

Appendix 1

Community Engagement Protocol



Introduction

The prime aim of this Protocol is to do all possible to ensure that new development in the Neighbourhood Plan area delivers good quality places to live and work. Its use will also contribute to improved outcomes for the current and future communities, as well as assisting applicants to make applications that accord with this plan and with those of Wiltshire Council. It is crucial for success with these aims for the community engagement to start very early in the preparation of applications, working with the communities of Melksham via the Town and Parish Council.

Use of this Protocol is without prejudice to the eventual judgement of either the Town or Parish Council on the merits of any final application, even if a good engagement process has been agreed and followed.

Pre-application community engagement is considered to be especially important in relation to any strategic site allocations made by Wiltshire Council, particularly with regard to any associated requirements for development briefs and masterplans that are to be approved by Wiltshire.

Context

National

National Planning Practice Guidance and the National Planning Policy Framework make several mentions of the considerable value of pre-application involvement, for example, in NPPF paragraph 39:

“Early engagement has significant potential to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the planning application system for all parties. Good quality pre-application discussion enables better coordination between public and private resources and improved outcomes for the community.”

The “10 Commitments for Effective Pre-application Engagement” (Local Government Association, 2014) published nationally by a group representing planning, industry and community groups, states that:

“Early, collaborative discussions between developers, public sector agencies and the communities affected by a new development can help to shape better quality, more accepted schemes and ensure improved outcomes for the community. These discussions also avoid wasted effort and costs.”

Wiltshire

Wiltshire Council's Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) 2015 sets out how Wiltshire Council will involve the community in planning for the future use of land in their area and provides clarity on the levels of involvement that communities should expect in planning processes. Section 5 of the SCI outlines in detail how communities can be involved in planning applications. The Council acknowledges that whilst in the early stages of considering a development proposal, applicants may wish for any discussions with Wiltshire Council to be confidential, involvement of the local community can and should happen at the earliest possible stage.

The SCI sets out how the level of community involvement agreed should reflect the scale and complexity of the proposal and that it will be the responsibility of the developer. Applications for major development submitted to Wiltshire Council are expected to provide evidence that sets out how the community has been involved in the form of a Statement of Community Consultation. This should outline what public consultation has been carried out and how the results of the exercise have been taken into account in the submitted application.

Wiltshire Council also clearly state that community involvement in

the development of a masterplan, or clear framework for the later detailed design of a development area or large site, is "essential".

Process

Whilst there is an emphasis on early and positive pre-application engagement in major development proposals, the approach should also apply to smaller developments in the plan area because these can have at least as much impact as larger ones. Melksham Town Council and Melksham Without Parish Council will play their appropriate role in delivering high quality pre-application engagement with themselves and with the wider community in the early stage of proposals that come forward.

Melksham Without Parish almost entirely surrounds Melksham Town. For development that takes place on the periphery of one or other Council area, and within other places in Melksham Without that are of high importance to the town (such as the commercial areas located at Bowerhill and Hampton Park etc.), both Councils will play a role.

Therefore, in respect of development proposals affecting the commercial areas, or residential sites on the periphery of Melksham Town, both Councils should be consulted in preapplication engagement.

Drawing from the 10 Commitments and other guidance on best practice, potential applicants should work with Melksham Town Council and Melksham Without Parish Council to fulfil the following principles:

- **‘Day One’ contact:** By far the best results for all emerge when contact is made with the relevant Council, and through us with our local community, at the earliest possible point in the process; consulting people late with already prepared schemes is not productive. See the end of this Protocol for contact details for the Town and Parish Council. Wiltshire Council are also asked by the Town and Parish Council to pass on contact details to applicants.
- **Agreed Process:** A key aim of this early contact is to discuss and agree the nature, scope, timetable, information and so forth of the engagement – i.e. the process to be followed. This should have particular regard to if and how both Councils should be involved in the process as noted above. For major development applications this will include Wiltshire Council.
- **Applicant Leadership but Shared Responsibility:** Although it is the applicant’s role to lead and fund engagement, the Town and / or Parish Council will offer as much support as possible to any agreed process; for example by providing local information, contact details for local groups, advice on meeting places, access to newsletters and so forth.
- **Openness and Transparency:** Building trust between all and ensuring an agreed outcome depend heavily on having a process that is as open as possible on all sides, though the Town and / or Parish Council will respect any issues of clear commercial confidentiality.
- **Agreed Community:** A project may have an impact on a limited number of people or on all of the Town and / or Parish as appropriate. The details of those to be involved will need to be discussed and agreed for any project, as will the potential ways to contact and engage them.
- **Agreed Scope:** There will also need to be agreement about the scope of the engagement, i.e. what is and is not open to change (e.g. layout, quantum of development, design etc.).
- **Proportionality:** The nature and scale of engagement will be balanced in appropriate proportion to the scale and likely impact of any proposals, for example small householder applications are very unlikely to need to undertake more than neighbour consultations.
- **Statement of Community Consultation:** For major development proposals applications, a statement of community consultation, should be submitted. this should describe and summarise the outcomes of the engagement, demonstrating how the proposals have (or have not) responded to results. If they have not, a short note should be included to explain this.

If the process has been followed fully, the Parish Council will endorse this report; if not they may submit their own evaluation of it*. For smaller development proposals, a short statement describing and summarising the outcomes of the engagement is encouraged.

Contact Details

Initial contact should be made at the very outset with the Town and / or Parish Councils:

townhall@melkshamtc.gov.uk
clerk@melkshamwithout.co.uk

The Town and / or Parish Council commits to doing all possible to arrange an initial meeting as soon as possible following contact.

Additional Notes

Melksham Without Parish Council will only consider taking on ownership and management of equipped play areas from developers, such as LEAPs (Local Equipped Area for Play) and NEAPs (Neighbourhood Equipped Area for Play) and not LAPs (Local Landscaped Area for Play).

*As per the opening proviso, endorsement of an engagement process and results does not necessarily mean support for the resulting proposals.