

GROUND RULES FOR DELIVERING EFFECTIVE COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

The 'ground rules' set out below are intended to ensure consistent and minimum standards in community involvement. Organisers of and participants in community involvement are expected to adopt and make reasonable endeavours to implement the ground rules. Failure to do so is likely to limit the validity and credibility of the involvement undertaken.

The ground rules apply to:

- prospective planning applicants carrying out pre-application community involvement on development proposals considered and decided by the OPDC;
- individual(s), community group(s), and / or organisation(s) having an interest in the planning application or planning policy document;
- the OPDC in preparing planning policy documents.

The Ground Rules

1. Inclusive invitation

- a) Reasonable attempts should be made by prospective planning applicants and / or the OPDC to ensure that a representative cross-section of the community is invited to the same community involvement event(s) to ensure that all participants are aware of each other's views.
- b) Invitations should go to every household in and around the OPDC area as well as to community groups (e.g. local residents' associations, neighbourhood planning forums and amenity societies) where they exist or are formed as a result of a proposal.
- c) Information provided by the OPDC and planning applicants will highlight the importance of community members and groups being involved in the development of planning policy and determining planning applications. Community participation in the planning process should be recognised as a central way of promoting vibrant democratic governance that encourages active citizenship.
- d) It may be necessary to hold additional events for those groups not traditionally involved in the planning process. This will include young and older people, people with disabilities or who have learning difficulties or black and minority ethnic communities.
- e) The OPDC will seek out active involvement of the community within and surrounding the OPDC area. Gaps in involvement, particularly of those who would not usually engage in planning policy will be identified and attempts will be made to address the gaps.
- f) Events should be held in accessible locations. Absence of accessible meeting spaces at the neighbourhood level will be identified and new provision will be made.
- g) All participants in the involvement process should be asked to provide their contact details to ensure they receive feedback on the results of involvement.
- h) The OPDC will make the best use of existing ways of talking to the community such as established local forums in each of the three boroughs;
- i) The OPDC will promote understanding of the planning process through schools and collages;
- j) Regular provision of information and feedback from open engagement events will be made available in accessible formats for all sections of the community by the OPDC and planning applicants;

- k) All consultation documents should be available free of cost to the public;
- l) The OPDC will avoid holding consultations during public or popular holiday time periods.

2. Authorisation

- a) Those representing community groups, the prospective planning applicant and the OPDC at community involvement events should be able to show that they are authorised to speak for their individual organisations or networks of organisations that they may be involved with.
- b) The scale and remit of those organisations should also be made clear.

3. Continuity, collaboration and co-production

- a) Involvement should be a continuous two-way process for all interested parties, with the timetable for the period of preparing the plan or making the planning application, made clear.
- b) Where involvement is intended to include a series of meetings or events then, as far as possible, the same individuals that represent the community, the prospective planning applicant and the OPDC should be invited, to ensure some continuity. Minutes of meeting should be made available to ensure that there is no re-run of meetings when new groups and individuals engage.
- c) The OPDC will seek to work collaboratively with community groups and engage them in co-production of planning policy.

4. Independent advice

- a) Where technical or professional advisers or private consultants are employed as independent facilitators to manage involvement processes, they should have a client duty of care to all parties equally and should be instructed to follow these ground rules, irrespective of the party employing them. Where facilitators or advisers are not independent, this should be declared.

5. Early Involvement

- a) Arrangements should be made for the community involvement process to begin at the formative stages of plan making and for all parties to meet at the early 'ideas' stage of the plan or development proposal process. This is before specific proposals are made, when significant options are still open and can be identified and while there is still the potential to make a difference to the final options selected. *NB formative replaced with 'early'. Text is added that suggests where community members can't attend initial meetings, but do wish to participate, engagement in writing should be pursued.*
- b) The OPDC will seek to facilitate communities' desires to be proactive.

6. Presenting options

- a) The aim should be to set out options or choices that are possible in the way that specific development is carried out, including those suggested by the community and that reflect the community's needs, ambitions and experience. *NB OPDC includes this but adds in 'where reasonable'.*
- b) For development proposals, purely oral or written presentations should be avoided so that, wherever possible, options are also presented visually. This should include the use of three dimensional models. Written materials may need to be translated into other languages. *OPDC adds in 'videos and photographs'*
- c) Options presented in flyers and or newsheets and which are widely distributed will present options in an accessible format.
- d) The OPDC should encourage the development of community based options.

7. Choosing between options

- a) The planning criteria for choosing between options should be made clear and transparent.
- b) The OPDC will explain why any alternatives may have been rejected.
- c) It is expected that developers will provide a range of options for community consultations and reasons for rejecting any that are favoured by the community. These should not include leading questions.
- d) The OPDC and developers will provide some open questions which invite comment – for example around potential heights of buildings.

8. Consensus

- a) Best endeavours should be made to reach consensus, making it clear and specific how far the involvement has resulted in agreement to adopt or to alter proposals. Where agreement has not been possible, the reasons and the scale of disagreement should be made clear and specific.
- b) The OPDC will also set out how it will conclude that a consensus has been reached.

9. Transparency and confidentiality

- a) For major planning applications, a Community Involvement Statement is required to be submitted by the planning applicant to the OPDC as a supporting document to their planning application. The statement will summarise
 - the community involvement undertaken
 - the main issues raised by the community
 - how the proposal has been revised to take account of the issues raised and, where the proposal has not been revised, the reasons why not.
- b) For OPDC Local Plan documents, a consultation statement will be made available alongside the Local Plan published for representations. This will set out
 - who was consulted when preparing the Local Plan
 - a summary of the main issues raised by those persons; and
 - how those issues have been addressed in the Local Plan
 - full submissions will also be available via the OPDC's website (section of the Mayors website)
- c) For Supplementary Planning Documents, a consultation statement will be published alongside the draft document. This will set out:
 - who was consulted when preparing the draft document
 - a summary of the main issues raised by those persons; and
 - how those issues have been addressed in the draft document
- d) Participants may provide a written statement of omissions and corrections which will be reported and considered by the OPDC along with the Community Involvement Statement and / or consultation statement. The availability of information submitted as a part of the planning process is important to ensure public participation in the planning process, confidence in the planning system and the accountability of those undertaking the assessments. The OPDC considers that information submitted as a part of, and in support of a viability assessment should be treated transparently and be available for wider scrutiny. In submitting information, applicants do so in the knowledge that this may be made publicly available alongside other application documents. If an applicant considers that disclosure of an element of a viability assessment would cause harm to both their commercial interests and the public interest, and should be kept confidential, they

should provide a full justification for this. The OPDC will consider this having regard to the 'adverse effect' test and overriding 'public interest' test in the EIR, decisions of the ICO and the First Tier Tribunal, and the specific circumstances.

- e) The OPDC will
- provide advice and guidance to community members on how to effectively object to planning applications;
 - provide guidance for developers on involving the community around individual developments;
 - ensure that information on all section 106 agreements is easily accessible to the community via its website and
 - encourage community involvement in determining the content of individual section 106 agreements.
- f) The OPDC will define what it means by a major planning application. The definition will be sensitive not just to the size of a development, but also to the impact it may have on any one particular community.

10 Feedback on the outcome of community involvement

- a) For major planning applications, feedback is provided in the officer's report which recommends to the delegated officer or the Planning Committee whether planning permission should be granted. The report summarises the pre-application involvement undertaken by the applicant and how it has influenced the application. For applications below the 'major' threshold, the officer's report summarises the responses received to consultation on the planning application.
- b) For Local Plan documents, feedback is provided in the consultation statement referred to under 9b. For Supplementary Planning Documents this will be the consultation statement referred to under 9c
- (c) The OPDC should set out how it is conscientiously taken into account any representations, why it is disregarding comments made in any representations from the community and any proposed alternatives.

11 Responsibility

- a) The particular remit and responsibilities of both the OPDC and the boroughs in terms of planning policy and determining planning applications, and for involving the community in both, will be clearly expressed in explanatory documentation that is accessible to all community members.
- b) The OPDC will avoid confusion around its and the boroughs responsibilities for different types of planning applications in order to avoid community members having less than a reasonable period to respond to consultations. This will be set out clearly on the OPDC's and the boroughs' website.

12 Measuring, monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of community involvement

- a) The effectiveness of community involvement will be measured, monitored regularly and evaluated. This will include
- community involvement in co-producing planning policy;
 - levels of consultation submissions;
 - changes that have been made as a result of community involvement
 - annual tracking of the views of and experiences of a representative survey group of resident and community organisations and small businesses within the boundaries of the OPDC area over the next 10 – 15 years.