

Involving Parish Councils in pre-application discussions on planning applications

As part of the Council's response to the 'localism agenda' we would like to involve local communities more in the early stages of some planning applications. We would like to do this by inviting parish councils to take part in more pre-application discussions.

This new initiative will build on our track record of working with local communities to improve design quality in the built environment, for example through village design statements and the local plan workshops which enabled local people to lead the identification of future development sites through the development plan.

We are already encouraging those applicants who want to develop the larger sites allocated in the Tenterden and Rural Sites DPD to involve the local community at an early stage. We have let all the affected parishes know¹ that we are keen to help set up design workshops with Parish Councils and local communities to help shape more detailed proposals before planning applications are submitted.

We would now like to widen this to encourage parish involvement in pre-application discussions on allocated sites in the DPD, which have not already been identified as suitable for the workshop process, and in other significant or highly sensitive schemes within the villages. Such schemes are likely to be within Conservation Areas, where the potential impact on the quality of the village scene is greatest.²

We can only do this where the applicant agrees and, because of the limited resources we have available, we will have to focus on the most sensitive sites.

We hope that involvement in pre application discussions with potential applicants will ensure that local aspirations are incorporated at an early stage before a final application scheme becomes 'fixed'.

To be clear on what is involved the following protocol has been prepared. The intention is to improve the dialogue with parishes and not in any way to limit contact between parish and applicant/ agent that would otherwise take place.

¹ See our letter to parish clerks dated 27th June 2011

² Separate arrangements apply to major applications in Ashford town and for the sites allocated in the Development Plan around Ashford.

Protocol for pre–application discussions with Parish Councils

1. This protocol applies to the smaller housing allocations in the Tenterden and Rural Sites DPD, large scale and significant new proposals and others which may have a significant impact on sensitive environments such as designated Conservation Areas. It does not apply to minor development or householder development such as extensions to houses.
2. Parish Councils will be invited to be involved in pre-application advice for these proposals where the applicants/agent have agreed this.³ The Borough Council does not have the power to require applicants to agree but will strongly encourage this.
3. In some circumstances elements of a proposal may be withheld by the applicant on confidentiality grounds (e.g. viability statements or business plans) or Parish representatives may be asked to treat them in confidence.
4. If applicants agree to sharing pre-application proposals with the Parish Council this will happen in one of two ways:

On larger schemes where a meeting is needed

- a. Parish Councils will be provided with a copy of the pre-application plans submitted by the applicant at least 10 days before any meeting to discuss the proposals with the applicant.
- b. Parish councils should provide preliminary comments prior to the meeting to assist with agenda setting and to enable us to know the parish position if prior to discussions with the potential applicants. Ideally these should be provided 3 working days before the meeting.
- c. One or two representatives of the Parish Council will be invited to the meeting. Where a series of meetings are needed it will be at the applicant's discretion whether the parish representatives will be invited to all or some of these.

On smaller yet still significant schemes where only written comments are provided by the Borough Council to the applicant.

- a. Parish Councils will be provided with a copy of the pre-application plans submitted by the applicant and with a copy of the comments provided by officers.
- b. Parish Councils will be requested to provide any comments on schemes within 14 days of notification to:
 - ensure that these can be forwarded to the applicant, and
 - ensure that a good pre-application service is maintained.
 - Any comments then made by the Parish Council will be passed to the applicant. Where the applicant is unwilling to involve Parish Councils directly in pre-application discussions they will continue to be encouraged to release information to Parish Councils and the local community at the earliest opportunity.

³ Please note that some information, including the fact that the site may be available for development, can be commercially sensitive. In such circumstances pre-application discussions with the Borough Council may take place and, if requested by the applicant, this confidentiality will be maintained and no third party (including the Parish Council) will be informed that pre-application discussions have taken place.