

Statement of Community Involvement

Introduction

1. This document outlines the different processes that the Planning Directorate at Epping Forest District Council go through in determining a planning application or publishing a Local Plan. It also gives an indication of how people can get involved at each stage and where to find supporting information.

Contacting Us

General Enquiries

2. If you want to contact us outside of a consultation period the Planning Reception in the Civic Offices is staffed between 9am and 1pm Monday to Friday. A list of Planning Directorate contact details is also contained within the Appendix for ease of use.

How to respond to Consultations on Local Plans or Planning Applications

3. Epping Forest District Council will try and increase the number of responses received by using a range of consultation techniques. These will include:
 - Information Leaflet and Questionnaire;
 - Commuter Postcards;
 - Community and Stakeholder Workshops;
 - Public Information Exhibitions;
 - The Council's Website;
 - Press releases and information on amenity group websites e.g. The Local Talk: <http://thelocaltalk.net/eppingforest/>
4. Written representations to both Local Plan consultations or Planning Applications can be made on the Council's website or by written submissions addressed to the relevant planning team at the Civic Offices. There is also a weekly list of all planning applications that have been submitted and this too can be found on the Council's website.

How we will contact you

Consultees

5. There are two broad categories of agencies the Council has to contact with regard to any proposals in the District:
 - a. Statutory consultees - These are agencies that must be consulted if they are affected by the proposals. These include organisations such as the Environment Agency and Thames Water.

- b. General Consultees - These are consultees that will be contacted as the Council considers appropriate. For example local community and amenity groups, resident associations, business sector, developers, landowners and other agencies.
6. These consultees will be contacted formally through letter and/ or email from the Council. Members of the public that have also previously responded to a Forward Planning consultation will be held on our database and will also be notified of any consultation period. Members of the public that have not previously responded to a consultation will be informed via the local newspaper and the Council's website. Further information about each stage of the consultation on Local Plans or Planning Applications can be found in the relevant section below.

Local Plan

7. The local plan is a document which outlines the policies which will influence development in the District up until 2033. Both the Local Plan and the supporting studies will be available to view on the Council's website.

Supporting Documents

8. There are a number of studies which are used as background evidence to the main Local Plan document. The studies are used to help guide the policies that are going to be in the final document and perhaps identify options that are not feasible. These will be available from the Council offices or on the Council's website when they are finalised.
9. A full list and timetable of when these are likely to be produced is available in the Local Development Scheme, available from the Council Offices or on the Council's website. This outlines the various documents that will be produced and dates for their estimated preparation and revision.
10. The Council will try to keep the Local Development Scheme as up to date as possible to make sure that the general public and agents can see the timetable for the production of the Local Plan and the opportunities for engagement.

Local Plan Production

11. There are a number of different stages in the production of the Local Plan and these are explained, with how you can get involved, below:

Stage One – Researching/ Gathering Evidence (ongoing)

12. This process involves Officers researching and gathering evidence to guide what is included in the Local Plan. This may involve processes such as the Call for Sites in which interested landowners and their agents can suggest their land for future development allocations.
13. Stakeholder briefings/ workshops will also be held to make sure that the Council gets as many specialist opinions at an early stage as possible; particularly in relation to the supporting evidence base documents. Dedicated briefings and workshops will be held for evidence base reports and findings

from our consultants; for example the Strategic Land Availability Assessment and the Open Space Strategy and the Heritage Review. These will involve interested groups, including local amenity groups, Town and Parish Councils and agents.

14. This process of gathering evidence including via engagement, will also help to make sure that the information used can be seen as 'robust' by the Inspector towards the latter stage of the processes.

Community Visioning (complete)

15. 'Community Visioning' was a consultation and public engagement exercise which was undertaken by the Council to understand their views on the issues within the District as well as the priorities for the next 20 years. This took place from November 2010 to January 2011. In order to publicise this event we used the consultation methods mentioned previously in paragraph 3.
16. The Council will use the same techniques to consult on the latter stages of the Local Plan process.

The outcome of the Visioning exercise can be found on the Council's website (<http://www.eppingforestdc.gov.uk/index.php/home/file-store/category/108-new-local-plan>)

Stage Two - Issues and Options Preparation (complete)

17. The Council drafted and consulted upon an Issues and Options document called 'Community Choices'. The document includes ideas that have been raised as part of the Community Visioning exercise, as well as ideas and issues we have to consult upon by law. There are a range of different options to try and gauge public opinion on certain issues such as housing targets, green infrastructure and transport. The consultation results will be used to decide whether our strategic direction/vision for the District continues to be in line with public opinion and what specific Development Control policies are going to be included in the Local Plan document.

Stage Three - First Public Consultation (Issues & Options) (complete)

18. This consultation ran for 11 weeks from 30 July to 15 October 2012 and was open to comments from both consultees and the general public.
19. For statutory consultees a formal letter set out the subject of the Local Plan and invited representations.
20. For the general public a series of information drop in sessions took place at various locations around the district at a variety of times.
21. All documents were made available at the Council Offices, libraries within the District and the Council's website. The consultation was also advertised via local media, including local papers and social media such as Twitter.
22. Documents could be provided in other formats where required, including large print.

Stage Four – Draft Plan Preparation (Preferred Options) (current stage)

23. When consultation responses are received, each is logged and the response given a unique identification number. Each is acknowledged by email or post depending upon the form of receipt. The Council has to account for the issues raised in consultation and report on them to the inspector when the plan is submitted- see stage six and seven below. Therefore each response must be read, considered and a view reached as to the weight given to the response alongside the other aspects of evidence used in plan making. The consultation responses are also reported to members to assist them in their deliberations.
24. Now that consultation responses have been received from the Community Choices exercise, the Forward Planning team will take account of the comments made and develop the policies with these in mind. Consultation comments that are deemed discriminatory will not be accepted. Comments made on the Draft Plan will be made available to view on the Council's website where further information will be given about the next stage of the process. The Council will correspond with all those who have submitted comments to the process to ensure they are kept up to date. This will be done largely via email, but where email addresses have not been supplied they will be sent out to home/ business addresses.

Stage Five – Second Public Consultation- the draft plan

25. The second consultation period will again be for a minimum of 6 weeks and it may be the final opportunity for the general public and stakeholders to have their say on the content of the document.
26. If people have commented on a previous consultation, a letter or email will be sent to them personally to tell them the details of the consultation period, including dates, times and locations. This consultation will also be advertised by the same means as the Community Choices consultation and the website regularly updated.

Stage Six – Submission Plan Preparation

27. During this stage all comments made during the second round of consultation will be taken into account where possible. These comments will again be able to be viewed on the Council's website and a newsletter once again produced detailing the next steps.
28. The Council Officers will then amend any text or diagrams accordingly. The final document will then be agreed by Full Council before being published for representations on the 'soundness' of the plan. The plan must meet legal requirements and be sound. The soundness tests mean that the plan should be positively prepared, based on objectively assessed needs, justified and effective as well as consistent with National Policy. It is these legal and soundness tests that the Inspector considers at the Local Plan Examination, towards the end of the process.

Stage Seven - Submission Plan representations period

29. The period for representations on the 'soundness' of the plan is 6 weeks. At this point comments are invited via a form on the Council's website and in paper form accompanying the documents. A guidance note will be provided to help fill in the form. Any representations should be based on why the document is unsound and the changes that are needed to make it sound. Representations made cannot remain confidential as the examination is a public process.

Stage Eight – Submission

30. Epping Forest District Council must submit one paper and one electronic copy of all the documents to the Secretary of State for examination. A summary of the main issues raised in the consultation responses and who was consulted will also be supplied in addition to a statement on how the Council has fulfilled its 'Duty to Co operate' with neighbouring Councils. As soon as the Council has dates of when the Examination in Public is likely to be these will be published on our website, as well as Social Media. Closer to the date we will also ensure that the Examination is advertised in the local paper.

Stage Nine - Examination Period

31. An independent Inspector from the Planning Inspectorate will look at whether the Local Plan is sound and consider the supporting documents.
32. He/she will make sure that all evidence supports the plan and that the main issues of the consultation have been investigated and taken into account.
33. When Epping Forest District Council submits the documents for examination copies of the document will be available on the Website, at the Civic Offices and in public libraries. An advert will be put in the local paper giving notice that it has submitted the document.
34. The Inspector will decide to hold part of the examination as a hearing in public. The hearing tries to focus the discussions to test the evidence.
35. In addition to the hearing, written representations will also be taken into account from the people that have an interest in the document. Written representations are treated with equal importance. The length of the examination will depend on how complicated the document is and also the representations made. However the Council will try and keep the public informed as much as possible via the Council's website and the local newspaper with regards to possible timeframes.
36. During the examination the Council may suggest proposed changes in discussion with the inspector; these may result in suspension of the examination and further public consultation.

Stage Ten – Adoption

37. A report from the Inspector is received, usually within 12 months from when the document is submitted. However the Council will ensure early contact with

the Planning Inspectorate to try and shorten this timeframe as much as possible.

38. Once the Inspector has come to his/her decision about the 'soundness' of the Local Plan it will need to be formally adopted by the Council.
39. The Council will publish the Inspector's report and inform those people that wanted to be made aware of its publication that it is available. The report will also be made available in the Civic Offices, as well as on the Council website and other venues such as public libraries.
40. When adopted the Local Plan will replace any local existing guidance, including the Local Plan Alterations of 2006.

Planning Applications

The Pre-Application Stage

41. The size, or how controversial a planning application is, will determine what pre-consultation methods are used. Pre-consultation is generally required concerning major development and infrastructure projects and a fee for this service applies. Early engagement with applicants and communities is encouraged and often allows issues that might be a problem later to be solved before an application is submitted. If any more information is needed about this please contact a member of the Planning Development Control Team (Contact details are contained within the Appendix)

The Application Stage

Public Consultation on Planning Applications

42. There are specific ways that the Council will publicise planning applications once they have been formally submitted, these are:
 - Advertisements in local papers; in the case of applications for listed building consent or affecting the setting of a listed building, conservation area consent, departures from the Local Plan, major developments or for applications of wider concern and regarding public rights of way.
 - Site notices;
 - Weekly planning application lists on the Council's website;
 - Notification to neighbours by letter including neighbours that are not within the Epping Forest District boundary.
43. The Council is also required to consult statutory bodies, for example Town and Parish Councils, infrastructure providers and environmental groups, on certain planning applications. As a minimum the Council will notify all properties that share a boundary with the application site of a planning application.

44. The planning applications can be viewed at the Council Offices or via the Council's website. Neighbours are given 21 days to comment. Written representations can be made on the Council's website or by post addressed to the relevant planning officer at the Civic Officer.

The Decision Stage

45. The decision is made either by an Area Committee or by officers under delegated powers. Some applications are decided at District Development Control committee when they have been referred by the Area Committee, or are a major development deemed to be of district/wider importance. Once a decision on an application has been reached the Council will write to anyone who has made a representation and let them know the outcome.
46. The Council should normally determine applications within 8 weeks of accepting it as valid. For major developments it is 13 weeks. If the applicant has agreed with the Council, in writing, a period longer than 8 or 13 weeks will be the period for determination. If the council has failed to determine the application within the relevant timeframe an appeal can be made to the Planning Inspectorate.

The Post-Application Stage

47. The applicant can appeal the decision. For Household applications this has to be done within 12 weeks of the decision and for other applications the time limit is 6 months. Third parties do not have a right of appeal.
48. If the applicant wishes to appeal the decision there are three methods:
- Written Representations;
 - Hearing;
 - Inquiry.
49. More information about what is involved in each method is available on the Planning Portal website or the Council's website.
50. If an appeal is lodged and you have commented on a householder or non-householder application you will be notified. However you will only be invited to make further comments in the case of appeals relating to non-householder applications.

The Role of Ward Councillors in Planning

51. The Council has three Area Sub Committees dealing with planning applications. If you want to make your views known at one of these committees a detailed guide called "Your Voice, Your Choice" can be found on our website, this explains what happens in committees.

The Role of Parish Councillors in Planning

52. The Parish Councils act as consultees on planning applications within the parish and are able to make their views known through this route. In

addition the Parish Councils are kept up to date regarding forthcoming and current planning policy consultations.

Neighbourhood Development Plans

53. Communities now have the ability to produce Neighbourhood Development Plans which if examined, and passing a referendum become part of the Development Plan. The Council has a duty to assist and advise communities in this respect. Because Neighbourhood Development Plans have to conform to the strategic policies of the Council's Local Plan the Council is currently focussing its attention on the Epping Forest Local Plan. Further guidance will be given in the future in relation to the advice and assistance available.

Appendix

Planning Contact Details

General Queries:

Epping Forest District Council Main Reception:

Tel: 01992 564000

If you wish to contact the Planning Directorate you can ring the Councils Main Reception and ask to be put through to the Planning Reception (Extension Number 3140) between the hours of 0900 and 1300.

If you wish to contact us via email: contactplanning@eppingforestdc.gov.uk

Or alternatively you can fax us on: 01992 564229

Forward Planning:

For issues relating to the Local Plan or Planning Policies you can contact the Forward Planning Team, Monday to Friday between the hours of 0900 and 1700:

Tel: 01992 564517

Email: Ldfconsult@eppingforestdc.gov.uk

Development Control:

For queries relating to planning applications, permissions or appeals these should be directed to the Development Control Team.

Between the hours of 1030 and 1300 Monday to Friday you can contact the Duty Officer on 01992 564477

Visit Planning reception on 2nd floor of the Council Civic Offices, Epping between 0900 and 1300 Monday to Friday

The Council website

Is found at www.eppingforestdc.gov.uk

The Local Plan/ Planning Our Future webpage:

<http://www.eppingforestdc.gov.uk/index.php/contact-us/consultation/planning-our-future>

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