



Introduction

This protocol has been written to with the aim of ensuring that future development in Bradford on Avon:

- Is of a high standard
- Reflects local challenges and concerns
- Aligns with the town's aspirations and values, as described in the town vision and the Bradford on Avon Neighbourhood Plan

It's hoped that this protocol will contribute to improved outcomes for the town now and in the future – and that it will help applicants to submit planning applications that accord with the town council's aims and strategies and reflect the aspirations of the town's community.

An essential part of this protocol is that community engagement starts early in the planning process, and that applicants can start working with the community by contacting the town council.

Use of this protocol is without prejudice to the eventual comments and views of Bradford on Avon Town Council on the merits of any resulting planning applications, even if a good engagement process has been agreed and followed.

Background & Context

There's guidance and support describing why early and effective community engagement is important, including guidance from Wiltshire Council.

Nationally

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was last updated in December 2024.

The NPPF highlights the value of pre-application community engagement and involvement in the planning process, for example in paragraph 40:

"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 NPPF also supports this protocol in paragraph 137:



"Applicants should work closely with those affected by their proposals to evolve designs that take account of the views of the community.

Applications that can demonstrate early, proactive and effective engagement with the community should be looked on more favourably than those that cannot."

The [10 Commitments for effective pre-application engagement](#) was published in 2014 by a group representing planning, industry and community groups.

This document 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"

In Wiltshire

Published in 2020, Wiltshire Council's [Statement of Community Involvement](#) (SCI) encourages "developers and applicants to engage with local people and communities including Town and Parish Councils and with neighbours, when appropriate, before submission of a planning application"

The SCI then adds:

"The government have stated that such engagement is discretionary, but it is strongly encouraged by the Council prior to the submission of applications for ten or more houses, or other large developments on sites of 1 (one) hectare or more"

This clearly identifies and encourages community engagement for applications for 10 or more houses – and for larger developments. Additionally - in representing the town and its community - Bradford on Avon Town Council believes that early and effective community engagement should equally apply to smaller developments.

This is because Bradford on Avon is a smaller settlement with significant constraints to development – meaning that (even) smaller developments could have significant and far-reaching impacts on the town.

The SCI outlines in detail how communities can be involved in planning applications.



Our principles

Drawing from the 10 Commitments – alongside other guidance on best practice - potential applicants should work with Bradford on Avon Town Council to fulfil the following principles:

‘Day one’ contact

By far the best results for all emerge when contact is made with the town council, and through us with the local community, at the very start of any process.

Consulting people late on with already prepared schemes is not productive.

The town council acknowledges and understands that in the very earliest stages of discussions and considerations relating to development, applicants may wish for these discussions with Wiltshire Council to remain confidential.

At the earliest possible stage, though, the town council would welcome the involvement of the local community in the planning process.

After being contacted, the town council commits to arrange an initial open meeting as soon as possible following this contact.

An agreed process

A key aim of this early contact is to discuss and agree the nature, scope, timetable and details of the engagement – i.e. the process to be followed.

Applicant leadership - but shared responsibility

Although it is the applicant’s role to lead and fund engagement, the town council will offer as much support as possible to any agreed process.

This could be by sharing local information and knowledge, providing contact details for local groups, advising on meeting places, or access to newsletters and so on.

Openness & Transparency

Building trust and ensuring an agreed outcome depend heavily on having a process that is as open as possible on all sides, though the town council will respect instances of clear commercial confidentiality.

Agreed community

A project may have an impact on a limited number of people or on a larger proportion of the town.

The details of those to be involved will need to be discussed and agreed for any project, as will the potential methods to contact and engage them.

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Community engagement protocol for development in Bradford on Avon



The methods should include traditional approaches such as exhibitions and leaflets - but should also maximise contacts and responses through the use of social media.

Agreed scope

There will also need to be agreement about the scope of the engagement i.e. what is and **isn't** open to change (e.g. layout, quantum of development, design etc.)

The town council may also request additional consultation if particularly significant local issues emerge from any list of reserved matters associated with an application.

The town council also welcomes conversations about the potential ownership and management of public spaces in new developments, including (for example) equipped play areas and green spaces.

Final report

The applicant should submit, with any final application, a thorough report – a full ‘audit trail’ - describing and summarising the outcomes of the engagement, showing how the proposals have (or have not) responded to results.

If this doesn't happen, there should be a short note included to explain why.

If the process has been followed fully, the town council will endorse this report. If not, we may submit our own evaluation.

The Wiltshire SCI suggests that the final report “should take the form of a statement of community involvement outlining what public consultation has been carried out and how the results of the exercise have been taken into account in the submitted application”

Bradford-on-Avon Town Council fully supports and endorses the above principles - and will play their part in delivering high quality pre-application involvement directly with town councillors, and with the wider community as proposals come forward.



Appendix: Extracts from the National Planning Policy Framework 2024

The following paragraphs are taken from the NPPF – and both frame and explain why the community engagement protocol is important for the town.

Paragraph 40: “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.”

Paragraph 41: "Local planning authorities have a key role to play in encouraging other parties to take maximum advantage of the pre-application stage. They cannot require that a developer engages with them before submitting a planning application, but they should encourage take-up of any pre-application services they offer. They should also, where they think this would be beneficial, encourage any applicants who are not already required to do so by law to engage with the local community and, where relevant, with statutory and non-statutory consultees, before submitting their applications.”

Paragraph 42: "The more issues that can be resolved at pre-application stage, including the need to deliver improvements in infrastructure and affordable housing, the greater the benefits. For their role in the planning system to be effective and positive, statutory planning consultees will need to take the same early, pro-active approach, and provide advice in a timely manner throughout the development process. This assists local planning authorities in issuing timely decisions, helping to ensure that applicants do not experience unnecessary delays and costs."

Paragraph 137: "Design quality should be considered throughout the evolution and assessment of individual proposals. Early discussion between applicants, the local planning authority and local community about the design and style of emerging schemes is important for clarifying expectations and reconciling local and commercial interests. Applicants should work closely with those affected by their proposals to evolve designs that take account of the views of the community. Applications that can demonstrate early, proactive and effective engagement with the community should be looked on more favourably than those that cannot.”