

Introduction

Early engagement has significant potential to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the planning application system for all parties. Good quality pre-application discussion enables better coordination between public and private resources and improved outcomes for the community.

National Planning Policy Framework

Leeds City Council considers pre-application involvement with communities and ward members an important part of the development process, especially where it has been undertaken at an early stage. It has benefits for all parties- for developers it can provide more certainty in the process and enables the development to evolve to become a scheme with local support and for communities, it provides an opportunity to understand what has been proposed and to help shape the development at an early stage.

It's important for developers to ensure that engagement is timely and that sufficient time has been allowed for meaningful and transparent consultation to take place. Good community consultation allows views to be sought early on when there is scope for changing proposals in response to the views, but poor or rushed consultation may frustrate communities, increasing the chance of objections and creating the potential for delay in determination or refusal of permission.

The government has clearly signalled the importance of community involvement at the earliest of stages with its intention to make pre-application engagement a mandatory requirement on the largest of planning applications. The size thresholds are still to be set, but it is expected to cover developments:

- over 1 hectare
- 200 residential units or
- 10,000 square metres of new floor space

The Leeds Statement of Community Involvement asks for community involvement to take place on all major applications. The major planning application is defined by the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2010:

- *Residential developments (including houses and flats) of 10 units or more on a site of 0.5 ha or more those of 10 or more residential dwellings*
- any development (including change of use) with a gross floor area of 1,000sqm or more or a site area of 1 ha or more
- minerals applications (winning or working of minerals or the use of land for mineral working deposits)
- waste development (for the purposes of community involvement, only larger waste developments would fall into this category)

We also strongly encourage applications, irrespective of their size or scale, which are likely to be sensitive or likely to be of significant public interest to undertake community involvement.

We recognise that any community involvement should be appropriate the scale and complexity of the proposal and the time taken and the resources available should be in proportion to the size and, or the impact of the proposed development.

This guide sets out the city council's expectations from developers when engaging with local communities and elected members and best practice and practical advice to those involved in pre-application public involvement.

Principles of good engagement

Just as every proposed development is unique, the type, form and level of community involvement will be different, depending on the context of the site, the nature of the development and the communities involved. Therefore it's not possible to be too prescriptive about what engagement should be undertaken, but there are some guiding principles to ensure that engagement is effective and meaningful as possible.

Pre-application process

Applicants should meet with planning officers at the earliest of stages to discuss their proposal. Part of the discussion will cover community involvement and officers will provide assistance and advice on choice of venues, details of local groups and appropriate approaches. Officer will also organise meeting between applicants and ward members to discuss the proposal. There may also be the opportunity to present a pre-application proposal to the Plans Panel.

Important role of members

Members play a crucial role at the pre-application stage. Meetings between applicants and members should take place at the earliest possible stage to freely discuss proposals and to explore local issues. Involving members at the earliest of stages has the potential to lead to better community consultation, better decision making, resulting in better developments.

Defining what and who are "the community" can sometimes be difficult but Members are invaluable in signposting developers to representative local groups and organisations.

Timeliness

Any community involvement should begin at an early stage, before a detailed scheme has been prepared, but at a point where there will be some clarity around the key planning and design issues. Realistic timescales are needed and ensure that involvement takes place when things can be changed or influenced by any raised issues.

There should be a clear and published timetable for the consultation process, so everyone knows when there is the opportunity to participate. Sufficient time should also be allowed for considered and informed responses and feeding this back to communities.

Transparency

Developers need to be clear and honest with the community about the stage in the process that the development has reached or what's fixed and what's open to change. If there is no opportunity for changing particular parts of the scheme, then this needs to be made clear.

Developers should provide feedback to the community and ward members and be able to demonstrate that changes have been made as a result of community comments, or where that's not possible or practical, to show why the changes have not been made.

Understandable and inclusive

Information should be relevant, accurate and understandable by the intended audience. Where English is not the first language, consideration should be given to alternate forms of communication- information presented graphically and visually is often more easy to understand than text. Developers should be aware of the use of jargon; this can easily be a barrier to understanding.

Information and communications need to be clear so that the public have clarity about what they are being consulted on, what can be achieved, how they can participate and the timescales involved. Information that is unambiguous will help to dispel rumours and address local concerns head on.

There should be a means of collecting public comments and responses and state clearly what will happen to comments. Allow responses to be made by a variety of means- letters, email, online and telephone as well as in person at public events.

For public events, use venues which are within the locality, easy to find and at times that allow interested parties to attend. Different timings and locations should be used to suit different areas and groups within the community. Evening meetings may not be appropriate in areas where there is a large elderly population, day time meetings may not be suitable in commuter areas. Venues should be chosen where there is access for people with disabilities and other requirements. Venues should respect the cultural sensitivities of the communities whose views are being sought.

Monitor and evaluate the engagement process on an ongoing basis to ensure that the consultation has received balanced and representative responses.

Submission of a statement of community involvement

The council strongly encourages the submission of a statement of community involvement with the formal application. This should include:-

- Details of the consultation undertaken, including a list of residents, organisations/interest groups contacted and a commentary on the events held (format, location and duration)
- Summary of all comments made
- How the applicant responded to community views including if, and to what extent, the proposals may have changed as a result of the consultation and if expressed views were not taken into account at all, the statement should explain why.
- Highlight any criticism by groups or individuals about the consultation process

Approaches to community involvement

Leeds City Council expects developers to take a proportionate approach, developing a bespoke programme of involvement according to the size, scale, complexity and sensitive nature of the proposal. However, the expectation is that developers should concentrate on levels 2 and 3 on anything other than non-sensitive applications.

Level 1. Informing

This is the cheapest and easiest form and is essentially publicising what is going to happen on a development. It is usually a one way process and adds little value in terms of communities having

their say, but it is a useful platform for raising awareness of a proposal if a wide range of media and community venues are used to spread the word. This would be considered the minimum level of community involvement required on major schemes, but the expectation is that developers should in most cases, exceed this level of community involvement.

Level 2. Consulting

This is a more interactive, iterative process of listening, inviting comments, being responsive to issues raised by stakeholders, making changes and providing feedback. This level works well if it is done at the earliest of stages and comments are used to help inform the development proposals. Developers need to be mindful that this method does favour those who are sufficiently interested to put their own views forward and can give too much of a say to an unrepresentative vocal minority. It is important to work with planning officers and ward members to ensure that public involvement is as diverse as possible.

Leeds City Council would expect that most major schemes or sensitive proposals undertake this level of community involvement.

Level 3 Engagement and partnership

This is the most demanding level of engagement and may take place over an extended period of time and builds upon the approaches described above. It involves in depth collaboration at the earliest stage on the design and development of the scheme and also on the community engagement programme. This level taps into local knowledge and networks and makes a commitment to build up long lasting relationships with the community through the establishment of community forums. High levels of commitment, time and resources are needed to make this approach meaningful, but the benefits are immeasurable in terms of community buy-in, reduced risk of challenge and delays.

Leeds City Council would expect this approach in community-led proposals, on proposals where there will be a high level of community interest, in very large developments or regeneration programmes.

Good practice

There are many techniques and activities to use in involving the community. Below the table describes a number of activities suitable for different levels of engagement. Each level builds upon the previous one.

	Level 1 Informing	Level 2 Consulting	Level 3 Engagement and partnership
Approaches	Press notice Newsletters Website Leaflet drop Un-staffed exhibitions Information sheets Telephone hotline for further information	As in level 1 Staffed exhibitions, interactive displays Questionnaires for feedback and comments Presentations to local groups Website Liaison groups	As in levels 1 and 2 Community forum Liaison groups Drop-in sessions Site tours Staffed telephone hotline Electronic update alerts Online discussion forum

		Workshops with different groups Focus groups Online forums Public meetings Social media “Piggyback” on community events	Regular updates via newsletters Interactive websites
Good practice advice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify key individuals and groups who can spread the word. • Research the communities who may be affected. • Consider different levels of awareness raising depending on proximity and location. • Add colour to press advertisements and leaflets to draw attention to them, • keep to key information, and notify those most affected in person to ensure they are aware of the scheme • Explain what is proposed, how to find out more. • Place adverts in public places for example community centres, libraries, in shop windows, bus stops, places of worship, schools. • Consider ‘trade’ journals, local publications. • Monitor responses and address weaknesses. • Ensure venue is 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interest, enthuse and motivate communities to respond and manage expectations. • Consider establishing a residents /community steering group and work with them to identify locations for events and fine tune the content. • Identify and connect with other community events e.g. community fairs. • Seek feedback and be clear what will happen to comments. • Monitor attendance and consider additional venues / events to secure a balanced response. • Re-consult if significant changes have been made to the proposals. • Use interactive websites to reach the ‘silent’ majority • Consider the timing of the meetings to reflect the demographic make-up of the area. Avoid holiday periods, Christmas and other religious festivals and be aware of other activities happening at the same time which may impact on people participating 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to support and involve groups which have contributed to the process. • Invite feedback on issues before they develop into a crisis. • Involve participants in evaluation. • Keep the website up to date with responsive key contact information. • Provide electronic alerts at key stages.

	<p>accessible and material appropriate to the audience and the area.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider timing of the exhibition, public transport, accessibility, language and style used. • Identify whether there is a need to produce material in different languages. Provide • clear information about the project, background, explain what is 'fixed' and what is 'up for discussion', identify options, key dates for consultation events and how to comment. • Provide a telephone hotline for those wanting more information. 		
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Adapted from Planning Aid Good Practice Guide to public engagement in development schemes

Examples

Community involvement in the early stages of the development has led to the creation of a community forum for the Kirkstall Forge site to provide regular updates throughout the life of the project. Progress is further promoted through exhibiting at local events and via local media and the Kirkstall Forge website.

An exhibition and plans were available for public viewing for the new south stand for the Headingley Carnegie Stadium at the stadium's café bar with comments invited via a questionnaire for the public to complete. Details of the exhibition were promoted in the match game programmes.

During a public exhibition event for a residential site, developers invited public opinions on the number of units and number of affordable homes and the materials with which to build the houses. In both cases, the scheme was amended to reflect the community's view.

Pre-application involvement for a residential development in Woodlesford was heavily influenced by local residents and the desire by the landowner to develop the land sympathetically and over a longer period of time than would normally be expected. A collaborative approach was taken on

the design, with community input on a design code which would fix the style of properties and limit the nature and extent of materials to be used.

The Armley Forum is used as a way of reaching a large number of residents in that area through the discussion of applications as part of the general meeting. This keeps ward members and the community up to date with what is going on, at very low cost and resource input.

For more information on pre-application involvement contact:

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