

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 for anything the Planning Reception in the Civic Offices is manned 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

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 Councils 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 are able to be made on the Councils 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 Councils website.

How we will contact you

Consultees

5. There are two broad categories of agencies the Council has to contact with regards 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 statutory consultees and service providers; for example 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 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 Councils website. Further information about each stage of the consultation can be found below.

Local Plan

7. The local plan is a document which outlines the policies which will influence development in the District up until 2031. Both the Local Plan and the supporting studies will be available to view on the Councils 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.
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 Councils 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 this as up to date as possible to make sure that the general public and agents can see when documents are going to be produced and consulted on and any possible shifts in the timescales.

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

12. This process involves Officers researching and gathering evidence to guide what is necessary to be 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 public 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. In the case of the Heritage Review evidence base document a dedicated consultation will take place with interested groups, including local amenity groups, early on in the process. Town and Parish Councils and agents have also been involved in these process.
14. This 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

15. 'Community Visioning' is a consultation and public engagement exercise which is 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/planningourfuture/default.asp>).

Stage Two - Issues and Options Preparation

17. The Council will draft an Issues and Options document. The document will include 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 will be a range of different options to try and gauge public opinion on certain issues such as housing targets, green infrastructure and transport.. This can later be used to decide whether our strategic direction/vision for the District continues to be in line with public opinion and what specific Development Management policies are going to be included in the Local Plan document.

Stage Three - First Public Consultation (Issues & Options)

18. This consultation will run for a minimum of 6 weeks and will be open to comments from both consultees and the general public. We will update the website regularly to ensure the public know in plenty of time when the consultation will start. This will also outline how representations can be made and where to get further information.
19. For statutory consultees a formal letter will set out the subject of the Local Plan and invite representations.
20. For the general public there will be a series of workshops which will take place at various locations around the district at a variety of times. Times will include evening and weekends as well as day time sessions to try and make sure all sections of the community are able to attend if they wish.
21. All documents will also be available at the Council Offices, libraries within the District and the Councils website. We will also advertise the consultation via local media, including local papers and social media such as Twitter.
22. Documents can be provided in other formats where required, including large print.

Stage Four – Draft Plan Preparation (Preferred Options)

23. Once consultation responses have been received the Forward Planning team will take account of the comments made and develop the policies with these in mind. Consultation comments must not be deemed discriminatory as these will not be accepted. Comments made on the Draft Plan will be made available to view on the Councils website and further information will be given about the next stage of the process. The Council will send out a newsletter to 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

24. The second consultation period will again be for a minimum of 6 weeks and it is the final opportunity for the general public and stakeholders to have their say on the document. It is hoped that due to the previous consultation process any comments at this stage will be concentrated on issues such as changes in wording.
25. If people have commented on the first consultation an letter/ email will be sent to them personally to tell them the details of the consultation period, including dates, times and locations. The consultation will also be advertised by the same means as the first one and the website regularly updated.
26. Given that the draft document will have been produced in line with the previous consultation the document at this stage should be considered 'sound'. There is no legal definition of 'sound' but it means that the document can be justified, is a balanced assessment taking into account all information

including public consultations, and agrees with National Policy. It is this that the Inspector considers at the Examination in Public, towards the end of the process.

Stage Six - Plan Preparation

27. During this stage all comments made during the second round of consultations will be taken into account where possible. These comments will again be able to viewed on the Councils 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 Committee before being sent to the Planning Inspectorate.

Stage Seven - Submission to the Planning Inspectorate for Examination

29. 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. 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 Eight - Examination Period

30. An independent Inspector from the Planning Inspectorate will look at whether the Local Plan and its supporting documents are acceptable and in line with planning guidance.
31. They will make sure that all evidence has been collected in the correct way and that the main issues of the consultation have been investigated and taken into account.
32. When Epping Forest District Council submits the documents for examination copies of the document will be available of 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.
33. At this point comments are able to be made via a form on the Council's website or there will be a paper copy of the form available within the same locations as the documents. A guidance note will also be provided to help fill in the form and also with details of where and when to send the form in.
34. The Inspector will decide whether to hold the examination as a 'round-table' discussion or as a hearing. Round-table discussions allow people to talk informally on a variety of issues. A hearing tries to focus the discussions and is usually used where there are strongly opposed views, where people are supported by legal representation or where evidence may need to be formally tested.
35. In addition to the methods mentioned above written representations will also be taken into account with the people that have an interest in the document. Written representations are treated with equal importance. Any

representations should be based on why the document is unsound and the changes that you think are needed to make it sound. Representations made cannot remain confidential as the examination is a public process.

36. 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 Councils website and the local newspaper with regards to possible timeframes.

Stage Nine – Adoption/ Redo

37. A decision should be made by the Inspector within 12 months from when the document is submitted.
38. Once the Inspector has come to their decision about the 'soundness' of the Local Plan it will either be adopted or the Council will have to amend certain sections based on their recommendations.
39. The Council will publish the Inspectors 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. Depending on the size or how controversial a planning application is will determine what pre-consultation methods are used. Pre-consultation is not generally required by law, subject to the Localism Act and concerning major development and infrastructure projects. However early engagement 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 four ways that the Council will publicise planning applications once they have been formally submitted, these are:
- Advertisements in local papers;
 - Site notices;
 - Weekly planning application lists;
 - Notification to neighbours by letter.
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 Councils website. Neighbours are given 21 days to comment.

The Decision Stage

45. 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 decide your application within 8 weeks of accepting it as valid, For major developments it is 13 weeks. If you have agreed with the Council, in writing, a period longer than 8 or 13 weeks, but we have failed to decide your application the Planning Inspectorate must receive your appeal within 6 months of the end of that extended period.

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 to choose from:
- Written Representations;
 - Hearing;
 - Inquiry.
49. The Applicant and Epping Council will be able to pick which appeal method is most appropriate, depending on the circumstances. More information about

what is involved in each method is available on the Planning Portal website or the Councils 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.

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