

Statement of Community Involvement



July 2023

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Executive summary

1. This document details how the council enables the community to get involved in the planning process for proposals in the borough.
2. The council's Planning & Development service is committed to ensuring that members of the public and community organisations can have their say in the preparation of local plans and guidance and in the decisions made on planning applications.
3. To do this we propose to:
 - Seek people's views as early as possible,
 - Have consultations easily available online,
 - Involve all members of the community regardless of gender, faith, ethnicity, disability, sexuality, age, social deprivation or rural isolation,
 - Enable people to stay informed of future stages of consultation,
 - Produce clear, concise and accessible documents that avoid jargon wherever possible, and
 - Hold public meetings, exhibitions or workshops where appropriate.
4. This document details how we intend to achieve these objectives, who we plan to consult with, and how we will do it. It sets out the minimum that will be done in different circumstances accepting that, on occasions and where necessary, we will go further.

The Regulations for Producing an SCI

5. The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended) requires the planning department to prepare and maintain the Statement of Community Involvement (SCI). An SCI must set out how the council intends to achieve community involvement, public participation and cooperation in the preparation of their Local Plan, including any Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs), as well as setting out how they intend to involve the public when consulting on planning applications and the Local Development Scheme. In short, the aim of the SCI is to ensure that all sections of the public and community, including local groups and organisations, are actively involved in the planning process and are notified of plans that may affect them.
6. Local planning authorities are required to update their SCI every five years and prior to the consultation of any development plan document.

Unless otherwise stated the 'Regulations' referred to in this SCI are: 'The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 (as amended)'.

The council's community involvement policy

7. Ongoing community involvement is of continuing importance to Ashford Borough Council. Comprehensive, successful participation and consultation involving numerous community groups and local people has been carried out on council strategies and plans in the past. For example, the adopted Ashford Local Plan 2030 resulted in many responses, all of which were taken into consideration by the planning department. Consultations included online surveys, public exhibitions and bespoke workshops with local community groups, schools and youth clubs.
8. Every day we receive many representations on individual planning applications from neighbours, community organisations and statutory bodies. Corporately, we have a customer care policy which sets out our commitment to working with 'hard to reach' groups to ensure that we are socially inclusive. To view our Customer Care policy, please visit the council's website www.ashford.gov.uk/customer-care-policy.
9. In addition, the council provides a corporate online consultation portal where all ongoing consultations across different council services are displayed and consulted on. This portal is called '**Have Your Say**' and has already been extensively utilised by the planning department when consulting on Local Plan documents. The portal is available at <https://haveyoursay.ashford.gov.uk/>. In accordance with the Regulations on electronic communications¹ the consultation portal can notify stakeholders and members of the public when a

¹ The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012- Regulation 3 'Electronic Communications'

consultation is due to begin, provides the opportunity to view documents and plans online and also enables people to submit comments on a consultation electronically at any time of the day.

10. Similarly, the council's website is the most comprehensive register of documents relating to individual planning applications. The vast majority of documents being considered for any planning application will be available for the public to view. This part of the website also provides neighbours and consultees with a simple online form to enable them to submit their responses to individual planning applications.
11. The government has put an emphasis on the council's requirement to involve 'hard to reach' or 'easy to overlook' groups in planning issues. The council will aim to ensure that these groups are identified and take appropriate and proportionate measures to involve these groups in all consultation events.

Development Plan Documents

What are the council's current adopted Development Plan Documents?

12. In February 2019, the council adopted the Ashford Local Plan 2030 with full development plan status weight. The plan has been formed and influenced through consultation with partners, stakeholders, community groups and residents of Ashford.
13. The Ashford Local Plan 2030 superseded the saved policies in the Ashford Local Plan (2000), Ashford Core Strategy (2008), Ashford Town Centre Action Area Plan (2010), Tenterden & Rural Sites DPD (2010) and the Urban Sites and Infrastructure DPD (2012).
14. As of July 2023, the development plan for the borough comprises the Ashford Local Plan 2030 (adopted February 2019), the Chilmington Green AAP (2013), the Wye Neighbourhood Plan (2016), the Pluckley Neighbourhood Plan (2017), the Rolvenden Neighbourhood Plan (2019), the Boughton Aluph and Eastwell Neighbourhood Plan (2021), the Egerton Neighbourhood Plan (2022), the Charing Neighbourhood Plan (2023) and the Kent Minerals and Waste Local Plan (2016) as well as the Kent Minerals and Waste Early Partial Review (2020). However, the list of adopted documents will change over time as neighbourhood plans and other development plan documents are made or adopted by the council.
15. We also have a number of adopted Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) that support the development plans by way of providing guidance and clarity in relation to adopted policies. SPDs are used as material considerations when assessing planning applications. For a full list of current SPDs, please visit the council's website at www.ashford.gov.uk/other-planning-guidance/.
16. The government has made it clear that local choices should guide local plans and commenced neighbourhood planning in early 2010s. Since then, numerous neighbourhood planning bodies have been formed and several neighbourhood areas designated across the borough. Six neighbourhood plans have been adopted within the parishes of Wye, Pluckley, Rolvenden, Boughton Aluph and Eastwell, Egerton and Charing and more are progressing through relevant consultation, drafting and examination stages. This SCI outlines the council's roles and responsibilities to the neighbourhood planning bodies and the formulation of their plans.
17. The Regulations stipulate how local plan documents should be prepared. The stages (referred to in legislation as 'regulations') are set out in the table below:

Regulation	Stage
Regulation 18	Notification of and early engagement with public and specified bodies on the subject matter and scope of plan to be prepared
Regulations 19 & 20	Publication of submission plan documents with opportunity to make representations (under regulation 20) Minimum consultation is six weeks
Regulation 22	Submission of plan documents and background information to the Secretary of State for Independent Examination
Regulations 23 to 25	Consideration of representations made, Independent Examination of plan, and publication of recommendations of the appointed Inspector
Regulation 26	Adoption of plan - made publicly available with supporting documentation

Please note that regulation stages are different for neighbourhood planning process.

Who we will consult

18. As well as the general public, the Regulations set out a list of ‘specific’ consultees that must be consulted. There are also potential ‘general’ consultation bodies that could be consulted on all of our plans. This may vary at different stages of plan preparation (both Local Plan and SPDs). Currently, the council holds a database of ‘specific’ consultation bodies and a database of ‘general’ consultation bodies relevant to the Ashford borough. Both of these databases are updated where appropriate and in all instances comply with the most up-to-date regulations.
19. We recognise that within any area, communities are made up of many different interest groups, and effective involvement cannot happen without a good understanding of the make-up, needs and interests of these different groups and their capacity to engage in community involvement. For example, it is important to identify the key target groups to be involved in plan preparation so that consultation arrangements can be tailored accordingly, thus ensuring people are consulted on topics where they may have a particular interest and locating events in accessible locations. The needs of “hard to reach” groups such as the young, elderly, disabled and ethnic minorities will be considered thoroughly, so that they have the best opportunity to have their voice heard. We also plan to continue our extensive consultation work with the large rural community, through the parish councils.

How we will consult

20. We will use a variety of different methods to involve the community in the drafting stages of development plan documents. These are listed below and are varied to reflect the range of voices we want to hear from.
21. In accordance with the current regulations, when the submission version of a Local Plan is submitted to the Secretary of State for an independent examination, a consultation statement setting out what consultation techniques have been undertaken will be prepared and made public. Wherever possible, consultations will be undertaken in tandem with other council initiatives and strategies to allow the best use of resources. We will also work with existing community groups, for example, parish councils, urban forums and local interest and stakeholder groups to combine resources.
22. At appropriate stages of plan-making, such as early engagement at Regulation 18 stages, we will not just share information for people to read. We will aim to design participation events for the community so that we can explain ideas and strategies with the public who can then contribute in an open workshop or exhibition environment, for example.
23. The methods that we employ to notify and involve stakeholders in the consultation process include those listed below. Consultation methods may change depending on the type of document of being prepared. The choice of method may change to best suit the audience that we wish to communicate with. These methods will include, where appropriate:
 - contacting statutory bodies including Ward Councillors, Parish Councils, and other relevant organisations and individuals directly;
 - publicising consultations by methods such as website updates, social media, press releases, visual displays, leafleting, radio advertising;
 - placing formal notices in the local media, as required by legislation;
 - placing consultation documents at the Civic Centre and local libraries for people to view in person;
 - consulting with community groups and local organisations who have registered an interest to participate in the local planning process through registration on the council's local plan consultation data base;
 - organising events such as exhibitions, stakeholder meetings or workshops, including place-shaping workshops, where appropriate.
24. The nature of consultation will be determined by the nature of the issue and those likely to be affected. For example, if the particular issue concerns a specific site, a consultation will be focused within the area of the borough most likely to be affected. For each consultation the council will ensure that consideration is given to the most effective way of communicating the particular issue and the methods engaged are proportionate.

When we will consult

25. Where a formal consultation is carried out, this will be for a minimum of six weeks for consultations on the Local Plan, and minimum four weeks for Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs). Should a consultation fall within a holiday period, the council will consider extending the consultation period to accommodate bank holidays and those who may be away at these times.
26. Current regulations state that there must be a minimum of two consultation periods for development plan documents (including local plans). The first consultation relates to the subject matter that the local development document should contain (known as Regulation 18), and the second consultation should take place prior to the submission of the local development document to the Secretary of State to carry out a public examination of the documents (known as Regulation 19).

Accessible consultations

27. It is crucial that the consultations undertaken are accessible to all. To ensure that everyone has the opportunity to comment during a formal consultation period, we will accept representations online via the Consultation Portal and by written representation form².
28. In addition, we offer large print documents, a document reading service, braille versions and a translation service for all key materials we produce on request³ and will work with local groups on other steps needed to make sure that all members of the community can access material. We will ensure the documents are as jargon-free as possible, and include a glossary of terms to explain references, FAQs and guidance notes on how to complete comment forms where necessary. Events and exhibitions will be planned at venues that are fully accessible for everyone regardless of their mobility.
29. A significant proportion of the borough's residents live in rural areas, and therefore may have limited access to public transport and other services. The council will endeavour to fully engage rural communities in consultation on the proposals that affect them as well as those communities that live in or near Ashford town centre, or other parts of the urban area. This could involve an exhibition in a shopping centre on a weekend if the subject matter is regarding Ashford Town Centre, or a community workshop held in a rural village hall in the evening if the subject matter is regarding rural issues, or an event with a community forum on an evening or weekend for urban issues.

² Hard copy representation forms are available by telephoning 01233 330229

³ Alternative versions can be made available by calling the Planning Policy team on 01233 330229.

30. In order to manage expectations, we will choose accessible consultation venues and hold events at convenient times of the day and week. We will also be clear about the aims and scope of engagement so that people understand when and how they can participate and the rules for doing so.
31. Information about how to obtain hard copies of documents will be provided at the start of each consultation period. Document viewing locations are listed on the council's website at www.ashford.gov.uk/document-viewing-locations/.

Feedback on consultations

32. The council acknowledges that an important part of community engagement is to report back to those who have taken the trouble to be involved in a consultation, and to let them know how their comments and suggestions have been taken on board. Therefore, if a representation has been made at any formal consultation stage, feedback will be provided in accordance with the Regulations in place at the time. At present, the council list all the comments made and reply to them in one report, which is then submitted with the submission version of the plan for examination. If comments and feedback have been made via an informal method of consultation, the council may provide feedback via the website. In the case of the Local Plan, individual responses will be published on the council's website in accordance with the relevant regulations.
33. After consultation meetings or workshops with parish councils or other local groups are held, officers will write a report of the event, and send it to the lead officer of the group or organisation. Where required, the Planning Policy Team will return to a group and give verbal feedback of the results and explain the next steps in the process.
34. A detailed list of all the consultations carried out on the Local Plan and SPDs, including workshops and exhibitions, are recorded annually in the Authority Monitoring Report, which is publicly available on the council's website www.ashford.gov.uk/timetables-and-monitoring.
35. After the close of a consultation, all comments received will be considered by the Planning Policy team and the document in question will be revised as appropriate. A consultation statement will be prepared which will be made available online and will detail:
 - Compliance with the duty to co-operate;
 - Who was consulted and how;
 - A summary of the main issues raised from the comments;
 - The Council's response to these; and how the comments have been taken into account in any revisions to the document, if appropriate.

The Duty to Cooperate on strategic matters

36. In addition to public consultation on plans, local planning authorities are required to cooperate with each other, and other bodies, when preparing, or supporting the preparation of policies which address strategic matters. This “duty to cooperate” is set out in the Localism Act (2011) and described in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and Planning Practice Guidance (PPG). The ‘Duty to Cooperate’ is not defined as consultation, but ensures that the council works effectively with neighbouring authorities and other public bodies to address strategic issues that affect local plans and cross local authority boundaries.
37. In addition, the NPPF (2023) sets out in paragraphs 24-27 ‘Maintaining effective cooperation’ that strategic policy-making authorities, such as the Local Planning Authority, should prepare and maintain one or more Statements of Common Ground (SoCG) to address cross boundary matters. The PPG establishes the council’s responsibilities further, please visit <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/plan-making> for more information.
38. In accordance with regulations, the council includes details of what actions have been undertaken in accordance with the Duty to Cooperate in the Authority Monitoring Report (AMR) published annually, and will produce SoCG with relevant parties when relevant.

Neighbourhood and Community Planning

39. Community-led plans can take a variety of forms and can be produced solely by the community or in partnership with the council. The type of community-led plan being produced will determine the level of consultation work that should be undertaken by the council.
40. Village design statements and masterplans are undertaken by the local community, but are supported by the council. They can help guide development in a local community area, or influence the design of new development. The local community will be expected to lead on consultation initiatives, but will be assisted by the council wherever possible, for example through the facilitation of workshops or use of the corporate consultation portal. Once completed, the parts of the plans relevant to planning can be adopted by the council as supplementary planning documents or informal planning guidance. To be considered for adoption, the relevant part(s) of the document must be guidance based on existing adopted local plan policy.
41. We will provide advice and support to any community wishing to prepare a community-led plan, including advice on appropriate consultation methods and techniques to ensure constructive and informative feedback.

Neighbourhood Planning

42. Neighbourhood planning was introduced by government to provide increased opportunities for local communities to shape development within their area. Introduced through the Localism Act 2011, a parish, community group or neighbourhood forum may prepare a Neighbourhood Plan, Neighbourhood Development Order or a Community Right to Build Order having first been appropriately designated as a Neighbourhood Planning Body by the council.
43. The onus on ensuring community engagement will be placed on the neighbourhood plan group that wishes to produce, or undertake a review of, a Neighbourhood Plan. However, the council will provide support in accordance with the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations (2012). In contrast to community-led planning, Neighbourhood Plans, once made (adopted) by the council become part of the council's statutory development plan.
44. We will support and guide all communities undertaking neighbourhood planning. For example, we will share appropriate evidence and information that we already hold on the area, act as a 'critical friend' to provide general advice and support to give broad direction on evidence, consultation, sites and policy drafting, and direct you to any relevant helpful resource. We will also appoint a dedicated officer/s to act as a point of contact between the neighbourhood plan group and council.

45. The council's and neighbourhood planning group's roles and responsibilities are set out in our published 'Neighbourhood Planning Guide and Protocol'. The Protocol can be viewed at www.ashford.gov.uk/neighbourhood-planning-protocol.

The Neighbourhood Plan group may wish to seek assistance from a planning consultant for more technical areas of evidence gathering and policy drafting.

46. A Neighbourhood Plan needs to be in general conformity with the borough council's strategic planning policies, and if adopted, would form part of the Development Plan for the borough.
47. There are currently a number of parishes undertaking neighbourhood plans, with several now adopted. The link below provides an update on the status of each Neighbourhood Plan in the borough: www.ashford.gov.uk/neighbourhood-plans.
48. Any parish council or community group wishing to draft a neighbourhood plan should contact the Planning Policy team: planning.policy@ashford.gov.uk.

Masterplanning and Design

49. Masterplanning is a process where the council, developers and community stakeholders put forward a framework to shape development proposals for a specific site. Masterplans often cite specific matters such as the scale and layout of development, mix of uses, transport and green infrastructure. The aim is to set out the vision and implementation strategy for development with all concerned parties involved. The council believes that it is important for all sections of the community to be involved throughout this process. If we conduct a consultation, we will publish representations in a transparent way.
50. A review of the council's existing approach to the masterplanning engagement process took place in autumn 2019. The recommendations aim to ensure that community stakeholders are appropriately informed and engaged throughout the process in a cooperative way. The recommendations will ensure, among other ways that masterplanning exercises are carried out in a collaborative manner between all parties with clearly defined scopes and timeframes via independent facilitators and with clearly defined terms of reference for all actors within the process.

Monitoring and Development Update

51. The SCI is updated in accordance with changes to government legislation and at least every five years. We may also update or review the SCI in accordance with technological changes or forthcoming development plan consultations.
52. In addition, we produce an annual Authority Monitoring Report, which is available to view on the council's website at www.ashford.gov.uk/timetables-and-monitoring. This document sets out how the Local Plan policies are performing.
53. The council produces a digital 'Development Update' leaflet periodically to inform members of the public, key stakeholders and planning consultees how forthcoming planning policy documents are progressing. The update also provides information on significant planning applications and progress being made with them. The 'Development Update' is published on the council's website; please visit www.ashford.gov.uk/development-update.

Planning Applications

Before applications are submitted

54. Ashford Borough Council strongly supports pre-application discussion. Details of the services we provide are available on our website <http://www.ashford.gov.uk/pre-application-advice/>. The 'Major Developments' page includes our 'Charter' for strategic and major development proposals, which can be viewed at www.ashford.gov.uk/major-sites-charter/. This Charter has the commitment of all the local agencies involved in the development process, and sets in place a structured toolkit which aims to encourage and quickly facilitate major planning applications from submission to determination.
55. The council also works hard to inform and involve the wider community in helping to create better quality developments and "place-making". On significant applications, the council encourages potential major developers to undertake pre-application consultation with the local community. This process can serve to inform interested parties about the nature and scale of the proposal and give local people an opportunity to comment before proposals reach an advanced stage. Some major developments will also be subject to a design panel review. This is where experienced planners, independent architects and urban designers will provide feedback and improvements on the design principles of the proposed scheme. Please see www.ashford.gov.uk/pre-application-design-process/ for more information.
56. Similarly, we encourage developers of smaller, locally sensitive schemes to engage with local communities at an early stage to improve design quality in the built environment.
57. This might involve setting up design workshops with parish councils and local communities to help shape more detailed proposals before planning applications are submitted, accepting the co-operation of the developer will also be required.
58. There are many pre-application consultation techniques currently being used by the council. Not all these methods will be suitable for each pre-application consultation, it is essential to match the consultation methods with the individual planning proposal. The council uses a combination of the following:
- Public meetings and exhibitions (these would normally be advertised by the applicant or developer);
 - Workshops or surgeries;
 - Design Panel reviews; and
 - Development briefs
59. Many pre-application enquiries from developers do not fall into these categories and are confidential between the applicant and the council. The council's pre-application advice will therefore only be subsequently

published when a formal planning application for the same, or very similar, proposals is made within a reasonable timeframe.

Consultations when applications are received

60. We undertake statutory publicity and consultations on valid planning applications in accordance with the current legislation. The government may change the statutory publicity requirements at any time and our future approach will reflect any changes that are made. Residents are encouraged to comment on all planning applications that they consider may affect them, no matter what the scale of development proposed. For some major or strategic schemes, we will seek to publicise applications in additional ways over and above the statutory publicity requirements.
61. Currently, there are many different types of planning application that cover a variety of different scenarios. Many of these are typically 'notification' or 'prior approval' applications to the Local Planning Authority where timescales are limited for a formal response, in some cases only 28 days. Other examples include applications for a Certificate of Lawfulness of Proposed Development, to ascertain whether planning permission is required or not for a particular scheme.
62. In most of these cases, it is either impractical or unnecessary to formally consult on them as they may simply raise a technical matter of interpreting the planning regulations set down by central government. The following table sets out the consultations with the community that would take place for some of the most common application types:

Application Type	Neighbours	Ward	Parish	Public Register (visible)
Pre-Application Enquiry	No	No	No	Officer's advice subsequently published when a formal planning application for the same, or very similar, proposal is made within a reasonable timeframe.
Outline Planning Permission: Some matters reserved	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Outline Planning Permission: All matters reserved	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Approval of reserved matters	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Full Planning Permission	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Householder Planning Permission	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Change of Use	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Removal/variation of condition/s	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Discharge of Condition(s)	No	No	No	Yes
Advertisement Consent	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Non-material Amendment	No	No	No	Yes
Lawful Development: Existing Use	No	No	Yes	Yes
Lawful Development: Proposed Use	No	No	No	Yes
Scoping Opinion	No	No	No	Yes
Screening Opinion	No	No	No	Yes
Tree Preservation Order Consent	Yes	No	No	Yes
Listed Building Consent (Alt/Ext)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

63. However, all formal applications to the council are published on the public register and available to view.

Types of notification

64. Depending on the type of the application and the legislation pertaining to such an application, consultation includes the following methods:

- Letters to neighbours and statutory consultees;
- Site notices;
- Local Press and
- Website/public register

Letters to neighbours and statutory consultees

65. Immediate neighbours will be notified by letter of most planning and listed building applications being considered.

66. Neighbour letters are sent to the occupiers of individual premises in the immediate vicinity of the site, but not on unbuilt land, in accordance with the principles set out in Figure 1 below. It should be noted that the council does not consult on the basis of land ownership and therefore landowners who may not live adjacent to an application site should not expect to be directly consulted even if they own land in the vicinity of that site.

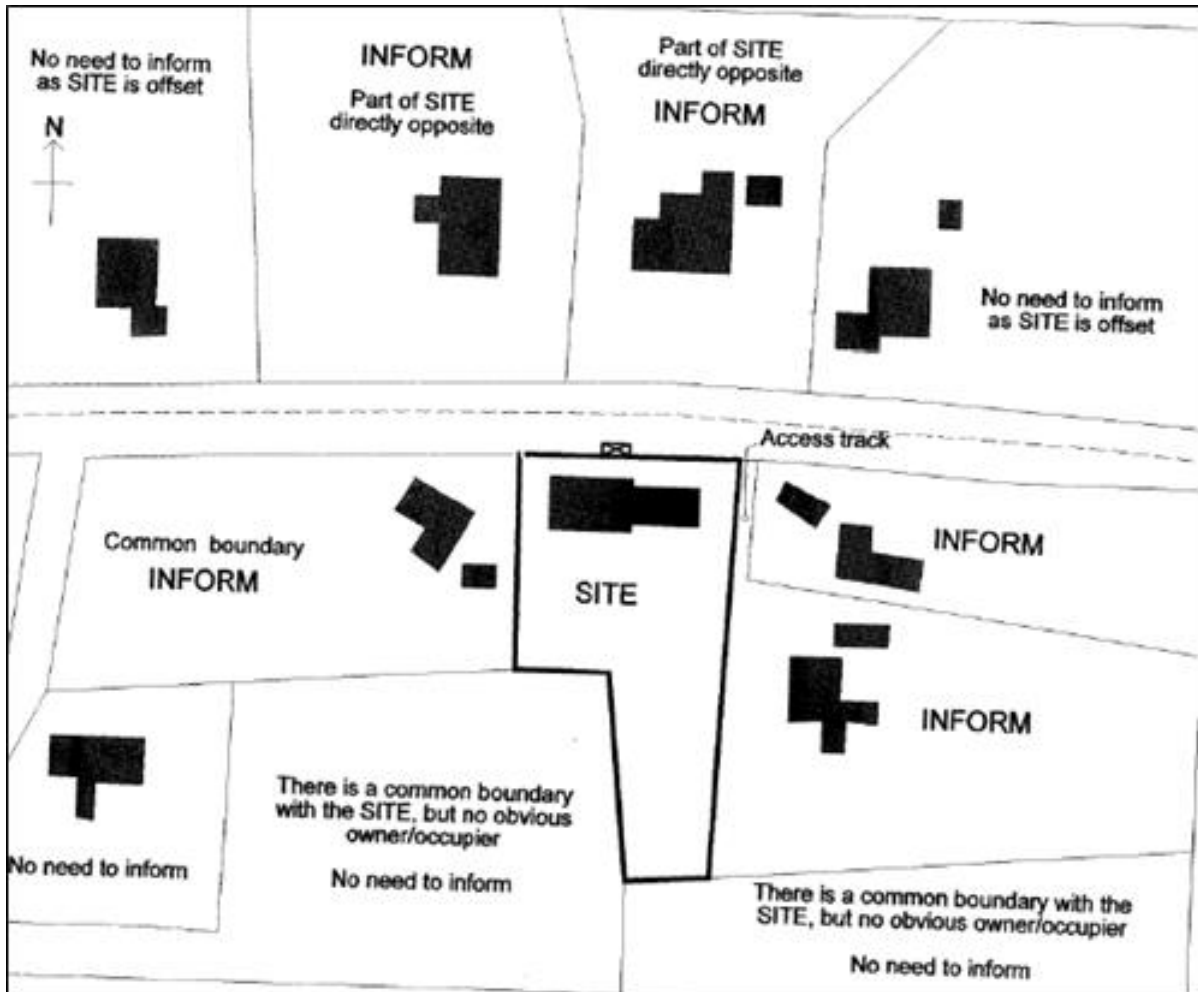


Figure 1 Neighbour letter consultation procedure

67. The consultation principles in Figure 1 are a minimum approach in line with legislation requiring notification of anyone ‘adjoining’. An officer may choose however, to extend the consultation boundary of an application further than the statutory minimum. This will be entirely at the officer’s discretion as they deem appropriate taking into account the nature and impact of the application proposal and the layout and proximity of any nearby properties.

68. As well as neighbour letters, notification correspondence will also be sent to organisations invited to comment on proposals in accordance with current legislation. Borough councillors will also be notified of applications in their ward.

69. Notification of most planning and listed building applications will also be sent to the relevant parish or community council. Responses **will be invited within 21 days of the date of notification** (or where longer periods of time are prescribed by different legislation, such as in comments on Environmental Impact Statements, where 30 days is the minimum consultation period).

70. All methods of notification will indicate the date that comments are expected

to be received by the council. If additional time is required to respond to an application, then contact should be made with the relevant case officer.

71. Comments should be received by the council within the consultation deadline to be certain of being taken into account as the application may lawfully be determined after this point. However, comments will still be taken into account by the case officer after this deadline up to the point they have made a recommendation to permit or refuse an application.

Site notices

72. For some application types (such as those with heritage considerations, those for prior approval, major developments, applications with an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and those not in accordance with the development plan) site notices are displayed.
73. Site notices are clearly visible and usually attached to lamp posts, telegraph poles, or boundary treatments on, or adjacent to, the application site. Site notices may also be placed further afield, on village centre notice boards for example to catch a wider audience.
74. The site notice will indicate the date that comments are expected to be received by the council. The application reference is also clearly stated, so all plans and documents can be accessed on the council's website.

Local Press

75. Some applications are also advertised in the local newspaper. This applies in accordance with current legislation, if the application is for major development (including EIA development) or affects a listed building, a conservation area, or a public right of way, or departs from the development plan, or if the application may have a substantial impact on an area.

Website/Public register

76. All copies of applications and plans are available for inspection on the council's website at www.ashford.gov.uk/comment-on-applications usually within four working days of being registered. These are found using the search function of the public register of applications on the website. It is also possible to subscribe to weekly lists of applications, decisions and appeals. If you are unable to access applications online from home, please visit the Council Offices where all live applications and accompanying plans can be viewed on computers in our reception area.
77. We are encouraging households to sign up to the subscription service feature

on the council's website. Households will be notified once per week of any applications based on the subscription preference. Email updates can currently be requested by ward for the following: valid applications, applications under consultation, decisions to be made by Planning Committee and applications that have been determined. It is expected that this will be extended to requests for this information on a parish-wide basis in the near future.

Anyone may comment on an application even if they have not been notified by the council. All comments are considered carefully and will be taken into account prior to a decision being made.

How to make a comment

78. The council receives and handles comments on planning applications by conventional post and email or by our online comments form on the council website. Making comments online is the easiest method for making comments and allows us to protect your personal data more easily.
79. The council does not respond to each comment made individually, due to the large number it receives. However, comments are summarised in the planning officer's report for each application. Officer's reports become public information found on the council's website following the application decision.
80. Care should be taken when making comments to the council to ensure that no personal data is included and that the information provided is relevant to the planning merits of the application only. Your comments, including your name and postal address, may be viewable on the website whilst the application or any subsequent appeal is being considered (your telephone number and e-mail address or any other personal data provided will never be published). Currently, personal data may be retained for up to 3 years and used for further consultation should revised or new applications for the same site be submitted in future. Although the council reserves the right to remove inappropriate comments from the website as necessary, such comments may still be viewable prior to any removal and visible online and by visitors to the Council Offices.

It is therefore your sole responsibility to ensure you do not include defamatory remarks in your comments as you could be held legally responsible for them in the future.

81. Any further correspondence received from the applicant or third party relating to the proposals will be added to the website where this does not involve

administrative matters or confidential information, for example formal amendments to an application.

82. In some specific circumstances public comments may not be published on the council's website. This is usually when comments either contain sensitive information about the applicant or person making the comment, or the comments are of an inappropriate nature bearing no relevance to the planning process.

Amendments to planning applications

83. Applications will be processed and determined in accordance with the council's Good Practice Guide, which is available to view at www.ashford.gov.uk/publications/good-practice-guide/.

84. During the consideration of large major applications any relevant consultees will be notified if any significant amendments are made. The period for commenting on amended plans will normally be 21 calendar days but this may be reduced to no less than 10 calendar days if circumstances such as the date of a planning committee dictate. In addition to consulting any relevant consultees, notification will be sent to the relevant ward member and to people who have already written in with comments.

How representations are considered by the council

85. Decisions on planning applications are made by the council's planning committee or decided by senior officers through the Council's scheme of delegation found in the Council's constitution.
86. The case officer determining the planning application should have all the necessary information needed to make a decision on the application after the close of the consultation period (the time when all public comments should be made). Any matters raised through representations from the local community will be acknowledged and considered in the published officers assessment reports.
87. All decisions are made in relation to the statutory development plan for the borough and any other material planning considerations. For more information, please visit www.ashford.gov.uk/material-planning-considerations/. To see how an officer came to a decision on any particular planning application, you can view the officer's assessment report on the Public Register via the council's website by quoting the case reference number.

Consultation on decisions

88. The majority of decisions are made by delegated authority. The planning committee also determines planning applications and meets on a broadly 4-week cycle, although occasionally special meetings may be called in addition. Planning Committee is attended by elected members who determine major, complex or controversial planning applications. The committee agendas are available on the council's website at <https://ashford.moderngov.co.uk/> and include reports on the individual planning applications being considered. For information about how to speak in favour or against an application at planning committee please visit www.ashford.gov.uk/speaking-at-planning-committee/.
89. Committee reports and the reports for applications decided by officers can be viewed on the council's website. Similarly, all decision notices are also viewable on the council's website.
90. Household can sign up to the subscription service feature on the council's website should they wish to be informed of a decision that is made on an application. Households will be notified once per week of any applications based on the subscription preference. Email updates can be requested at ward level to enable notification of decisions on planning applications and it is intended that this is also made available at parish-level when our systems allow this.

Consultation on appeals

91. When an applicant disagrees with the council's decision on their planning application, they can appeal to the Planning Inspectorate. An appointed government inspector will then make a decision on the appeal.
92. If we receive an appeal on an application, we will notify all those who commented on the original application either by letter or email. We will explain what the appeal is about, how people can be involved in the appeal process and the timescales for being involved. The inspector will decide if a hearing or public inquiry is required where there may be more opportunities for you to put across your views.
93. However if the appeal is about a householder application, (typically those for extensions or alteration to houses) then we will only let people know the appeal has been received. New comments on these types of appeal cannot be made at this stage.
94. For more information about planning appeals please visit the website of the Planning Inspectorate at www.gov.uk/planning-inspectorate

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