How to… Influence Planning Decisions

The planning process

Whether you live or work in an area, developments and regeneration proposed by your council or private developers may affect your life in some way. The person or organisation wanting to develop land, or change the way that land or buildings are used needs planning permission from the council.

Your council makes a planning decision in the best interests of the area looking to ensure that the need for housing, shopping, transport, community facilities, employment and open space are accommodated whilst the rights and amenity of existing residents, businesses, community groups and voluntary organisations are protected.

Your comments can affect this decision. Public involvement leads to development that meets the aspirations and needs of the whole community, and improves the quality and efficiency of the decisions made. Anyone who lives or works locally has a right to be involved in the planning process, whether they are a tenant or a home owner, a business owner or a local community group.

The local council has two roles in planning:

- They produce planning policies that are used to guide development and the outcome of planning applications
- They make decisions about whether or not to grant planning permission

The local council primarily decide:

- What is built where
- The allocation of shops, schools, roads, medical centres, phone boxes and street lighting
- What is redeveloped
- What proportion of housing schemes are designated as affordable housing
- What is left as open space
- Whether or not someone can build an extension or conservatory

How do I find out about building plans?

For small applications, the council must meet the legal requirements of the Town and Country Planning (General Development Procedure) Order 1995. This states that a notice should be displayed at or near the application site for not less than 21 days, notice should be given to any adjoining owner or occupier and a notice may also need to be placed in a local newspaper. This will tell the public where they can view the application and where they should send any comments. These comments or representations will be taken into account when the local planning authority makes its decision.

For larger projects, the applicant will be encouraged to discuss the proposal with both the council and the local community (see overleaf).
Commenting on applications

Comments should be sent within 21 days of the application details. The Council will also notify neighbours, and others who have commented, about any major change to the proposals since the first application. Extra time (usually 21 days) is then allowed for further feedback. All comments are published in the Statutory Register, and are fully considered before the council reaches a decision. You can ask to be notified of the result of any planning application. If you organise a petition the council will automatically inform you of the final decision.

Some Key Points to Remember:

- Read the Planning Applications Register to see if there are any applications that might affect you (see your council’s web site or check at the Planning Reception)
- Make sure that you keep track of any dates for decisions and when you need to reply by
- Always put your comments in writing

Have your say

When you make a comment it is important to focus on the practical and community issues rather than personal feelings. This is because the council cannot reject a proposal just because a lot of people are against it. They can only consider objections relevant to the planning issues, like the effects on traffic, the area’s appearance, a neighbour’s privacy or light.

They cannot take into account the effects on the value of your property, the personal circumstances or character of the developer, or a loss of a view. You can ask your neighbours and local organisations what they think about the plans, and work together to influence the development. You could start a campaign, or contact the local press to see if they will cover the story. You could raise your ideas at community council meetings and even come up with your own ideas for an empty site or disused building.

Training and support

Organisations in your area may hold free learning programmes for people and groups who are taking part in their community. Some of these courses may help in having your say about local government decisions. Contact your local council to find out more.