

Dartford's Statement of Community Involvement



Adopted March 2006

Part of Dartford's Local Development Framework

DARTFORD
BOROUGH COUNCIL



Dartford's Local Development Framework

Statement of Community Involvement

This document is also available in large print

March 2006

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SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

ABOUT THE STATEMENT OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

1.1 The Council has started work on a Local Development Framework for its area. This is a new type of document which explains the Council's proposals for planning and development. You can read more about the Local Development Framework and why it is important in Appendix 1.

1.2 The Council wishes to involve the community at all stages in the preparation of the Local Development Framework. This document, the Statement of Community Involvement (SCI), sets out how the Council proposes to involve people in the process. It also sets out proposals for greater community involvement in certain types of planning applications.

1.3 The Statement of Community Involvement is a statutory document – the law requires the Council to prepare one. However the Council is committed to involving the community in important decisions, and would in any event be working to ensure that community involvement in planning is effective.

1.4 An independent examination of the Dartford Borough Council Statement of Community Involvement has been carried out by the Planning Inspectorate in accordance with the regulations. This Statement has been amended to incorporate the binding changes set out in the Inspector's Report and it has been adopted by the General Assembly of the Council at its meeting on (date to be inserted).

SECTION 2: THE COUNCIL'S PROPOSALS FOR COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

HOW DOCUMENTS WILL BE MADE AVAILABLE FOR COMMENT

2.1 We will publish all of the draft Local Development Framework (LDF) documents on the Council's website (www.dartford.gov.uk) and provide a facility for you to comment online. In this way, you will be able to view the documents and comment on them when it is most convenient for you. Correspondence by e-mail will be used more widely in future consultations.

2.2 The Council is improving its planning policy webpage. This is at the 'trial' stage. As soon as it is finalised it will be included in all documentation.

2.3 If you do not have access to the internet, you may be interested to know that there are terminals available for public use at all local libraries¹, the Swanscombe Cyber Place in the Parade, Swanscombe, and the '1stbyte Centre' at St Edmund's, Temple Hill. Public access specifically for young people is also available at the Connexions centre in Hythe Street in Dartford. We aim to keep this list up-to-date, so please let us know of any other community-based internet access points that we have overlooked, or which are established in the coming years.

2.4 We will also place copies of all the draft Local Development Framework documents in public buildings throughout the Borough, including the Civic Centre, Parish and Town Council offices and local libraries. We will investigate the possibility of using other venues.

2.5 Comment forms will be available at each of these locations, and where the owners of these venues are willing arrangements will be made for completed forms to be left at these locations so that you do not have to post them or take them to the Civic Centre.

2.6 Reference and loan copies will be made available at libraries and organisations will be able to obtain loan copies on request from the Council.

2.7 We will send out consultation documents for the start of each consultation period, in either electronic or paper format as requested.

through the website, the Council's newsletter, the Borough News, or by letter to those who asked to be kept in touch this way.

KEEPING YOU UP TO DATE

2.9 The Council's website will also include a page about the Local Development Framework. This will be kept up to date with "*What's New*" bulletins, giving details of

¹ in Ashen Drive, at Central Park Dartford, Fleetdown, Greenhithe, Longfield, Summerhouse Drive, Sutton-at-Hone, Swan Valley Discovery Centre and Temple Hill Square

events, meetings, exhibitions and other important information. Any new background information, such as survey results, will also be posted on the website. We will write to those who have asked to be kept in touch by letter.

2.10 We will also publish regular articles in the Council's newspaper, the *Borough News*, both to provide information and to stimulate discussion and debate. With the consent of other organisations we will include articles and information in their newsletters.

2.11 Important dates will be publicised in the local newspapers.

2.12 We intend to produce leaflets and posters about the Local Development Framework and how to become involved in it, which will be made available in public buildings. We will establish and keep up to date a list of venues, noticeboards and websites where posters can be displayed and information/leaflets made available. We would like to hear from groups and organisations who would be willing to display posters and have leaflets available in reception areas.

ENCOURAGING DISCUSSION AND DEBATE

2.13 The Council wants to involve you in important discussions about the future of Dartford. We will try to keep documents free of unnecessary jargon to encourage people to comment. The LDF system places considerable emphasis on frontloading – that is early and effective consultation. As such the Council will ensure that there is sufficient time and resources made available for early consultation.

2.14 Annex E of Planning Policy Statement 12 "Local Development Frameworks" sets out a list of organisations that must be consulted and those that the authority may consider consulting. The Council will take account of this list when consulting. The Council is aware that this list does not include local businesses, landowners, developers or groups or private individuals and will include them as specific groups to target. To address this matter the Council has established a list of people and groups who wish to be involved in the process. This list will always be open for revision. Please contact the Planning Policy Team if you wish to be included.

2.15 Throughout the summer of 2005 there will be a series of public meetings and topic-based workshops where you can have your say about the Local Development Framework. There will also be public exhibitions, including the Council's caravan where appropriate, where you can find out more, and discuss issues with Council officers and with elected members. Dates, times and venues will be publicised as described in the previous section. We will investigate the potential of venues and locations such as supermarkets or a market stall. A register of venues that are suitable for public meetings will be established.

2.17 Major local consultees such as the Parish and Town Councils and the Dartford Youth Council will have an important role to play in highlighting local concerns and wishes for debate and discussion.

2.18 In some cases, Council officers may be able to attend your organisation's own meeting to discuss the Local Development Framework. Obviously we will need to keep these meetings to a manageable number, and so we cannot guarantee all organisations and groups their own meeting. Please let us know if your organisation would be interested in receiving a presentation from the Council.

2.19 The Council recognises the advantages of joint community involvement processes where these other processes can be used to gather further information or validate local objectives and priorities. Where there are common aims or needs, the Council will co-ordinate its efforts to make more efficient use of resources and emerging information.

2.20 We are considering setting up a *Chat Room* for the Local Development Framework on the Council's website. This would enable you to see what other citizens and organisations are saying about Dartford's key planning issues, and exchange views and ideas with them.

2.21 When the Council considers the draft Local Development Framework documents shortly before they are published for final comment, there will be a formal debate by the General Assembly of the Council. The public are welcome to sit in the public gallery and hear what the Council's elected members think about the Local Development Framework. The Council will consider webcasting the debate, if it appears that there will be a significant amount of public interest.

FORMAL OBJECTIONS AND REPRESENTATIONS

2.22 After you have had the opportunity to comment on the draft Local Development Framework documents toward the end of 2005, all representations received will be presented to the Cabinet and General Assembly of the Council who will consider them, form a view, and decide what changes need to be made. Then, in February 2006, it will publish a revised Local Development Framework (the revised Town Centre Action Plan will be published in March 2006).

2.23 You will have six weeks from the date of publication to make formal comments either objecting to the documents or making other representations about them. You will then be entitled to have these comments considered by an independent Inspector at a Public Inquiry or Examination. If new sites are suggested, or further changes, these will be publicised and the opportunity will be given for further comment.

2.24 The Public Examination period has been scheduled to start in September 2006. We will keep you informed of any changes in the programme.

SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING DOCUMENTS

2.25 Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD) provide additional policy guidance when the LDF policies are not detailed enough to deal with specific issues. Supplementary Planning Documents can be site specific, such as a design brief, or theme based such as setting out standards for public open space. SPDs are taken into account when determining planning applications.

2.26 At present, the work programme for the LDF does not envisage any Supplementary Planning Documents being prepared at least until the draft LDF documents are published in draft towards the end of the year. However, it is possible that SPDs may be needed if sites come forward for development. If so, we will publicise our intention to prepare an SPD, and make arrangements for involving landowners, developers, statutory consultees and the local community in the process. Please let us know if you belong to an interest group which is likely to have an interest in particular types of planning policy.

2.27 These arrangements will depend on the type of SPD being prepared. In the case of a site-specific SPD such as a design brief for a development site, it is likely that we will arrange planning workshops where local residents can play an active part in planning the site – a recent example of this approach was the Greenhithe Planning Workshop, which led to the adoption of a development and design brief for two waterfront sites in Greenhithe. Where appropriate the Council will arrange meetings aimed at specific age or interest groups, such as the Dartford Youth Council.

2.28 Where SPD is needed for a borough-wide theme we will consider whether there are any interest groups which are likely to have a particular view or need to be involved in drafting guidance. It may be appropriate to have one-to-one meetings with such groups, or to arrange special focus group discussions. We may use the website to enable groups and individuals to identify themselves.

2.29 The Council will publicise the publication of the draft SPD via the website and local newspapers, and place it on reference in selected locations. Site notice(s) will also be displayed on-site if it is a site based brief.

REPORTING BACK

2.30 Once we have heard what you have to say about the LDF your comments will be presented to the Cabinet and General Assembly of the Council who will consider them, form a view and decide what changes to the plan are needed, and include these before the next draft is published.

2.31 After each consultation stage we will produce a report outlining how the comments received have influenced the next stage, and make this available to you.

2.32 We will also prepare a statement of compliance for each Local Development Framework document. This will provide a record of what steps the Council has taken to involve the community in the plan-making process, how this fits with the Statement of Community Involvement, and how community involvement has shaped the document.

'HARD TO REACH' GROUPS

2.33 There are a number of reasons why certain groups in the community do not become involved in the Council's planning and other activities. We are very keen to identify different ways of involving these people.

2.34 Some groups and individuals simply do not find planning sufficiently interesting, even though it affects the future of Dartford in important ways. We will use the website, our printed literature and press articles to emphasise the importance of planning, and try to set these out in an attractive, accessible way (there is a statement about the Local Development Framework included in this document at Appendix 1).

2.35 Many people live busy lives and cannot spare the time to attend daytime meetings or come to the Civic Centre during working hours to read lengthy documents. Commuters may have particular problems in finding the time to participate in traditional consultation exercises. We hope that the Council's website will give many of these people a new way of accessing information and making their views known at a time which is convenient to them. We will also ensure there are short, clear summaries of the documents, and when leaflets are used to publicise aspects of the Local Development Framework or to conduct surveys. We will consider special leaflet drops at stations and investigate the potential for drop-off points at stations. We will also consider early morning and late sessions at venues close to stations, such as the Civic Centre.

2.36 The Council does not intend to produce the LDF documents in any language other than English in the first instance. If a member of the public requests a translation, one will be provided. However it may be more helpful to first offer the services of an interpreter. The Council can provide this service on request, although reasonable notice is required. We can also produce documents in Braille.

2.37 We will ensure that any public meetings are held in buildings which are compliant with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act.

2.38 The Royal Town Planning Institute has set up a new "Planning Aid" service, the purpose of which is to help local individuals and communities understand and get involved in planning. A Planning Aid worker has been assigned to the Kent Thameside area (Dartford and Gravesham) because of its focus as a growth area. The Council will involve the Planning Aid worker in all of its community involvement proposals, in the expectation that he will then help to forge links with "hard to reach" groups.

2.39 We will also seek the involvement of the following organisations, in an effort to extend the network of consultation to "hard to reach" groups:

- any Primary Care focus groups that may exist, the Red Cross, Age Concern, Queen Elizabeth Foundation
- other community outreach workers such as schools' family liaison officers
- Planning Aid's Community Planner

- Swanscombe Neighbourhood Co-ordinator
- North Kent Chamber of Commerce
- Dartford Town Centre Partnership
- Community Development Officers
- Racial Equality Council
- North Kent Council for Inter Faith Relations
- Schools and Youth Groups

REVIEWING THE STATEMENT OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

2.40 This Statement of Community Involvement sets out our ideas and proposals for involving people in the preparation of the Local Development Framework. By the time it is adopted, we hope to have received a range of comments and suggestions which will have helped to shape its proposals.

2.41 However that is not the end of the story. Once community involvement is under way, we will review how effective our efforts have been, learning what has worked and what could work better. Changes will be made when and where necessary to improve our communication with you as well as your involvement.

2.42 We will review each consultation method to find out if it:

- Gave you the information you needed
- Gave us the type of feedback we needed
- Actively encouraged more people to be involved
- Involved different types of people and organisations
- Allowed participants the opportunity to have their views heard and recorded
- Resulted in participants feeling their involvement was worthwhile.

2.43 The Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) is prepared at the end of each calendar year and will include a section on consultation. This will include conclusions from the review(s) of consultations undertaken that year and 'best practice'. If this experience shows that changes are required the AMR will set out what improvements will be made.

SECTION THREE: RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

3.1 Greater community involvement is likely to require additional resources and time. We will use resources efficiently by:

- Making use of the skills of staff.
- Linking consultation exercises on different Development Plan Document where this would be appropriate.
- Linking in with other suitable consultation activities being undertaken in the area.
- working through our existing relationships with partners and bodies representing local communities, such as Town and Parish Councils and recognised Residents' Associations;
- Learning from and, where possible, making use of the skills of other organisations such as the Local Strategic Partnership, Health Trusts, Kent Thameside Delivery Board, Groundwork Kent Thames-side and Kent Thameside Planning Aid.
- Choosing the most appropriate, efficient and effective method. The methods we will use at any particular time will depend on the resources we have available and the effectiveness of that method in achieving the commitments set out in this SCI

SECTION 4: PLANNING APPLICATIONS AND DEVELOPMENT PROPOSALS

PLANNING APPLICATIONS

4.1 Appendix 3 shows how the Council currently consults with the local community and other interested parties when a planning application is received. This approach generally exceeds the minimum requirements of the planning legislation. This will be our normal approach.

4.2 When it appears likely that planning applications will generate significant public interest, for example if the proposals are large in scale, or are likely to affect a local community, or perhaps do not comply with the Council's planning policies, the Council will consider some or all of the following additional measures:

- **Posting news items on the Council's website** – these can be used to describe the proposals, alert the public to any amendments which might be submitted, remind consultees about the closing date for comments, publicise the date when the decision is due to be made, and publicise the decision itself. If public meetings or exhibitions are to be held, the website can also be used to publicise these details.
- **Public meetings** – occasionally the Chairman of the Development Control Board will decide that a public meeting would be the best way of publicising proposals and allowing Members to hear the views of the public. When a public meeting is arranged, the Chairman of the Development Control Board will decide who is to chair it, and where it will be held. This will be a venue close to the application site wherever feasible.

(Sometimes members of the public or local groups hold their own public meetings, and invite the Council. We cannot promise always to attend such meetings; it will depend on the circumstances, and on whether the Council judges that a public meeting will be of genuine value)

- **Parish Council and Town Council meetings** – sometimes the Council will attend the scheduled meetings of Parish Councils and Town Councils to explain proposals and hear the views of these bodies.

CONSULTATION BY DEVELOPERS

4.3 The best time to influence development proposals can be before a planning application has been submitted and ideas have become fixed. The Council encourages developers to discuss their proposals with the Council at an early stage.

4.4 In certain cases, such as proposals that are large in scale, or are likely to affect a local community or perhaps do not comply with the Council's planning policies, we will encourage developers to undertake pre-application public consultation. This could take the form of leaflet drops, public meetings or public exhibition so that members of the public can discuss their proposals with them.

Some developers also provide websites for their developments. In these cases, we will provide links from the Council's own website.

4.5 Whilst the Council cannot insist that developers carry out any consultation it will encourage them to undertake pre-application consultation with local people, Town and Parish Councils and utility undertakers as early as possible. Where developers propose a public exhibition we will aim to ensure as follows:

- Developers should liaise with the Council with regard to any planned exhibitions, and the Council will provide advice on venues, important local contacts, etc.
- When organising a public exhibition, developers need to ensure that the chosen venue is accessible for the less mobile, and is close to the site of the proposed development.
- Exhibitions should be well publicised in the locality.
- Exhibitions need to be held over several days at different times, allowing different groups to attend.
- Exhibitions should be supported by written material that can be taken away and referred to.
- Visitors should be able to register their attendance (the Council can assess the extent of consultation and then use the list for any follow – up contact)
- Visitors should be able to record their opinions / feedback – preferably in an interactive way that allows subsequent visitors to react to views expressed.
- The developers should prepare a report summarising the process, identifying local concerns (where appropriate the Council will seek verification of this summary) and showing how these have influenced the resulting application process. This report should be submitted to the Council at the time of application.

Appendix 1

The Local Development Framework – Part of the Modern Planning Policy System

A1.1 Planning plays a vital role in creating places and communities where people can feel satisfied with their quality of life. It also has to deal with difficult choices, for example finding the right balance between meeting the demand for more homes, and protecting the character of local towns, villages and countryside.

A1.2 Some of these aspects are dealt with at regional or national level – for example Dartford has been designated by the Government as part of the Thames Gateway growth area, one of four such areas in the South East which are expected to absorb much of the region's growth.

A1.3 The Council has little say in whether Dartford is in a growth area, but it makes its voice heard through the new regional planning process (the South East Plan) on issues such as the amount of new development which it believes the area can absorb, and the infrastructure which is needed to support this. The outcome of this will be a housing target which will be set by the South East Regional Planning Board.

A1.4 There are many other important planning decisions which are made locally by the Council: these include deciding which sites will be selected for development, the mix of uses on these sites, the design and development principles for them, which areas should be protected from development, and so on.

A1.5 These matters are included in a Local Development Framework, which sets out all of the Council's planning policies and proposals for the next ten to fifteen years. The Local Development Framework is part of a new planning system recently introduced by the Government. It is similar in many respects to the Local Plan which used to detail the Council's planning policies and proposals, but with two important differences.

A1.6 First, there will be a greater connection between the Council's land use objectives and the spatial requirements of related strategies, including those of the Local Strategic Partnership, which is responsible for producing a Community Strategy for its area. Community involvement on the Local Development Framework needs to proceed alongside the review of the Community Strategy. In this way, the Local Development Framework is more likely to reflect the planning requirements of the Council's partners such as the Primary Care Trust.

A1.7 Secondly, the format of the Local Development Framework will be different. It will comprise a loose-leaf folder containing a series of interrelated documents that will build up over the years to give complete policy guidance. This means that some parts of the framework – for example the Core Strategy – can be quickly put in place while other more detailed components are being prepared. It also allows parts of the framework to be reviewed independently of the others. This makes the Local Development Framework a more flexible document than the old – style Local Plan which it will replace.

Dartford Borough Council's Local Development Framework Components

A1.8 The Council is currently finalising its Local Development Scheme – the three year project plan that will guide production of the Council's first Local Development Framework. The Council foresees the production of three [redacted] for the first Local Development Framework (see below). In addition, there will be a Proposals Map which will identify where policies and proposals apply, an integral Sustainability Appraisal process which will be used to test and improve the policy approach as it evolves, and a Statement of Community Involvement – the subject of this present consultation.

Document or Process	Description of Document or Process
Statement of Community Involvement	Sets out the overall approach for achieving local community and stakeholder engagement with the process of preparing the Borough's Local Development Framework, as well as consultation on planning applications – it acts as a type of service level agreement or charter.
Proposals Map	Depicts the borough's spatial development strategy. It will conform with the content of all Development Plan Documents
Sustainability Appraisal	A technical process which will test the evolution of the Borough's planning policies in terms of economic, environmental and social objectives.

APPENDIX 2

Matrix of consultation methods that will be used where and when appropriate for the various components of the Local Development Framework process

Consultation Methods	Local Development Framework Components				
	Core Strategy	Site Specific Allocations	Dartford Town Centre Area	Sustainability Appraisal	Supplementary Planning

			Action Plan	Process	Documents
1 Internet <i>(website, e-mailshots, sms text alerts) – should be user-friendly and include all relevant documents in accessible formats</i>	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
2 Letter to people who have asked to be contacted in this way	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
3 Focus Groups – stakeholder sessions designed to discuss a specific area or theme	Y	N	Y	Y	Y
4 Media / Leaflets / brochures <i>summarising current debate and inviting written views</i>	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
5 Surveys to discover views and opinions	Y	Y	Y	N	Y
6 Staffed exhibition <i>static or 'roadshow' style' with chance for face-to-face participation and follow-up written inputs.</i>	Y	Y	Y	N	Y
7 Consultation drafts <i>where documents are made available for comment at Libraries, Council offices, Council website etc. Written views sought</i>	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
8 'Dovetailing' or as agenda item at existing meetings eg Parish Council meetings	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
9 'Planning for Real' <i>type exercises using site based information to guide debate</i>	N	Y	Y	N	Y
10 'One-to-one' <i>meetings with existing groups such as the Chamber of Commerce or land owner</i>	Y	Y	Y	N	Y

Appendix 3

How the Council currently publicises Planning Applications

A3.1 The Council deals with a variety of applications for planning permission and other applications. The number of applications submitted over the last three years were:

2002	1239
2003	1181
2004	1243

A3.2 Of these 111 were classified as major applications and the remainder were minor and other applications, mostly from homeowners.

A3.3 The Council carries out consultation, publicity and notification in accordance with the relevant Statutory requirements as specified in legislation in force at the time. For neighbours, the requirements are to notify occupiers of properties which adjoin the application site. On larger or more controversial applications, the Council will often consult much more widely than this. The Council will also notify anybody who made comments on previous applications relating to the same site. For complex applications, the Council prepares briefing notes giving further information to help consultees. The Council's website also highlights major planning applications.

A3.4 The Council uses a variety of ways of informing people when we receive a planning application. These are:

(i) Weekly list – This is a list of all applications received within any given week and it sets out the details of the applications submitted, such as the applicant's name, site location, ward, description of the application and the name of the planning officer that will be dealing with the application. The list is sent to Parish Councils and Residents Associations. It is also posted on the Council's website.

(ii) Advertisements – The Council formally advertises applications for major developments, applications accompanied by an Environmental Impact Assessment, departures from the Local Plan, listed buildings as well as applications within Conservation areas or which would affect a public right of way. The adverts are placed in a local newspaper.

(iii) Site Notices – Site notices provide information for people in the vicinity of a site subject to a planning application and includes information on the nature of the application and details of how to contact the Council, and how to view plans and the deadline for making comments (usually 21 days from the date of the notice). Site notices are displayed for the same types of applications which are advertised (see above).

Where the owner or occupier of neighbouring land cannot readily be identified, the Council will put up a site notice nearby.

(iv) Notification of Neighbours – Neighbours with a common boundary with the application site are notified individually by letter that an application has been received and are invited to inspect the application and make written observations within 21 days. If the occupier is disabled or elderly and unable to get to the Council offices, copies of the plans can be posted free of charge or delivered by staff.

In the case of major applications or uses such as hot food takeaways it will be for the planning officer dealing with the application to determine the geographical extent of the notification.

For complex applications, the Council prepares briefing notes giving further information to help consultees. These are sent with notification letters.

(v) Availability of Plans – Plans are available to view at the Council's reception at the Civic Centre during office hours, copies are available for a charge. Plans are also posted on the Council's website. Planning advice is available to provide people with assistance.

Town and Parish Council's are sent copies of the plans for all applications within their area and are able to request copies of applications in other Parishes on request.

(vi) Statutory Consultees – The Council seeks to engage a whole range of stakeholders in the planning process. We consult a whole range of statutory consultees, but not all bodies are consulted on each application. Who to consult will vary with the nature of the proposal and location and according to the requirements set out in the Town and Country Planning General Development Procedure Order 1995. Consultees are notified in writing and have 21 days in which to respond.

A3.5 If an application is amended during its consideration, the Council will send a further round of consultation letters to nearby residents and to any additional people who have already written in with comments. A copy of the revised plans will also be sent to the relevant Town or Parish Council.

A3.6 The Council receives and handles comments received by conventional post, fax, email or the Council's website.

A3.7 Planning applications are determined by the Council's Development Control Board (DC Board) unless the application satisfies the Council's delegated authority criteria. The Board is made up of elected members who are responsible for determining planning applications. Planning officers prepare written reports for the Development Control Board, which summarise all planning related comments received.

The Council has given delegated authority to named senior planning officers to approve planning applications, with or without conditions, where they comply with the Development Plan and other relevant planning policies and there has been no written objection on planning grounds. Delegated authority has also been given for these named officers to refuse planning applications where the application does not

comply with the Development Plan or other relevant planning policies and no clear letter of support on planning grounds has been received.

This delegated authority is given for the following types of planning application:

- Full or outline;
- Reserved matters or discharge of planning conditions;
- The felling, lopping etc., of trees covered by a Tree Preservation Order or in a Conservation Area;
- Consultations undertaken by the Kent County Council in respect of their proposals to carry out development or applications which fall to them to be determined;
- Consultations from neighbouring authorities inviting comment on proposed development in their area.

Delegated authority for refusal also includes planning applications for Listed Building Control and for Conservation Area Consent.

A3.8 Applicants can presently check on the progress of their application using the Council's website. Consideration will be given to enhancing this facility.

A3.9 The Council allows public speaking at DC Board in respect of applications that the Council itself is determining. Under current arrangements people can speak for or against an application. Speakers have to register prior to the meeting, and due to time constraints this is normally limited to one person speaking in favour of the application and one against. These arrangements have been extended in the case of large and controversial applications.

A3.10 A letter is sent to everyone who writes in advising of the decision on the planning application (whether or not it was determined by officers under delegated powers or at Committee). The County Council, Town and Parish Councils are also informed. The decision, if taken at Committee is also publicised in the committee minutes on the Council's website.

A3.11 If an applicant has an application refused or disagrees with conditions attached to the granting of permission they have a right of appeal. This right of appeal does not extend to a third party.

A3.12 If and when an appeal is received anyone who wrote in on the application is notified in writing of the appeal and information is provided on how to make their views known (either in writing, if a written representations appeal or in person at an informal hearing or public inquiry). There is no need to re-submit previous information sent in on the planning application as all this information will be copied and sent to the Planning Inspectorate. Ward Councillors are also individually notified.

A3.13 Where an informal hearing or public inquiry is to be held to consider an appeal a site notice is erected and the appeal is publicised in the press the date/time with the location of the hearing/inquiry. Third parties are able to attend both informal hearings and inquiries if they wish to, providing the Inspectorate is notified beforehand. Third parties can have an important role as it is often their view that

reinforces the Council's decision to refuse planning permission or impose specific conditions.

A3.14 The Inspectorate encourages many appeals to be dealt with by way of Written Representations and where this is the case the appeal is determined on the basis of the statements submitted by the appellant, the Council and any third parties.