Examples of Community Involvement Processes

This document supplements the Pre-Application Community Involvement Protocol for the Stroud District and the Guidance document produced.

As in the main Protocol, any involvement process needs to be:
'appropriate to the scale, size and nature of any proposed development'.

This section includes a few examples of how this might play out on different types of development. None of these examples is yet from a Stroud project but all are based on real examples elsewhere. The aim is to replace them as soon as possible with delivered examples from the Stroud area.

The first is an example of how **not** to do it and the **disbenefits** that come with that.

Negative Example: Site and Project: *A site of 4 hectares (10 acres) on the edge of a village. It was allocated so it was within the 'village envelope'. The development to be of houses and some public open space.*

- The developer approached the parish council at the outset but they declined to meet and discuss how to involve the village community – and told residents that in a leaflet.
- The developer then found it difficult to get anybody to share issues, views and ideas so the scheme failed to offer what the parish council had been trying to achieve for years - a community meeting room as well as the open space.
- The parish council had not done a Parish Plan so there was no public evidence for the community facilities.
- There was also no Design Statement in place so the design was at best rather average.
- The parish council objected to the application on several issues including lack of community facilities and poor design.
- The developer made it quite clear that, had he known earlier, the meeting room could easily have been included and the designs made more locally distinctive.
- However, the costs of going back over it all at that late stage were considerable, so the application stayed as submitted, could not be refused and a scheme that did not meet local aspirations was built.

The more positive examples follow below, starting with a very small project and working up in scale and complexity.

Example 1: Site and Project: *A single new house on a small plot of land in a Conservation Area at the centre of a small town. This was a windfall site, so not allocated, being developed by the owner of the land who was also was the owner of the house next door.*

- Knowing about the Protocol, the owner spoke about her ideas for a new house to her near neighbour who was a Town Councillor.
- The Councillor raised the issue with colleagues and a small group met the owner.
- They passed across the Protocol and their own Addendum, highlighting the Town Design Statement - though the owner had in fact helped to produce it!
- They also made sure the owner had seen the Conservation Area Character Assessment.

- They agreed that those to consult (apart from the parish council) were the immediate neighbours to the side, rear and across the road (8 houses in total), the Civic Society and that the Town Council would mention the proposal in their next general newsletter.
- They also agreed that the key issue to discuss was really just design.
- The owner's architect met all the 8 neighbours, in some cases alone, other times with 2/3 together and discussed the proposed design.
- The design was also shared once with a group of Parish Councillors and representatives of the Civic Society.
- Some changes were made as the design developed.
- The owner/applicant put in the application with a short report on the involvement work.
- The Town Council supported the report and stated as such in their comments on the application, which was then approved.

Example 2: Site and Project: A scheme of 4 houses on a backland site behind a village centre shop; a windfall site but within the village envelope and fringing the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

- The shop and house were owned by a recently arrived resident who purchased both from someone who had struggled to make the shop viable.
- The owner did not know about the Protocol until he contacted the District Council to ask about possible development. They passed it to him and explained its use.
- He was surprised to hear about the AONB and its implications and had not been aware of the Parish Plan that commented negatively on backland development.
- This made him anxious because he had bought the shop and house on the assumption that he could only make the shop viable if he could sell the land at the rear for houses.
- The owner then contacted the Parish Council and asked to meet.
- The meeting was not easy. The Parish Council had concerns about backland per se, the idea of 4 houses on a small site and the very awkward road access. At the same time, they were very keen for the shop (one of only two) to stay open.
- The owner realised that his only hope of succeeding would be to follow the Protocol and discuss the scheme early on with the Parish Council, an agreed group of neighbours and the AONB team, covering the key issues as above.
- The owner agreed with the Parish Council that the best way to start would be to arrange a meeting with some of them and all the neighbours together and then share the results of that with the wider community.
- It was also agreed that a second meeting would be appropriate once some initial designs had developed and that the eventual designs would be displayed locally for a day or two.
- The results after the second discussion were a change to include just 3 houses, arranged very differently to respect the AONB, and the inclusion of significant landscaping at the rear of the site.
- The owner's surveyor judged that this scheme could generate as much income as the original 4 house proposal.
- The wider community involvement generated more negative than positive comments although the opposite was true for the discussion group with neighbours.
- The report produced by the surveyor at application stage highlighted the varying views very clearly.
- The Parish Council endorsed the report in part because they judged that the final proposals would secure the future of the shop.
- The application was approved.

Example 3: Site and Project: *Extension to an employment unit on an allocated site at the entrance to a village.*

- The engineering company involved had been based in the village for 17 years and now wished to expand but not leave that location.
- Most of the employees lived in the village or nearby.
- The existing building was well screened with trees and shrubs but the extension site would be important visually because there was no existing screening to the site, which was at the entrance to the village.
- The company manager had some idea about the Protocol because that was mentioned during discussions about allocating the site, but had not actually seen it.
- He contacted the Parish Council and agreed to meet to discuss how to use the Protocol for the extension project.
- It was agreed that the prominence of the site meant that all in the village should be consulted (there were no immediate neighbours) and that the key issues for discussion were access/traffic, visual impact/design and possibly noise and nuisance (from the engineering work and lorries etc.).
- It was also agreed that there would be an opening drop-in session in the village hall (the applicant paid for the use of the hall) to raise awareness and generate a good list of issues and ideas.
- The Parish Council agreed to promote the event; the applicant paid for the leaflets, the usual volunteers delivered them.
- Following the drop-in, the applicant's architects produced some initial sketches that were then discussed with a Parish Council group and representatives from a number of local groups and societies.
- One idea that emerged was that the site edge could include a tree-lined footpath along a stretch of road currently without a pavement and that the parish would take on the future maintenance of that path and trees if it was provided through the development.
- There was then a leaflet drop to all in the village showing the basic designs which could also be seen, along with more details, on the company's website.
- With that in place and other design ideas now taken on board there was a second open drop-in event that showed good support from those attending.
- The applicant prepared a report of consultation which the Parish Council endorsed and the application was successful.

Example 4: Site and Project: *Housing on an unallocated site near the centre of a village.*

- The village was in two parts, the old centre and the post-war 'council estate', two hundred metres round a bend in the road.
- There was community concern that the village was not well integrated socially.
- The land between the two parts of the village was owned by a large national company, leased to a local farmer but no longer proving viable.
- It had not been allocated in the Local Plan.
- Initial contact with the District Council planners had raised concern, not fundamental, about losing a key open area of land in the middle of the village, so the Protocol was introduced in part to ensure good local discussion of the issue.

- There was then a meeting between the applicant's land manager, 3 Parish Councillors and a district planner.
- The Parish Councillors were not necessarily against the new housing because more people might help sustain the local shop and school, and the other allocated sites were all on the village edge.
- They made clear to the applicant that any development should make more than just a built contribution to integrating the village; something more would be needed.
- The Parish Council passed across a copy of their Parish Plan that highlighted community recreational needs and their Design Statement, as well as local information, contacts etc. (though they had not yet prepared an Addendum as such).
- It was agreed that the first step would be a working session with the applicant's team, some Parish Councillors, representatives of local recreational groups and a Parish Councillor from each of the 3 adjacent parishes (because of possible impacts on the primary school).
- It was also agreed that all aspects of 'scope' listed in the guidance were 'up for grabs' at least to begin with.
- The first session highlighted some of the key design and layout criteria, issues of density (around 25 houses seemed appropriate), community safety and a list of possible ways in which a project could contribute to local recreational needs.
- This initial scoped information was then shared at an interactive public exhibition funded by the applicant and the design team were present throughout to talk to people.
- The exhibition was promoted through a medley of local networks - school, pub, noticeboards, football club etc. - all costs covered by the applicant.
- The response to the first open event was good and more ideas started to emerge about design, layout, landscaping and recreation facilities.
- The working session group reconvened to discuss the next stages at which the applicant made clear that they could add in some quite significant recreational facilities if they could use a little more land and move up to around 35 houses.
- This idea was shared through a letter/questionnaire – agreed with the Parish Council – sent to all households.
- The results were positive, so pre-final designs were developed and again put on exhibition, still with a chance for people to comment.
- The net result was a project to develop 37 houses, all designed within the frame of the Design Statement, and improvements to the football club building, creation of a small village green and a new tree-lined avenue pointing towards the village church.
- The applicant prepared a report of consultation which the Parish Council endorsed and the application, which included detailed agreements on the development and management of the village green etc., was successful.

Example 5: Site and Project: *A large mixed development (housing, employment units and community facilities) on the edge of a small town on an allocated site. The allocation also included a basic development brief covering uses, quantities, site features and so forth. The application was for outline permission only, based on an illustrative masterplan.*

- For this project the lead developer was a national housebuilding company, although it was made clear that they would parcel up parts of the site and sell on to others with outline permissions.
- The initial contact from the developer's planning consultant was with the District Council planners.
- The planners said that they would require a Planning Performance Agreement (PPA) and that this would include requirements on community involvement to meet the Protocol.

- A meeting was arranged between the developer, Town Council and planning officers at which the general wording of the PPA was agreed and it was also agreed that further discussions would shape and agree the detail of the community involvement.
- As a result the Town Council also signed the PPA.
- The first stage in delivering on the PPA was to set up a workshop with around 20 key local people at which the involvement process was discussed, along with the establishment of a Consultation Steering Group (CSG).
- At this point the Town Council's Protocol Addendum was handed over, as well as copies of the Town Plan and Design Statement.
- The CSG, which included authority and applicant representatives, developed a detailed programme of involvement from the outline produced by the workshop. This included:
1. A project website set up and managed by the developer with basic text agreed by the CSG.
2. An initial awareness-raising leaflet to all in the community (including businesses, groups, church, school etc.), also sent to Parish Councils in surrounding parishes and including logos of developer, applicant and authority.
3. A two-day interactive drop-in session enabling all to raise issues and ideas, during which there were also short workshops at which groups could develop their own masterplans.
4. A follow-up website opportunity to generate issues and ideas and share the sketches produced at the drop-in.
5. A second CSG meeting to distill issues, ideas and possible key layout elements.
6. A widely invited design workshop at which sketch ideas were developed further with the input of the developer's design team, ending with two basic but (at that stage) agreed options.
7. An open meeting with all the Town Council to discuss and check the emerging options.
8. A second round of leaflet, drop-in and workshop as well as specific small sessions with organisations such as the local footpath group, wildlife group and youth group, all developing the options further.
9. A third meeting of the CSG at which a single now more detailed option for consultation was agreed.
10. The agreed option displayed at an exhibition and promoted through the website which also provided an opportunity for comments.
11. Final results discussed at a fourth CSG meeting as well as a draft of the final report of consultation; the latter was agreed.
- The applicant paid all direct costs for the above, the Town Council helping with venues, contacts, local information, volunteer deliverers etc.
- The application was submitted with the report of consultation. Although not showing agreement by all with all aspects of the proposals, the report was able to show that there was clear majority support, not least because the project would deliver several proposed actions within the Town Plan.
- Outline permission was granted and the developer agreed to make it a condition of any sales of parts of the site that purchasers must also use the Protocol in moving to detailed applications.