What type of consultation do you want us to do? How many exhibitions and where? Who shall we invite?

There are a great number of different methods of involvement and some are more suited to particular stages in the process.

Again, before deciding on what to do, it is very important to consider when you want to carry out the involvement, who you want to involve and the level of engagement that you want undertake.

Some suggestions are listed below:

Inform	Meeting, public notice, website, letter, exhibition, newspaper supplements
Consultation	Local community group, community information and feedback session, focus group, meeting, questionnaire, website, community needs analysis, models, roadshow, street stall
Involvement	Planning for Real type event, photo survey, facilitation, focus meeting, briefing workshop, choice catalogues, website, interactive displays, mapping, models, review sessions
Collaboration	Briefing workshop, planning forum, design game/ workshops, interactive displays, photo survey, mapping, task force, user groups
Empowerment	Planning day, prioritising, process planning, task force, user groups

In terms of who to involve, this will depend on the nature of the exercise and its purpose. However, it will be important to demonstrate that the involvement undertaken is meaningful and inclusive.

In the same way that site analysis should be used as a first tool in the design process, then neighbourhood analysis should inform the community involvement process. It will be important to consider the context of the site, the nature of the development proposed, the issues likely to be raised, who is likely to use the development in the future and how they will use it, what impacts the development will have and on whom.

It will be important to ensure that the level, type, method and timing of involvement enable all sections of the community to participate. Analysis of readily available neighbourhood profile information will be able to provide an insight into the make-up of a local area in order to ensure that the engagement exercises undertaken are as effective as possible. For example, in an area with a predominantly elderly population, evening events may not be as well attended. In areas with a high percentage of residents for whom



English is a second language, there may be a need to consider non-written or even non-verbal engagement techniques.

To assist with this, local authority neighbourhood teams (north, south, east and west teams) will be able to help you to identify existing groups that are active within the area. Local community support officers may be able to share knowledge of local issues to be addressed, for example, how the site is currently used, local needs in terms of facilities etc. Local faith groups and schools may be willing to participate in the development of proposals for their area. Local council ward members and, if the development is likely to have an impact beyond the City Council boundaries, members of neighbouring Parish Councils, will be able to offer advice and knowledge about the area and the issues likely to be raised.

In addition to consultation with the local resident community, involvement strategies should also consider the need to interact with other sections of the community, e.g. local businesses, charities and interest groups. Some of these will be readily identifiable through their existing contacts with the planning system (e.g. the Norwich Society). Others may require greater research. Local authorities and other agencies may also be able to help with this part of the process.

What we want you to do:

In submitting a planning application for a 'major' development it will be important to demonstrate that appropriate consideration has been given to the advice contained in the SCI and to explain how the design and details of the development proposals have been influenced and informed as part of this process.

You should clearly outline your Community Involvement Strategy, your site and neighbourhood analysis and your methods and types of engagement. Comments made and issues raised as part of this process should be outlined and responded to within the document.

For larger schemes, it will be appropriate to have a separate Community Involvement Report. For smaller schemes, this can be part of the Design and Access Statement.

Remember:

- It will take time!
- It needs research and groundwork
- It needs to be sustainable for all parties
- It needs imagination and innovation
- It is enjoyable and worth it!



Some useful resources:

There is a wealth of resources on community engagement and different participation methods and techniques. The ones suggested below represent a very small selection from those available. The website addresses listed also include those which can assist with the neighbourhood analysis and profiling part of developing a community involvement strategy.

Websites include:

<http://www.communityplanning.net>

<http://www.planningaid.rtpi.org.uk>

<http://www.urbanforum.org.uk>

<http://www.communities.gov.uk>

<http://www.statistics.gov.uk>

<http://www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk>

<http://www.data4nr.net>

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/communities/neighbourhoodrenewal/deprivation/deprivation>

Methods and techniques include:

Rapid Community Consultation and Action Planning Toolkit – Oxfordshire Rural Community Council (available as PDF from www.oxonrcc.org.uk)

The Community Planning Handbook – Nick Wates, 2000

Participation Works! 21 techniques of community participation for the 21st Century – New Economics Foundation

Participatory Workshops – a source book of 21 sets of ideas and activities – Robert Chambers, 2002

Participation, Spice it up! – Practical tools for engaging children and young people in planning and consultations – Carol Shephard and Phil Treseder, 2002