

Statement of Community Involvement

Draft consultation version
(February 2022)

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Introduction

The Council is committed to engaging residents, interest groups and stakeholders in the planning process, which involves the preparation, alteration and review of local planning policy documents, such as the Local Plan, as well as making decisions on planning applications. The purpose of this Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) is to set out who can be involved, and how and when consultation and engagement will take place, as well as how views will be considered, from the earliest stages of the plan-making process through to development on the ground.

Whilst the planning system requires some level of consultation as part of the plan-making process, Central Bedfordshire Council has always committed to going beyond this, to try and get as many people involved as possible. The SCI should help to ensure that opportunities for engagement are clear to everyone and are carefully considered to ensure the best outcome for all.

Planning for the future of Central Bedfordshire will affect everyone, so it is important that people understand the process and are able to get involved in the process. Early and continuing involvement allows for local priorities and aspirations to be reflected most effectively in local policy decisions, helping to shape the decisions that are being made about the communities in which we live.

Community engagement lies at the very heart of the planning process, as set out by the Localism Act 2011 and emphasised by the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). The NPPF sets out the government's vision for the planning system, including how plans should be prepared and how planning policies should be applied in managing development locally. Paragraph 39 states that:

'Early engagement has significant potential to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the planning system for all parties'.

In addition, the Planning for the Future White Paper published in August 2020 set out a review of the current planning system and emphasised the need to give neighbours and communities an earlier and more meaningful voice in the future of their areas as plans are made. It also emphasised the importance of harnessing digital technology to make it much easier to access and understand information about specific planning proposals, to ensure it is accessible to all people.

Section 18 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires local planning authorities to prepare and keep an up to date Statement of Community Involvement (SCI), which should clearly set out their approach to ensuring effective consultation on planning matters. Planning Regulations require that SCI's should be reviewed every five years and updates should be prepared to reflect any material changes that may have occurred.

The Council's last SCI was adopted in 2012 and was partially updated in 2020 to take account of the government guidance in relation to Covid-19. However, this guidance has subsequently changed, and a comprehensive review has been undertaken. This SCI provides an update to that document and will supersede it once adopted.

Who Will Be Involved and How?

The Council already has a well-established network of stakeholders within the local community. The word 'stakeholder' means those who have an interest in the services and activities of the Council. Stakeholders will be engaged as they can provide specific knowledge to help form options

for wider public consultation. For example, if preparing a transport-related document, a local bus company would be a key stakeholder. The list below gives examples of the different groups/individuals who may be consulted for the formulation of a planning document or through the planning application process. This is not a definitive list.

- Parish Councils
- Town Councils
- General Public/Residents
- Landowners/House Builders/Agents/Housing Associations
- Local Groups, Clubs, Organisations
- Environmental/Community/Voluntary Groups and organisations
- National Government and organisations (including Homes England, National Highways, Environment Agency, Natural England, Historic England etc)
- Neighbouring Local Authorities
- Seldom Heard Groups
- Local Forums/Partnerships

Engaging with Seldom Heard Groups or Individuals

Within the community there are certain groups of people who are 'seldom heard', meaning that they have been under-represented in consultation in the past. Particular effort will be made to get these groups involved in the consultation process and this may require direct engagement to allow them to effectively participate in consultation. These groups could include:

- People with learning or visual Disabilities;
- Black and Minority Ethnic Groups;
- Young people;
- Travellers and Gypsies (Gypsy, Roma and Traveller community);
- Travelling Showpeople community;
- The homeless;
- Older People;
- Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual;
- Transgender;
- People living in deprived areas.

All planning documents will be screened to see if an Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) is required, although it is anticipated most planning documents will be subject to an Assessment.

Questionnaires and surveys will include equality monitoring questions to give the Council a picture of who contributes, to ensure that all consultation is as inclusive as possible. There are some existing forums, groups and services which may be accessed to ensure that seldom heard groups are consulted on planning applications and during the preparation of planning documents.

Housing Services: Some tenants of Central Bedfordshire Council owned properties are representative of seldom heard groups. A Tenant Voice and Engagement Manager is in post to manage tenant consultation and liaise with various tenant groups and will be approached to facilitate consultation

Young People: The Council is committed to seeking opportunities to engage and consult with young people, through our Youth Participation Network members, Youth Parliament, local schools, community youth groups and dedicated social media channels.

Travellers and Gypsies (Gypsy, Roma and Traveller community) and Travelling

Showpeople community: A countywide Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessment (GTAA) was undertaken in 2016 and a Travellers Study Group was set up. A further GTAA may be prepared in 2022 as part of the Local Plan Review, and this group could also be accessed for future consultation. In addition, useful links to the community have been forged through the work of the Council's Gypsy and Traveller Unit. The community will also be engaged in the planning application process.

Voluntary and Community Sector: The important role this sector plays in the consultation process is recognised. There are a wide range of representative voluntary and community groups within Central Bedfordshire whose knowledge and links are vital in reaching certain groups.

Accessibility

The Council recognise that some groups and individuals have particular needs. Where appropriate, publicity and consultation methods will be tailored to specifically address the needs of a target group. This includes producing documents to meet the new accessibility regulations that came into force for public sector bodies on 23 September 2018. All written documents published after this date, and all pre-recorded audio or video published after 23 September 2020, will be available in an accessible format which meet the required accessibility guidelines. This will enable more people to access the documents the Council produce.

Methods for Community Involvement in Planning

Some methods for community involvement are listed in table 1 below. They include methods for simply giving out information or publicising a consultation when feedback is invited and direct methods of consulting. The list below is not definitive but includes those methods considered to be the most effective and practical. It is not the intention to use all these methods for each consultation and some may be more relevant to either plan making or the development management process. A variety of methods may be used as and where appropriate, depending on the purpose of the consultation and type of scheme for example. Some are statutory requirements, meaning that they will always be used for any consultation.

Table 1: Methods for notifying and consulting

Consultation/ engagement method	Description
Placing documents 'on deposit'	<p>It is a statutory requirement that all adopted planning policy documents are placed on deposit for the public to view. Hard copies of documents will be placed in the offices of Central Bedfordshire Council (Priory House and Watling House) and Central Bedfordshire Libraries. Whilst consultees will be encouraged to review documents electronically wherever possible, this approach does ensure that documents are available for review on request.</p> <p>Hard copies of planning applications are no longer held. Customers without digital access are advised to speak to the case officer to arrange access.</p> <p>The Council will ensure any documentation is available to obtain in a safe environment.</p>
Website	<p>It is a statutory requirement that planning policy documents are available to view online on the Central Bedfordshire Council website www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk. It is also a statutory requirement for the Council to keep a register of every planning application, which is available to view online. Documents may occasionally be hosted other external websites (for example Development Briefs prepared by developers) and in this case links will be provided from the Council's website. Information and updates will be displayed and documents will be downloadable. Links to online consultations and feedback pages/systems are hosted on the relevant pages of the website.</p>
Social Media	<p>Social media can be used to inform residents, local groups and organisations about consultations and progress on the preparation of planning policy documents.</p>
Letters	<p>It is a statutory requirement that all statutory consultees are notified in writing when a policy document goes out to consultation. A number of general consultees; to whom a particular document may be of relevance, will also be notified in writing. It is also a statutory requirement that they are consulted before the granting of planning permission.</p> <p>Where available, emails will be used over letters, unless someone has specified otherwise.</p>
Consultee database	<p>For each planning document, a database of contacts will be maintained and letters or emails sent out to inform them of the various stages that</p>

Consultation/ engagement method	Description
	the documents go through. Consultees will also be informed of the adoption and publication of documents.
Consultation/ feedback systems	The Council encourages responses to planning consultations to be made online. For planning policy documents, the Council uses a system called 'Opusconsult' to host and manage public consultations. It allows all stakeholders to comment directly on planning document consultations. Comments on planning applications can be made via the planning application pages of the Council's website.
Response forms (paper)	The Council accepts comments and feedback in writing as well as requests for updates and queries.
Email	<p>The Council will use emails to send out information about consultation.</p> <p>Everyone with access to a web enabled computer will be able to contact the Council using dedicated email addresses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • planning@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk (for general planning application purposes) • localplan@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk (for enquiries relating to planning policy) • mwplans@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk (for enquiries relating to Minerals and Waste planning policy) • mwapplications@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk (for enquiries relating to Minerals and Waste planning applications). <p>Comments, queries and requests for updates on planning policy documents may be submitted via email.</p> <p>For planning applications, case specific queries should be sent to the case officer.</p>
Telephone:	<p>The planning staff at Central Bedfordshire Council can be contacted by telephone on 0300 300 8307. Case officers can be contacted by telephone to discuss case specific queries.</p> <p>However, some formal consultation responses must be made in writing, in line with statutory requirements.</p>
Leaflets and Newsletters	Leaflets and newsletters are an effective way of accessing the whole community and gaining interest in a particular matter. Leaflets containing a summary of the document or proposal which is out for consultation have been published in the past. It is acknowledged that they need to be

Consultation/ engagement method	Description
	attractive with a distinctive message to be effective and that overuse of this method can sometimes be ineffective.
Questionnaires and surveys	These are an effective means of gaining views of documents and proposals. They can be aimed at a small group or included in leaflets and newsletters to reach the wider community. The questionnaires need to be designed in such a way as to gain useful information from the respondent, which can be used to inform planning documents.
Media releases/ Newspaper Adverts	It is a statutory requirement to publicise certain consultations in the press. The Council aims to ensure as full coverage geographically as possible. Regular media releases may be issued to keep residents informed.
Council publications	The Council publishes news and information about consultations on the website and via social media channels.
Television and radio	Television and radio may be used to inform the community of key community involvement dates and to report on feedback received.
Posters, displays and banners	Posters, displays and banners may be displayed in key public locations, including Council offices, supermarkets, leisure centres, libraries and village halls, with the aim of attracting interest and providing information.
Community Involvement Events	<p>A range of community involvement events may be organised at accessible locations in order to capture community views. They will allow all those interested in the planning process to directly discuss the relevant issues, options and planning proposals with planning officers and other staff. They may utilise “hands on” consultation exercises such as “Planning for Real” for which the community are asked to identify what they would like to see developed in their area on a scale model or map. This method would be particularly relevant for master planning larger developments.</p> <p>Online events may also be used as a way of engaging with communities and other stakeholders.</p>
Public Exhibitions	Public exhibitions provide a good visual means of displaying draft proposals. When manned, visitors will be able to discuss these matters with planning officers and other staff and submit their comments at the time. Opportunities for online exhibitions can also be explored.
Workshops and focus groups	These are increasingly being used to encourage discussions around particular issues, and can offer an opportunity to develop community

Consultation/ engagement method	Description
	capacity and offer training. Online workshops and focus groups offer more opportunities for people to engage.
Town and Parish Councils	Town and Parish Council's play an important part in the community and officers may attend parish meetings where possible. For major planning proposals, developers will be encouraged to hold meetings with these groups.
Councillors	Elected Councillors are community representatives and play an important role in guiding the planning process.
Use of existing partnerships, forums and panels:	These can provide representative views from a range of organisations/agencies as well as specific groups within the community.
Client-Side Panel and Infrastructure Board	These scheduled meetings can be used as a platform to engage with landowners and developers.
Stakeholder groups	Stakeholder Groups may be used as a forum for providing updates on planning applications and any other issues related to strategic scale developments. The membership of these groups will depend on the location of the development and the nature of the proposal.
Site notices	These are used in certain circumstances to advertise applications in addition to letters inviting representations.

Involvement in Plan Preparation

The timetable associated with the preparation of planning policy documents is set out in the Council's Local Development Scheme (LDS). The LDS includes the timetable for the Local Plan and other supporting planning policy documents. Copies of the LDS are available to view or download from the Council's website and are available to view at Council offices.

Key Stages of Documents

Key Stages of Local Plan preparation

The Local Plan will be prepared by the Council and will include the following elements;

- Strategic Policies setting out an overarching vision and principles necessary for managing development and growth over the next 20 years. Strategic policies will confirm the location

of new development for all types of uses including housing, commercial development and recreational development

- ‘Development Management policies’, comprising general policies for the control of development, for example the protection of the natural, visual and residential environment.

All the policies and proposals will be illustrated on the ‘Policies Map’ covering the whole of Central Bedfordshire.

In accordance with Government Guidance, there are several stages for preparing Local Plans, as set out in table 2 below.

Table 2: Key stages of Local Plan preparation

Stage	Description
Research and Issues Phase	The Council will gather information about the area in order to assess and identify issues and options for addressing the needs of the area. This may be technical information or it may constitute the views of stakeholders. At the same time, the Council will assess the requirements of Government Guidance, corporate strategies and technical information in order to put together a draft document.
Draft Plan Phase (Regulation 18)	A draft plan or parts of an emerging document will be published to get some feedback from the community and stakeholders. These will be made available for a six week period allowing written representations to be submitted. Workshops, exhibitions and other consultation methods may be used to engage with different groups. The feedback received will be considered and used in the preparation of the Local Plan document which will be considered by the Council before proceeding to the next phase. All these documents will be subject to a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and a Sustainability Appraisal (SA).
Publication Phase (Regulation 19)	The proposed Local Plan document will be published for a formal six week consultation period, allowing written representations to be submitted. The consultation will be advertised widely. Comments received at Regulation 18 and Regulation 19 will be passed in full to the Planning Inspectorate. Summaries of the representations may also be prepared to assist the Inspectors.
Submission	Following the period of formal consultation, the document will be submitted to the Secretary of State (as represented by the Planning Inspectorate) for independent Examination. All background material, the Sustainability Appraisal/Strategic Environmental Assessment and a statement of consultation will be submitted for Examination. All documents will be published on the website.

Stage	Description
Examination	An Examination will be carried out by an Inspector from the Government's Planning Inspectorate. This comprises a period of familiarisation by the appointed Inspector who may ask for more information from the Council. The Inspector will identify the matters and issues for discussion at the public hearings and will prepare a timetable and guidance notes for participants. If the Inspector considers it necessary, the Council and other participants will be asked to submit information or statements on specific issues. Hearing sessions will be arranged with six weeks notice being given in advance of the beginning of the hearings. Only those who submitted representations at publication stage (Regulation 19) will be entitled to be heard. The Inspector will assess 'the soundness' of the Plan and will produce a report with recommendations which will be considered by the Council.
Adoption	The Council will adopt the Local Plan as soon as practicable following consideration of the Inspector's Report. It will be published on the Council's website and all those who made comments will be informed. Hard copies will be available to view at Council Offices.

Key Stages of Supplementary Planning Guidance

Supplementary planning guidance may be site specific or cover particular issues, and will generally relate to policies or proposals in the Local Plan document. They do not form part of the statutory development plan and are not subject to independent examination, but will still be subject to community and stakeholder involvement and adopted by the Council to ensure they can be given weight in decision making.

Table 3: Key stages of supplementary planning guidance

Stage	Description
Research and Issues Phase	Background information will be gathered (including community input where appropriate), government advice will be assessed and a draft document will be published.
Consultation Phase	The draft will be subject to involvement by the community and stakeholders in a similar way to Local Plan Documents, for a minimum of 4 weeks. All comments will be considered and fed into the final document, where appropriate.
Adoption	The document will be adopted by the Council and published on the website. An Adoption Statement will also be published for specific documents prepared as Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs). All

Stage	Description
	<p>those who made comments will be informed of the adoption of the guidance. Hard copies will be available to view at Council Offices.</p> <p>A statement of the representations received and the Council's response to those representations will also be prepared to demonstrate how comments have been taken into account. This will be presented to committee alongside the planning guidance document, but it does not need to be formally published on the website when the guidance is adopted.</p>

Key Stages of Neighbourhood Plans or Orders

Central Bedfordshire is parished so Neighbourhood Plans or Orders will be produced by Parish and Town Councils, with the assistance and engagement of the community they represent. They set out policies for a prescribed area and may combine more than one parish or only relate to a particular part of a parish. The policies will be specific to the needs of the community and may cover topics such as design, protection of green space and/or allocate land for specific purposes for example. A Neighbourhood Order can effectively grant planning permission for a particular type of development or a specific development, within a specified area.

Once approved through a formal referendum with the community and adopted by the Council, they will become a formal part of the local development plan, alongside the Council's Local Plan. More information on Neighbourhood Planning is available from the [Government](#) (Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities).

Table 4: Key stages of neighbourhood plans or orders

Stage	Description
Initiation	The Town or Parish Council will resolve to produce a Neighbourhood Plan/Order and will approach the Council, submitting an application form for designation accompanied by a plan showing the extent of the Neighbourhood Area for agreement by the Council. Generally, a Steering Group will be set up as a sub-group of the Parish or Town Council to carry out the production of the Plan or Order.
Research and Issues Phase	The Steering Group will gather information about the designated area in order to assess and identify issues and opportunities for addressing the needs of the area. This will include technical information and will also constitute the views of the community and/or adjacent communities. Visions and objectives are likely to be identified during this stage. It is expected that a number of consultation exercises will be undertaken with various sectors of the community at this stage.

Stage	Description
Consultation Phase (Regulation 14)	The Neighbourhood Plan or Order will need to be published by the Town or Parish Council for a formal period, allowing representations to be submitted. The consultation will need to be advertised widely and the document will be available for comment to statutory consultees, stakeholders and any other interested parties. The comments received will be summarised and any necessary changes will be made to the document, by the Town/Parish Council's. The process, comments and outcomes will be recorded in a Consultation Statement, also produced by the Town/Parish Council.
Submission (Regulation 15 and 16)	The document will be submitted to the Council to check that it complies with legal requirements and planning policies. The Sustainability Appraisal/ Strategic Environmental assessment and the Consultation Statement will also be submitted. The Council will arrange for a further consultation and gather comments to pass on to the person carrying out the Examination.
Examination	An Examination will be carried out by a suitable person who may be an Inspector from the Government's Planning Inspectorate. It may be examined by written representation or by a public hearing. The Inspector will assess the document and will produce a report containing a recommendation on whether it should proceed to referendum.
Referendum	A referendum will be held to see if the community is in favour of the document. A simple majority is sufficient for it to succeed.
Adoption	The Local Planning Authority will adopt the Neighbourhood Plan or Order as soon as practicable following a successful referendum and it will become part of the local development plan. It will be published on the Council's website and all those who made representations will be informed. Hard copies will be available to view at Council Offices.

Strategic Environmental Assessment/Sustainability Appraisal

Local planning authorities are required to undertake a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Sustainability Appraisal (SA) of plans likely to have a significant effect on the environment, under the SEA Directive and the Planning Act. Detailed information on these requirements are available on the [Government's website](#). SA assesses the potential social, environmental and economic effects of policies, whereas SEA looks at the various environmental impacts of policies. The Directive requires that the public and relevant authorities are consulted as part of the SEA & SA process. Consultation will be undertaken as part of the screening process, when deciding the scope and level of detail to be included in the report, and when the submission report is published. It is a requirement of the Directive that comments received on consultations will be taken into account during the preparation of the plan or programme before its adoption.

Brownfield Land Register

One of the National Planning Policy Framework's (NPPF) core planning principles is to '*give substantial weight to the value of using suitable brownfield land within settlements for homes and other identified needs*'. Paragraph 120 (C) of the NPPF re-affirms this prioritisation of brownfield land.

Brownfield Land Registers were introduced by the Government in 2017. The Brownfield Land Register lists those previously developed sites within the area that are suitable for housing development. To be considered suitable for housing, sites must meet the definition of brownfield land and be:

- Capable of supporting five or more dwellings or more than 0.25 hectares;
- In a suitable location for housing (informed by national and local planning policies) and free from major constraints;
- Available for residential development; and
- Achievable (i.e. the development is likely to take place within 15 years of its entry date on the Register).

Brownfield Land Registers are arranged in two parts:

- Part 1 collates into one list those brownfield sites that are suitable for housing development; and
- Part 2 goes one step further and identifies sites where Permission in Principle will be granted.

Where sites are placed on Part 2 of a register, the principle of the residential use is effectively granted and only the details need to be agreed. Councils are only required to publish a Part 1 register. Part 2 of the register is discretionary. Central Bedfordshire Council currently only publishes Part 1 of the Register, which comprises all brownfield sites considered suitable, available and achievable for residential development.

The Brownfield Register is available to view on the Council's website and has been prepared in accordance with the requirements as set out in Brownfield Land Registers Data Standard: Preparing and publishing a register. The register is published in an 'open' format, ensuring it is accessible to those entering data and navigating the document. Part 2 of the Register grants permission in principle to sites, and as such to publish Part 2 requires further publicity, notification and consultation. Central Bedfordshire Council will consider in the update to Part 1 of the register whether to undertake Part 2 and this would be subject to further consultation.

Brownfield sites can be submitted to the Council at any time for consideration. The Council will assess the site and confirm to the applicant whether the site will be included on the Register. A [submission form and briefing note](#) is available on the Council's website. The Council will update the register at least annually.

Minerals and Waste

There is a separate SCI dealing with minerals and waste development, this can be found on the [Council's website](#).

Monitoring Feedback

The Council will ensure that comments received through consultation with stakeholders will be taken into consideration when informing the content of planning policy documents. Careful consideration will be given to how responses to consultation are addressed. Undoubtedly there will be conflicts and differences arising from these responses and there will be a need to balance these accordingly when considering responses at each stage.

At the end of every statutory consultation period, the Council will analyse the responses received and prepare a summary report. This will be presented at the Executive or Council meeting with recommendations for any changes required. Following the final stage of consultation, a consultation statement will be produced that will summarise responses received and the main issues arising.

All comments and reports will be available to view online via the consultation website and at the Council's offices on request.

Any individual, group or organisation making comments on this SCI, future Local Plan documents and supplementary planning guidance documents will be given the option to be added to a database to ensure they are automatically kept informed of all future consultation stages by either letter or email,.

Involvement in Planning Applications

The responsibility for publicising planning applications falls to local planning authorities and the requirements are set out in Government guidance and regulations. Information is available on the Council's website outlining how people can be involved in the planning application process.

The Council encourages applicants wishing to submit a planning application to enter into pre application discussions with the Council's Planning Delivery Team. This should help to identify and resolve any problems that can normally hold up the planning application and possibly help to address any objections likely to arise.

When the Council receive and register a planning application the minimum requirements of consultation and publicity is always carried out, in accordance with the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015 (as amended). However the Council may choose to carry out further publicity and consultation in specific circumstances. This may include effective and creative strategies to engage with seldom heard groups, examples of which are set out earlier in this document.

The Council produces a weekly list of all of the planning applications received, which can be viewed on the Council's website. To find out more about a particular application, members of the public can contact the case officer.

Applications are dealt with by Planning Officers in accordance with the Council's approved scheme of delegation, as set out in the [Council's Constitution](#). Applications that are more complex or controversial may be reported to Development Management Committee, in accordance with the scheme of delegation. The Committee is made up of Councillors and meets every four weeks. Committee meetings are open to the public and provided it has been arranged in advance, anyone has the right to speak. [Information about Development Management Committee](#), including

details of how to view the meeting and the arrangements for the right to speak, is available on the Council's website.

When a decision is made, it is publicised on the Council's website.

Key Stages of Planning Applications

Table 5: Key stages of planning applications

Stage	Description
Pre-application	Applicants are encouraged to discuss proposals with the Council before submitting a planning application so that potential issues can be identified at an early stage. Developers are encouraged to engage with local people and where appropriate, Town or Parish Councils and to incorporate the feedback obtained through that engagement into their proposals before submitting a planning application. Advice given by the LPA to the applicant will be published as part of the planning record once the application has been submitted.
Submission of application	The Council will publicise the planning application in accordance with the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) Order 2015 (as amended) which may include writing to any addresses that adjoin the application site; erection of site notice(s) and publicising in a local newspaper in certain circumstances. Additional consultation will be carried out where appropriate. The application will be available to view on the Council's website.
Consideration of application	Any responses that are received will be considered before a decision is made on a planning application. Where comments have been made and are relevant, they will be addressed in the planning officers report. Representations received from statutory and non-statutory technical consultees will be placed on the Council's website.
Decision	A decision will be made by the Council either by officers (under their delegated powers) or by Councillors at a Development Management Committee. The decision notice will be published on the Council's website.
Appeal (if refused)	If an applicant appeals against a decision made by the Council to the Secretary of State, the Council will write to people who commented on the planning application. They will be given the opportunity to write directly to the Planning Inspectorate, who will inform people of an appeal decision if asked to do so.

Standard Planning Applications

When a planning application is received, the Council follows a certain procedure to allow anyone who is likely to be interested to be made aware of the proposal in the first instance and allow them an opportunity to make comments. Details of every application received are sent to the local Parish or Town Council. Statutory and non-statutory consultees are notified as appropriate and weekly lists are available for people to look through what applications have been received and request details. Individual letters are sent out to any identifiable addresses adjoining the application site. Occasionally, letters are sent to properties separated from the site by a road or footpath where they are considered to be materially affected by the proposal. If no addresses are identified or if the proposal raises issues of general public interest, a notice will be put up on public land where it can be seen by people who may be interested in or affected by the proposal.

In addition, newspaper advertisements are used in local newspapers to notify people about an application in the following circumstances:

- If the site is in a Conservation Area or a listed building
- If the site is a departure from the Local Plan
- If the site affects a footpath or Right of Way
- If the application needs an Environmental Impact Assessment
- If the site is a major development

As some proposals do not need an application for planning permission and some require other types of consent, not all proposals are subject to publicity and consultation. The table below describes the different types of applications and the publicity and consultation that is relevant to each. The application type and suggested consultees are not an exhaustive but covers the most common applications. Each case will be assessed on its own merits for the level of publicity and consultation required and the Council will ensure that the minimum statutory requirements are met in every case.

Publicity for Planning Applications

Table 6: Minimum publicity for planning applications

Types of application	Site notice	Neighbour notification letter/email	Press notice in local newspaper	Website
Major Development	Discretionary to be determined on case by case basis by the Council	Yes	Yes	Yes
Minor Development	Discretionary to be determined	Yes	Yes	Yes

Types of application	Site notice	Neighbour notification letter/email	Press notice in local newspaper	Website
	on case by case basis by the Council			
Householder Applications	Discretionary to be determined on case by case basis by the Council	Yes	Yes	Yes
Applications subject to EIA which are accompanied by an Environmental Statement	Discretionary to be determined on case by case basis by the Council	Yes	Yes	Yes
Applications which do not accord with the Development Plan for the area	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Applications affecting a Public Right of Way	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Listed Building applications and applications where the Council thinks the setting of a Listed Building or conservation area would be affected	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Works to protected trees	Responsibility of the applicant	Landowner must be notified	No	Yes

Types of application	Site notice	Neighbour notification letter/email	Press notice in local newspaper	Website
Applications relating to an advertisement	Discretionary to be determined on case by case basis by the Council	Yes	Yes	Yes
Prior Notification Applications	Notification requirements depend on the type of prior notification application. The requirements are set out within the relevant sections of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 (as amended).			

There is no statutory requirement to consult on the following types of applications:

- Certificates of Lawfulness of proposed use or development;
- Certificates of Lawfulness of existing use or development;
- Approval of details/Discharge of Conditions;
- Non-material amendments.

Representations

Comments on any type of planning application should be made via our website where all plans and associated documents can be viewed. To ensure that a record of comments is kept, only written comments can be accepted. The Council will accept comments by letter or email but ideally comments should be made on-line so that all the required information is gathered in a consistent format. Online comments are the most effective mechanism to ensure comments expeditiously reach the case officer for consideration. Representations should refer only to material planning considerations.

All material planning comments are taken into account in considering planning applications. Examples of some of the material planning matters that can be taken into account when deciding a planning application are listed below. Please note this list is not exclusive:

- National planning policies and guidance
- Local planning policies and guidance
- Highway safety issues
- Impact on amenity of neighbouring properties such as overshadowing and loss of light, over dominance, noise disturbance, smells, obtrusive lighting or other impacts on amenity

- The impact on the character and appearance of the area
- Design, layout, scale, density and materials
- Traffic generation
- Car parking provision
- Impact on important trees and landscaping
- Impact on the character or setting of a listed building
- Impact on the character or appearance of a conservation area

Examples of non-material planning matters that will not be taken into account are listed below. Please note this list is not exclusive:

- Reduction in property values
- Boundary and access disputes
- Covenants and other private property matters
- Commercial competition
- Loss of a private view over land

Major Applications

Planning applications may be received that are considered to be ‘major’ as defined in the planning regulations. These include applications:

- Where the number of dwellings to be constructed is 10 or more or a site area of 0.5 hectares or more
- For all other uses where the floorspace to be built is 1,000 metres or more, or where the site area is one hectare or more
- A major change of use will also count as a major development.

These proposals may not be controversial. The exact scale of the consultation process will need to be suited to the size and likely impact of the development.

A number of situations may arise where it is felt necessary to engage people more closely in the decision-making process, for instance where community facilities are affected, or where a proposal is likely to affect a large proportion of residents. For these proposals the Council would wish to see:

- Developers or landowners take a key role in this as part of their obligation to the local community

- Consultation carried out at the earliest stage of the application process with local people to explore their reactions and optimise potential community benefits as part of the development
- Extra effort made to engage with seldom heard groups
- Exhibitions, and/or workshops being held to involve people in a non-confrontational way, if appropriate

A range of appropriate methods of involvement is set out in table 1 of this document. A statement setting out what consultation has taken place should be submitted to the Council for consideration as part of the planning application process.

‘Beyond’ Major Applications

There may be occasions where a proposal constitutes a separate order of magnitude which will have widespread implications for a large number of residents, the environment, the landscape and traffic or travel choices for example. It will be for the Council to decide which applications fall into this category but examples include a major holiday village, a new settlement etc. In these circumstances the Council will require much more effort and resources to be put into the consultation process, much of it prior to the submission of a planning application. In some cases a Development Brief will be required for the proposal which would require the involvement of stakeholders in its production. A Development Brief intends to provide firm guidance for prospective developers and the community on the form and quality of development the Council envisages for a site. A Development Brief would be used to guide the Council in making development control decisions. However, in circumstances when a proposal has already been subjected to a considerable amount of public involvement, for example, a site allocated for development in the Local Plan, less public involvement may be required.

For these developments the Council would wish to see:

- Developers or landowners take a leading role in this as part of their obligations to the local community
- Local people in the settlement affected or nearby settlements engaged
- A considerable amount of exhibitions/workshops run with the local community
- Extra effort made to engage with hard to reach groups
- Optimal community benefits identified through effective (and demonstrable) engagement with local people
- The setting up of focus groups to help resolve the particularly important issues

Any scheme for development must be drawn up with considerable (and demonstrable) local input, and local support as far as possible. A range of appropriate methods of involvement is set out earlier in this document.

The Council have prepared [guidance on Development Briefs and Design Codes](#), which is available to view on the Council’s website. This guidance sets out the requirements for preparing them and the expectations for public engagement. A statement setting out what consultation has taken

place and how comments have been taken into account should be submitted to the Council for consideration as part of the Development Brief and planning application process.

Amendments to Applications During Their Consideration

Following the initial period of consultation, it may be that further additional consultation on changes submitted by an applicant prior to any decision being made is considered necessary. The requirement to consult will be determined based on whether the proposed changes are significant and whether there were objections or concerns raised in the original consultation stage or likely to be new objections arising as a result of the changes made. Where it is decided that re-consultation is necessary, it is open to the Council to set the timeframe for responses.

Stakeholder Groups

The Council will use the Stakeholder Groups as a forum for engaging with key stakeholders on strategic scale developments. The membership of these groups will be determined by the relevant Ward Members (relevant meaning the Ward Members within whose ward the development is situated), the Executive Member for Planning and Regeneration and the Director of Place and Communities. Membership will depend on the location of the development and the nature of the proposal. The planning case officer will where necessary provide suitable administrative support and advice to the Stakeholder Group.

The primary role of the groups will be:

- Ensuring the continued engagement of local community stakeholders during the planning application process and proposed future development of the site.
- Enhancing stakeholder involvement in participatory processes, in addition to the statutory stages of consultation on the planning application.

The main function of the groups will be to:

- Provide an active, two-way channel of communication between local community representatives and Central Bedfordshire Council.
- Disseminate information about the proposed allocation or development.
- Provide regular updates on the progress of the planning application.
- Provide a forum to which planning application matters can be presented and discussed as part of a participatory planning process alongside statutory stages of consultation.
- Air local views, comments and ongoing concerns and input timely advice in relation to the planning application and any future development issues in relation to the proposed allocation.

The group will not be a formal decision making body and the accountability for the decision making on the planning application will remain with Central Bedfordshire Council.

Appeals

Planning applications may be refused by the Council. Applicants have a right of appeal against a planning application decision. There are no third party appeal rights. Appeals are made either by

written representations, a hearing or a public inquiry. When an appeal is received by the Council, all those who were consulted on the original application and those who have made comments will be informed and advised how they can make their views known. All new appeals will be displayed on the Council's website. If the appeal is to be heard at a public inquiry, a site notice will be displayed showing the time, date and location. Details will be published in local newspapers.

All representations submitted during the application stage will be forwarded to the Planning Inspectorate who decides the appeal. There is no opportunity for further representations to be made in the case of an appeal dealt with under the householder appeals service but all representations made on the planning application will be forwarded to the Inspector.

If there is a hearing or a public inquiry, it is normal procedure for the Planning Inspectorate to invite main parties to prepare a joint statement of agreed facts of common ground. Appeal hearings and inquiries are open to the public and may either be held in person, virtually or a hybrid of the two. The Planning Inspector may also arrange for a public meeting with residents at a local venue in order to hear issues directly. The Council will encourage this type of meeting in cases where there is considerable local interest. The Council will notify the Town/Parish Council and Ward Members of the outcome of any appeal and publish a copy of the appeal decision on our website.

Enforcement

If development takes place without the right approvals being obtained or development is not carried out in accordance with the planning permission, this is known as a breach of planning control and enforcement action could be taken if it is appropriate to do so. When the Council identifies that a breach of planning control has occurred there are a number of powers that it may use in response. An overview of these powers and how they are applied in Central Bedfordshire is published in the Council's adopted [Planning Enforcement Plan](#), which may be viewed on the website.

Reports of a breach of planning control, or queries relating to a potential breach of planning control, should be made via the web form on the Planning Enforcement pages on the Council's web-site. The Council are required by law to keep a publicly available register of enforcement notices that have been served but much of the information gathered during an enforcement investigation is kept strictly confidential. All the data gathered during investigations is treated in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), the Data Protection Act (DPA) and may be subject to requests under the Freedom of Information Act (FOI) and the Environmental Information Regulations (EIR). This means that the Council would not disclose the identity of a person reporting a matter without their express permission to do so.

Some investigations result in the submission of a planning application to try and regularise a breach of planning control. This means the community will be involved in the same way as any other planning application. If a breach cannot be regularised the Council will consider formal enforcement action. In doing so they must consider the degree of harm being caused and whether it is expedient to take action in the public interest. Officers are delegated to make these decisions on behalf of the Council. The Council will ensure that the enquirer is informed of decisions made in relation to the case. Further details about the process are set out in the [Planning Enforcement Plan](#), which can be viewed on the Council's website.

If the Council receive an enquiry that is not a planning enforcement matter, appropriate advice will be provided and the enquirer will be directed appropriately, where possible. Some of the things that are occasionally reported but do not fall within the scope of the planning enforcement service are:

- Disputes over land ownership and the location of boundaries
- Breaches of restrictive covenants and legal agreements
- Nuisance parking and activities on the highway that do not amount to a breach of planning control
- Building site safety
- Breaches of the Building Regulations

Dealing with Racist or other Discriminatory Representations

The Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 requires any material which is defamatory or likely to incite racial hatred or contempt, to be marked 'confidential' and not disclosed to the public. The Equality Act 2010 makes it unlawful for anyone to induce or attempt to induce another person to discriminate on the grounds of the following protected characteristics; age, disability, gender re-assignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. It also makes it a statutory duty for Central Bedfordshire Council to promote equality of opportunity and makes it unlawful for the Council to aid and abet discrimination by failing to challenge a discriminatory pressure. Anyone who, either in writing or verbally, objects on discriminatory grounds to a planning proposal is potentially contravening one of these Acts, by applying pressure to discriminate.

An example of a racist representation is one which includes words, phrases or comments which are likely to be offensive to a particular racial or ethnic group; be racially abusive, insulting or threatening; apply pressure to discriminate on racial grounds and stir up racial hatred or contempt. The same criteria would apply in relation to other protected characteristics. Where a representation is wholly discriminatory, and contains no material planning consideration, the representation is unlawful and cannot be considered or disclosed. Its receipt will not be identified in any committee report as it is not material. If the representation is discriminatory, but also contains material planning considerations, the Council may write to the respondent, explaining that only those valid planning matters will be considered or disclosed. If the Council does not write to the respondent, only valid planning matters will be considered or disclosed and content deemed to be discriminatory may be removed from the representation.

Implementation and Review

During the preparation of the documents making up the local development plan, there may be circumstances where additional community involvement would benefit those documents, for example if issues are raised during a workshop that merit further investigation. The Council reserves the right to exercise its judgement in these matters and will act in the best interests of the stakeholders, taking into account resources and deadlines.

Resources

The consultation and participation outlined in this Statement of Community Involvement will be led by the planning teams, with the assistance of other Council departments and external agencies or stakeholders where required. Staff within the Council's Strategic Growth teams will primarily carry out the consultation processes for the preparation of the Local Plan, supplementary planning guidance and neighbourhood plans. Officers from the Community Engagement Team may also provide specialist skills to involve people in consultations, such as engaging with young people. Staff within the Development Management and Technical Administration Teams will primarily carry out the public consultation processes associated with planning applications. Given the potential scale of consultation, it may be necessary or beneficial to use consultants for certain pieces of work. Examples of such are listed below, however these are by no means exhaustive and serve as an indication of where the Council may look for outside assistance if required:

- Staging and running of public meetings/workshops
- Publication of summary leaflets/flyers
- Development of any online, interactive exhibitions

Funding of the procedures set out in this SCI will be incorporated into the appropriate budgets for the forthcoming financial years. The annual budget making process and the medium-term financial strategy will determine whether further resources are required to effectively deliver the Council's programme of community involvement.

The Council is aware that residents and organisations are frequently asked to comment on documents and strategies and are anxious where possible to avoid 'consultation fatigue'. Where there is existing information, the Council will take this information into account. Opportunities for joint consultation exercises will be sought.

Review

The Statement of Community Involvement will be kept under review and revised when necessary. Revisions will be made where statutory regulations change, significant changes have been identified in the methods used to engage in consultation, or where the type of groups identified have changed.

Central Bedfordshire in contact

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