

## Foreword

We want to involve you in all the decisions that affect your lives. We also welcome the involvement of anyone else with an interest in the town, whether as potential investors, service providers, regulatory agencies or visitors.

That's why we welcome this Statement of Community Involvement (SCI), prepared by our Planning Policy team. It explains how and when you can take part in planning in Darlington, whether it be helping to shape new planning policy documents or having a say on planning applications. If you are planning a 'significant' development, we have set out our guidelines as to what we expect you to do to involve local people and other organisations in developing your plans, before sending us your planning application.

We are delighted that Darlington Partnership is working closely with the team. Effective partnerships with the local community and agencies which deliver services are at the heart of well-designed and appropriate local development and land use.

We look forward to your contribution in planning the future of Darlington.

**Councillor J Williams, Leader of the Council and Regeneration Portfolio Holder**  
**Councillor P Baldwin, Chair, Planning Applications Committee**

Darlington Borough Council

## Statement of Community Involvement

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# Chapter 1: Introduction

## What is this statement and why has it been prepared?

**1.1** This statement explains what we (the Council) will do to involve you in shaping our new local development documents (see note 1 below). It shows when and how you can get involved in planning matters, and what to expect from when you do. It also sets out what we will expect potential developers to do to involve you before they send us significant planning applications.

**1.2** Under law set down in the planning acts we need to produce this statement. If we do not carry out the actions shown in the document when preparing a new planning document, the Government could tell us to withdraw it.

**1.3** To find out what plans are being prepared and when, please see our document 'The Local Development Scheme 2007-2010'. To find out how to have your say on planning applications, see our 'A Charter for Development Control' and 'Have Your Say', a leaflet specifically about speaking at Planning Committee.

**1.4** All these documents are on our website at [www.darlington.gov.uk](http://www.darlington.gov.uk) or, you can see them at the Town Hall and local libraries. Alternatively

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<sup>1</sup> These documents are the formal development plan and supplementary planning documents that will replace our existing adopted Local Plan and Supplementary Planning Guidance. See [www.darlington.gov.uk/planningpolicy](http://www.darlington.gov.uk/planningpolicy) for more details.

you can request copies. Phone 01325 388799. However, we may make a small charge for this.

## Using this document

**1.5 Plan Making:** For details of when and how you can get involved in preparing new local development documents, go to **chapter 2**.

**1.6 Planning applications:** To find out about our guidelines on consulting the community on 'significant' proposals or our existing consultation and publicity practices, go to **chapter 3**.

## Getting involved – a cautionary note

**1.7** You are most likely to come into contact with the planning system if a development proposal is going to directly affect you. However, because of the range of people and interests that changes to the local environment can affect, it is rarely possible to find development solutions that keep everybody happy. And, we must consider issues such as available resources and legal requirements. Getting involved does not guarantee that we make changes or decisions that reflect your views, but we will consider all the relevant planning issues you raise. If we prepare a report for councillors, it will include a summary of your written comments and the officer's response to them.

**1.8** Sometimes, you may find that we have not made changes or decisions that reflect your views because the policies on which the decision is based were agreed some time ago. This is why it is also important to have your say

when planning policy documents are being prepared. Details of all current consultations on draft planning policy documents are highlighted on the planning policy page of the council's website, [www.darlington.gov.uk/planningpolicy](http://www.darlington.gov.uk/planningpolicy).

## Guiding principles

**1.9** We want to improve the way we involve you in making planning policy and in making decisions on planning applications. We also want to encourage more of you to get involved. We hope to do this by making it as easy as possible, and by making sure that you are only involved while plans or proposals can still be changed in response to your comments.

**1.10** We think that taking account of your views, and local knowledge as early as possible is the best way to make sure that the development in the borough has the widest possible local support. And by making the process as clear as possible, it will be easy for you to see how we have made decisions and how we have considered your comments.

**1.11** To achieve this, we will apply the following principles when we involve you in planning matters.

### **1 We will communicate clearly**

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- We will say why we want to involve you, and if we want your comments on a formal or informal basis.

- We will set out documents and reply forms as simply, clearly and concisely as possible, in a form that is easy to understand. If we cannot avoid jargon, we will clearly explain it.
- We will publish a summary document alongside any draft local development document that is more than 1500 words long. These will also be available (if you ask) in large print, on tape or in certain ethnic-minority languages.

## **2 We will make it easy for you to be involved**

- We will make it clear what you need to do (and when) so you can give us your views no matter what, if any, physical or language barrier you may have. We will provide help if you are not able to write.
- We will hold any public events or surgeries as close as possible to where the people most likely to be affected live. These will be at times when you are most likely to be able to visit, and at venues that are accessible.
- We will try to match how we involve you with the time and financial resources you have available, and your experience or knowledge of the planning system.
- We will try to match our public-involvement programme to the scale and nature of the planning issues we are dealing with.
- If your group has little or no experience of planning, we will work with you, alongside Planning Aid North (see note 2 below), to

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2. Planning Aid North offers free, independent, professional advice on town and country planning issues to people or groups who cannot afford a planning consultant. For details, call 0191 222 5776 or e-mail [ntco@planningaid.rtpi.org.uk](mailto:ntco@planningaid.rtpi.org.uk).

improve your ability to respond. We will do this for as long as is necessary to allow you to work independently.

- We will make particular efforts to involve groups that traditionally have not voiced their views on planning matters.
- We will make reasonable adjustments to our public-involvement programme and events to make sure that if you have a disability, you do not receive a lower standard of service. We will make sure you can reply to all consultations on-line on our website.

## **3 We will make sure your involvement is effective**

- We will involve you at the earliest stage, and at all further stages of the planning application process and the planning policy preparation process when there is still a genuine opportunity for your views to make a difference.
- We will make it clear what things we can change and what we can't.
- We will give you plenty of time and notice of the opportunities to get involved, wherever possible.
- If you have expertise that we think could help us in developing policies or making decisions on planning applications, we will contact you to discuss this.

## **4 We will share information and provide feedback**

- We will make paper and electronic versions of draft planning and associated documents available to the public and other organisations.
- We will publish all background documents no later than the date that the first development plan document or planning decision that relies on it is made or published. We will publish these on our website and on paper. You will be able to see them at the Town Hall and libraries. They will either be free or available for a small fee.
- We will consider all planning-related comments we receive and provide feedback to you on how we have considered your views and information provided. This will generally only apply to comments made within the publicised time period.
- We will make sure that we report the comments of the public and other stakeholders to councillors no later than the date when they are next due to make decisions on the proposed plans or planning documents.
- We will make your comments and our response to them publicly available, so that others with an interest in the same issue or matter can see them. (This will not include any unsuitable material, for example, sexist, racist or slanderous.)
- We will only use any records we have from the information you provide for planning purposes.
- We will not keep records of the information you have provided any longer than we need for the original purpose.

## **5 We will keep the process simple**

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- We will use our existing community involvement arrangements and those of our local partners, such as the Darlington Partnership (see [Appendix 1](#) for details). This will improve the range and balance of people having their say on planning matters.
- Wherever possible, we will group together consultations on several planning

documents and issues to help avoid a situation where people get fed up with being consulted.

## **6 We will learn from our mistakes**

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- We will review how effective each of our efforts to involve you is. We will change or improve the methods we use to deal with any shortcomings we identify. This will not necessarily mean we will change this statement.

## **We will follow these principles**

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**1.12 Chapters 2 and 3** following this outline how we will follow these principles and the standards of service you can expect from us.

**1.13 Chapter 4** explains the resources that we will use to achieve our aim of involving you.

## Chapter 2

# Local development documents

### How we plan to involve you

**2.1** We want to involve you throughout the plan-making process, and will try to do this in several ways. The methods we use will vary according to:

- The stage of each plan;
- What your interest is; and
- How much experience and knowledge of planning you have.

**2.2** Darlington Partnership will be at the heart of our consultations with the local community. We will use their groups to involve a wide range of people in our work. The main link will be through their Greener Theme Group.

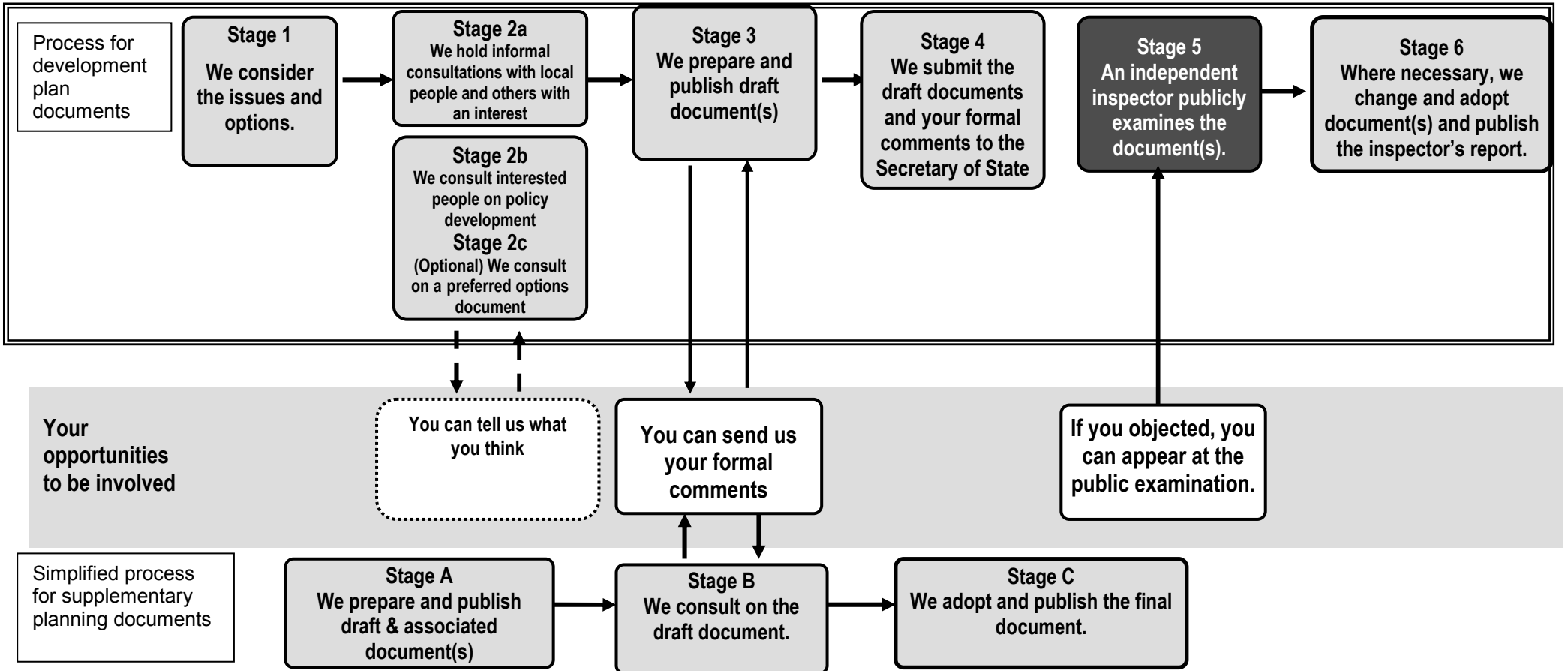
**Appendix 1** shows the links with Darlington Partnership in more detail.

**2.3** Your main opportunities to help shape the local development documents and Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) that we will be preparing are shown in **figure 1** below. It shows that there will generally be more and longer opportunities for you to get involved in preparing development plan documents (DPDs) than supplementary planning documents (SPDs).

**2.4** We will only actively try to get you involved in preparing SPDs if we think you have a clear interest in the area or the issues that the document tackles, or if we have to consult you

by law. If we need to prepare a SPD particularly quickly, for example, to help gain funding for developments or to respond to a request from a developer, the opportunities to get involved may be more limited. In these cases, we will give clear reasons why the need for speed is more important than a wide-ranging community involvement.

**Figure 1 – The main opportunities to get involved in the plan making process**



**2.5 Table 1** below shows what we will do to involve you in plan making, and in carrying out the sustainability appraisal and strategic environmental assessment (SA/SEA). This includes specific action to encourage the involvement of those who, in the past, have had little involvement in

planning, such as young people, and those who have previously found barriers to their involvement, such as people with disabilities and the black and ethnic-minority population.

**2.6** How we involve you may depend on the nature of the specific planning issues. Please see our Local Development Scheme and any Annual Monitoring Reports for details on the timetable for preparing each document.

**Table 1 – How we will involve you in plan making**

What we will do	Plan-making stage	How we will do it
<b>1</b> We will let you know when we publish new draft or revised planning documents. We will say where you can see the documents and when and how you can give us your representations.	DPD – stages 1 and 2 and 3. SPD – stage B.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We will use the local media (such as the press and the radio). We will use the, Town Crier, direct send letters and/or e-mail to statutory consultees and people and /groups on our planning policy mailing list. We will put, notices in libraries and main Council offices, within a week of the start of any consultation period.</li> <li>If a planning document proposes to change how land is used or proposes development on a specific area of land, we will send out leaflets or letters to the neighbouring residents and businesses most likely to be affected. We will also put up notices in prominent places in the area. If possible, we will let owners know of property that is likely to be affected.</li> <li>We will publish a notice on the website at the start of the consultation period, saying where you can see new or revised planning documents.</li> <li>We will contact you directly by e-mail or post if you send in comments directly. We may use a response form to do this.</li> </ul>
<b>2</b> We will promptly publish and make available copies of all new or revised planning documents.	DPD – stages 2, 3 and 5. SPD – stages B and C.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We will publish all new and revised planning documents on our website in a downloadable form, no later than the day we adopt the document or revise it.</li> <li>We will make paper copies available either free or for a reasonable charge.</li> <li>We will make paper copies of local development documents available for you to see at Crown Street library, Cockerton library, the mobile library and at the Town Hall during normal office hours.</li> </ul>
<b>3</b> We will debate and ask for your views on planning issues and options.	DPD – up to stage 4 + between stage 4 and 5 if necessary. SPD – stage B. SA/SEA – stage I and ii	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We will hold open events and exhibitions where you can meet the planners face-to-face.</li> <li>We will hold events, such as focus groups, for certain community representatives, organisations and individuals.</li> <li>If we are invited and it is possible, we will go to other organisations' meetings.</li> <li>We will arrange specific events for groups who need particular encouragement to get involved.</li> <li>We will use an open planning forum to meet about three times a year, or at important stages when documents are prepared.</li> </ul>
<b>4</b> We will offer advice to, help and develop the knowledge and skills of people and groups with little previous experience of the planning system.	DPD – all stages SPD – all stages SA/SEA – all stages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We will arrange 'orientation' events for representatives of hard-to-reach groups.</li> <li>We will work with Darlington Partnership's representatives group to develop their role as 'champions'. They encourage people to get involved in planning matters in their local communities and provide a community view on planning matters.</li> <li>We will promote the services of Planning Aid North among disadvantaged communities, black and ethnic-minority people, people with disabilities, young people and the elderly.</li> </ul>
<b>5</b> We will give you notice of the formal opportunities to make representations on or challenge a planning document, and invite your comments.	DPD – stages 3 to 6. SPD – stages B and C. SA/SEA – stages ii and iii	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We will place an advertisement, usually in the Northern Echo or Darlington &amp; Stockton Times, Darlington Advertiser or Herald &amp; Post public notices sections. This will give details of the proposed planning document together with details of where and when you can inspect it (and the other documents) and how you can make responses.</li> <li>We will send out formal response forms with all documents to Crown Street, Cockerton and the mobile libraries and to main</li> </ul>



This also applies to other people's suggested site allocations, if these are made in response to a planning document we have published.		<p>council offices.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We will publish a notice on the website saying where you can see the documents, together with when, how and to whom you should send any formal representations.</li> <li>If a planning document proposes changing the way land is used or a development on a specific area of land, we will send out leaflets or letters to the neighbouring residents and businesses most likely to be affected. We will also put up notices in prominent places in the area. If possible, we will let owners and users of property know that is likely to be affected.</li> <li>We will make forms for formal comments available on the website (you will be able to fill them in and reply on-line).</li> <li>We will send any people we have to consult by law a copy of the document and any other documents, together with a formal response form and a notice saying where they can see the document.</li> <li>We will send a notice that a new document has been published, where and when it can be inspected and how to make comments to all others on the planning policy mailing list.</li> </ul>
<b>6</b> We will try to get everyone to agree, and mediate between people who cannot.	DPD – all up to stage 5. SPD – between stages B and C. SA/SEA – all up to stage iv.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We will hold meetings with certain individuals and groups to explore particular issues in more depth, and ask them to agree a detailed policy wording.</li> <li>We will exchange information which has been agreed or which there is a dispute about.</li> <li>We will explore issues with members of the planning forum.</li> </ul>
<b>7</b> We will use the Economy and Environment Scrutiny Committee as a way of raising the awareness of members of the background of the specific document and issues raised through public consultation.	DPD – between stages 2 and 4 SPD – between stages A and B and C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We may invite members of the public to committee meetings as well as organisations, which members of the committee particularly want to hear from, together with guidelines about speaking at the meetings.</li> </ul>
<b>8</b> We will publish reports (for example, consultation feedback, environmental assessment, Inspector's report and annual monitoring report).	DPD – stage 2, between stages 2 and 3, stages 3 and 5 and 6. SPD – between stages B and C SA/SEA: –All stages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We will contact, by e-mail or post, all those who sent in comments directly. We may use a response form.</li> <li>We will send copies of reports to people we have to by law.</li> <li>We will publish reports on our website.</li> <li>We will send out paper copies to main council offices and libraries.</li> <li>We will make printed copies available for a small charge.</li> <li>We will advertise the publication using a press release and the Town Crier.</li> </ul>
<b>9</b> We will give notice of our arrangements for events associated with the Public Examination of planning documents.	DPD – between stages 3 and 5. SA/SEA – between stages iii and iv.	<p>At least six weeks before any public examination:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We will publish at least one public notice in at least one local newspaper in the area;</li> <li>We will issue a press release to the local media, and include the item in the next available Town Crier;</li> <li>We will post notices in the Town Hall Reception and local libraries; and</li> <li>We will contact directly those who have lodged objections .</li> </ul>
<b>10</b> We will give notice of our intention to adopt a planning document and will publish a consultation statement. This will set out who has been consulted, how this was done, the main issues that arose, and how the document tackles these.	DPD – Stage 6 SPD – Stage C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We will publish and make copies of the planning document and consultation statement available at the Town Hall, at Crown Street and Cockerton libraries, as well as the mobile library, during normal opening hours. We will include information about challenging the document.</li> <li>We will make all the above available on our website, together with a notice setting out when and where you can inspect copies of the documents.</li> <li>We will send copies of the planning document and any other documents to the organisations we have to consult by law, together with a notice saying where the documents can be inspected.</li> <li>We will place an advertisement, usually in the Northern Echo or Darlington &amp; Stockton Times' public notices section, giving details of the proposed planning document, together with details of where and when you can inspect it (and the associated</li> </ul>

documents).

- We will send a 'notice of adoption' to all those who have previously asked to be told.
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## Our service standards

**2.8** We are committed to making our dealings with everyone who gets involved in the plan-making process fair, clear, accessible and in good time. Table 2 sets out the standards you can expect in your dealings with us.

**Table 2 – Preparing new planning documents – Our service standards**

<b>General</b>	In all our dealings with you, we will treat you fairly and considerately.
<b>We will do the following.</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If you write to us</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We will acknowledge it within two working days of the date that we receive it.</li> <li>• We will reply in full within 10 working days of the date that we receive it.. Where we are unable to do so we will write and tell you why, and advise you of the date when you can expect a full reply.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If you phone us</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We will try to answer your query immediately over the phone, as long as you call within normal office hours. If your query relates to a specific site, we may ask you to send us a map by post or fax. This is to make sure that the advice we give is actually for the site that interests you.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If you e-mail us</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As long as you use the e-mail address <a href="mailto:planning.policy@darlington.gov.uk">planning.policy@darlington.gov.uk</a>, we will send you an automatic acknowledgement that we have received your e-mail. A planning officer will follow this up with a full reply by e-mail within 10 working days of the date we received the e-mail. If we are unable to do so we will email and tell you why, and advise you of the date when you can expect a full reply. We cannot guarantee this service if you use the e-mail address of a specific planning officer.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If you fax us</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• See our standards for writing to us. These only apply if you use the fax number 01325 388616. It often helps if you contact us first by phone or e-mail to tell us to expect a fax.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If you meet us face-to-face</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We try to answer your query immediately. If this is not possible, we will explain why not and will let you know when you can expect a follow-up response. We will ask you how you want us to contact you in the future. Planning policy officers are generally available to discuss any aspect of the new local development framework or other development plan documents during normal office hours. However, it is a good idea to make an appointment beforehand.</li> </ul>
<b>Specific action</b>	
<b>We will do the following.</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If you send us a formal representation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We will acknowledge it within two working days of the date that we receive it.</li> <li>• We will provide feedback either directly or through a summary report of all representations prepared for councillors.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If you ask for planning or environmental information</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If necessary, we will explain your rights and the information we have to make available under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Environmental Information Regulations 2004.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If you ask for a document</li> </ul>	<p>We will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• tell you where you can already see the document;</li> <li>• tell you whether there is a charge, and if so what it is; and</li> <li>• post it out to you the same day (if it is free of charge) or when we receive your payment (if there is a cost).</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If you have sent us comments on any planning document</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We will publish a community involvement and responses statement alongside the finalised planning document, setting out the issues raised by people who contacted us and our response to each issue raised.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If you make a formal complaint</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The appropriate section manager will deal with this in the first instance and let you know about the further steps you can take if you do not get a satisfactory answer.</li> </ul>

Which documents can I get involved in and when?

**2.9** Table 3 shows who we will involve at all key stages in preparing each of the new planning documents. Table 1 shows how we will go about it.

<b>Table 3</b>	Statement of Community Involvement	Local Development Scheme	Core Strategy (DPD)	Local development documents (DPDs SPDs)	Environmental sustainability and assessment scoping report	Environmental and sustainability report(s)	<b>Notes</b>
<b>Those to be involved</b>							
Specific organisations we will consult: Association of North East Councils, Coal Authority, Environment Agency, English Heritage, Natural England, the Secretary Of State For Transport, Highways Agency, One North East, Yorkshire Forward, other local authorities, the police, fire and rescue services, a Primary Care Trust and parish councils and Parish Meetings.	•		•	•	•	•	These are the organisations that the regulations say we must consult if we think that the proposed subject matter of the document affects them.
Government Office for the North East, the media	•		•	•	•	•	Government Office for North East
The general public, MPs, MEP	•		•	•		•	
Darlington Partnership, regional health authorities, Built Environment, architecture and heritage organisations, housing (developers, private and social landlords), environmental organisations and sustainability organisations, regional and strategic organisations (for example, One North East, Tees Valley Unlimited)	•		•	•	•	•	
Government agencies and departments	•	• *	•	•	•	•	*Planning Inspectorate only
Utility, energy and telecoms providers	•		•	•	• *		*Green energy, for example, companies who provide wind power.
Transport companies and organisations (for example, the Secretary Of State For Transport and local transport operators)	•		•	•	•	•	
Local neighbourhood groups	•		•	•		•	
Community diversity (for example, faith groups, disability groups, young people and gypsies)	•		•	•	•	•	
Open space, sport and recreation (for example, Sport England and local sports clubs)	•		•	•		•	
Rural and countryside interests, such as farmers groups, country landowners and government agencies.	•		•	•	•	•	
Land, property and housing organisations (developers, housing providers and planning consultants)	•		•	•	• *	•	*Planning consultants only.
Business, industrial and commercial organisations.	•		•	•			
Education, Learning & Skills	•		•	• *			*If education or the learning provision is included in the plan.
Retail and town centre.	•		•	•		•	
Health.	•		•	• *			*Where there are clear health links,

						for example, open land
Land and property owners and occupiers	• *		• *	• **		*Major landowners only – those directly affected
Minerals and waste interests	•		•	• *	•	* Only where relevant.
Tourism interests, such as the hospitality sector and visitors to the borough.	•		•	• *		* Tourism locations only, for example, town centre and parks
Other local community and voluntary groups, such as the Council for Voluntary Services.	•		•	•		

### Your involvement in assessing the effect of the proposed plans

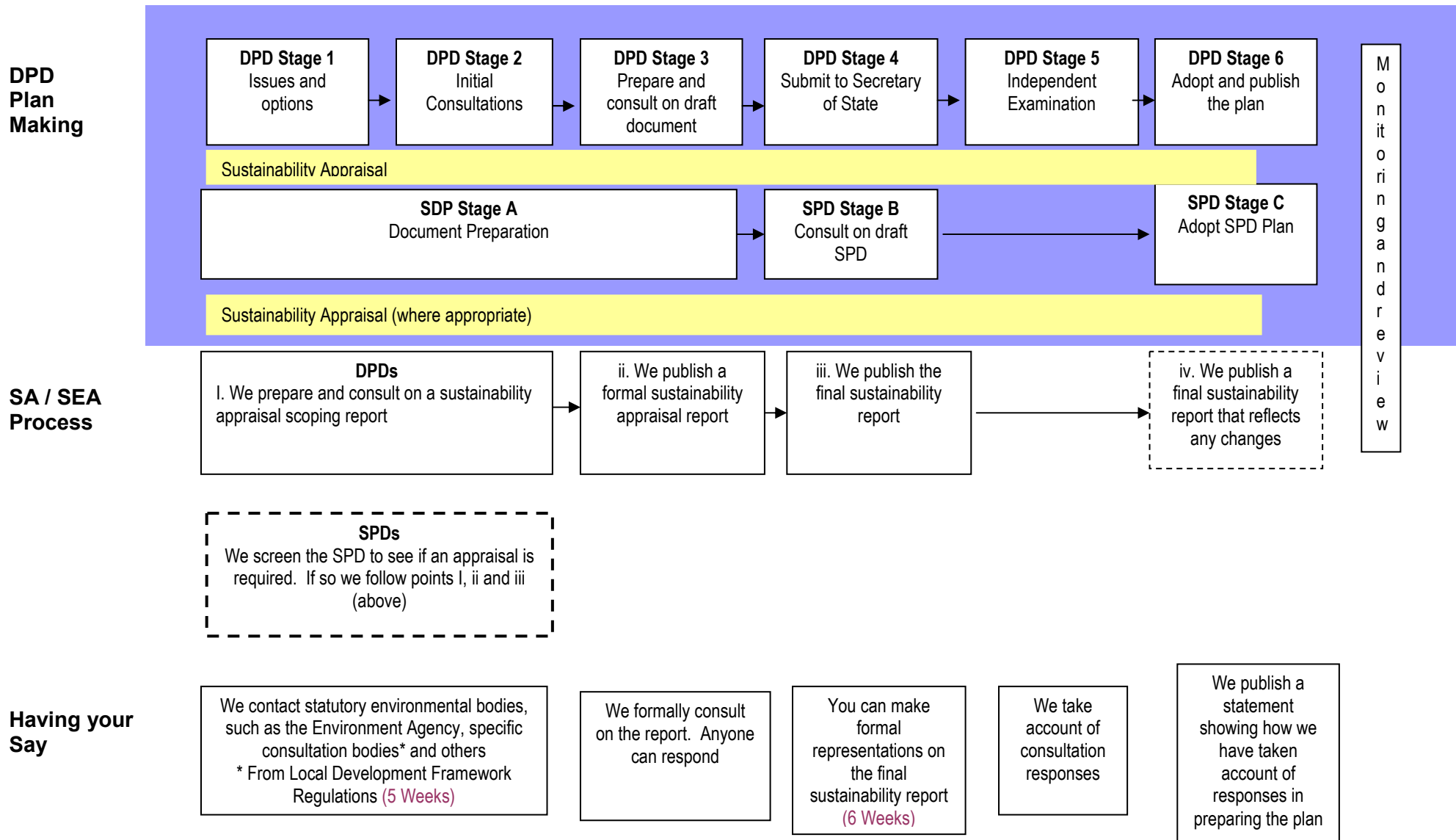
**2.10** At each main stage in preparing any new development plan document, we must assess the effect it will have on the environment and how sustainable it will be. Not all SPDs will need full assessments of effects, but all will need to be screened to ascertain if one is required. We will combine

these assessments and may combine the assessments of documents prepared simultaneously.

**2.11** We will consult environmental organisations and certain other local organisations on the scope of the

environmental and sustainability report. We will continue to involve them as necessary during the assessment process. Everyone will have the chance to comment on the reports, which we will publish at each main stage of preparing the plan (**Figure 2** below).

**Figure 2 – Community involvement in the environmental effect and sustainability of DPDs and SPDs**



## Chapter 3: Planning applications

### General

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**3.1** This section sets out the guidelines to potential developers on involving the public and others **before** a 'significant' planning application is made to us. This will require a two step approach from developers

The first step would be for the developer to convene a meeting / exhibition to enable their schemes to be shown in initial draft format to interested groups of people including local residents,. This would allow questions to be asked and feedback to be taken on board by developers.

We will expect developers to organise, fund and manage this event themselves. However, we will provide help, for example, in identifying relevant local community groups, neighbours and suitable venues for events. We also provide help in the form of free pre-application advice in our One Stop Shop. The benefits of submitting details of your proposals to the One Stop Shop are detailed in **Appendix 3**.

The second step would comprise a more formal meeting which would be organised and managed by senior officers of the Council. It would have the same objectives as the informal exhibition described above, that is for people to gain information and understanding

about a proposed development. A presentation of the proposals by the developer would be expected. The key difference in this case is that it would involve the participation of elected Members of the Council potentially including Ward Members and Members of the Planning Applications Committee.

To ensure that Members do not fetter their involvement in subsequent decision-making, they would be expected essentially to ask questions at this stage rather than to express a view.

Although such a system can not be prescriptive, in that both developer proposals and public and Member reactions may change, it is envisaged that such proactive forums would serve to reduce the potential for any 'surprises' to appear at a later stage.

**3.2** This work by developers is on top of what we already do once we receive a planning application. We summarise what consultation and publicity we already do in **Appendix 2**. You can see this on our website or in person at the Town Hall.

### **Why consult the community before a significant planning application is made?**

**3.3** We think that the early involvement of the public and other people with an interest on significant planning applications will benefit everyone. People will have more chance to have their say, and for their views to influence the final details of plans. Developers stand to benefit by identifying, at an early stage, local issues and environmental information to put together a scheme that better fits into the local area. As long as developers consider the relevant planning issues and comments raised at this stage and wherever possible use this feedback when finalising the scheme, he or she can expect us to deal with the planning application more quickly.

### **What is a 'significant planning application'?**

**3.4** The following are guidelines as to the kinds of development that we will treat as 'significant'.

- a Major developments. We define these as housing developments which include 10 or more homes or a residential development on a site of at least 0.5 hectares, and any other development with a floor area of 1000 square metres or more, or a site area of 1 hectare or more. Major developments will include changes of use above these thresholds.

- b A development, which needs an environmental assessment.<sup>3</sup>, These can include major industrial, infrastructure and waste projects, plus schemes such as golf courses, mining and intensive agriculture over certain sizes.
- c A significant development that conflicts with the policies in our development plan or with more up-to-date government planning policy<sup>4</sup>.
- d A development which proposes closing or changing a public right of way.

**3.5** There may also be proposed developments below these thresholds that we treat as 'significant'. This may be because the type of development or the location is sensitive for some reason, or the effect of a development, when taken with previous developments of the same type in an area, exceeds our significance thresholds. For example, a proposed development may be sensitive if it affects the site or setting of a listed building, the character or appearance of a conservation area, protected trees or ancient woodland, the amenity of neighbours nearby, or could cause local traffic congestion. In particular, fairly small-scale schemes within village settings may become significant within their context. The Council would therefore urge any applicants in villages to carry out local consultation prior to submitting an application irrespective of whether it meets the above thresholds.

<sup>16</sup>\_\_\_\_\_

<sup>3</sup> under Schedule 1 & 2 of the EIA Regulations.

<sup>4</sup> as may be set out in Government Planning Policy Guidance Notes and Statements, Ministerial Statements and speeches.

**3.6** The organisation or person applying will have to find out if their planning application will be 'significant'. You can ask a planning officer for an opinion as to whether the application is 'significant' before making the application. If you have applied to the One Stop Shop for pre-application advice, you will be made aware of whether or not the planning application will be 'significant' in the written response.

### **What we expect from developers**

**3.7** If you propose a 'significant' development, we will expect you to engage with planning officers, the public and community representatives before making a planning application. This consultation should be proportionate to the nature and scale of the proposed development. We strongly encourage you to discuss your consultations plan with a planning officer prior to carrying it out. At this stage, we will give you a list of addresses of people we suggest you consult.

**3.8** Pre-application consultations are the responsibility of the potential developer to whom any comments about the proposals at this stage should be sent.

**3.9** Any publicity or presentation material and questionnaires should concentrate on facts about the proposed scheme and avoid any bias. We can help assess any material you want to use.

**3.10** As a guide, we may expect you to carry out a range of activities taken from the list below.

### **Publicity**

- a For the first consultation step, as described above, you should let local residents, businesses, regular users of land (for example, sports teams) and others (service providers, government agencies) know by letter about the proposed development. The letter should say when and where they can find out more. The letters should include a clear map showing the location of the development and details of who to reply to and by when.
- b You must place an advert in a local newspaper (usually the Northern Echo) about the proposed development. It should say when and where people can find out more, and to whom and by when people can make comments.
- c The closing date for comments should be no earlier than 10 days after the close of a consultation event or sending out any letters, whichever is later. You should accept comments made in writing or at a minuted meeting. You should send round any extra information as a press release.

### **Involving the public at events or exhibitions**

- d You should organise at least one event or exhibition where anyone can find out more. Any staffed event should be no



earlier than four days after you have published publicity material or sent out letters.

- e Any event or exhibition must include display material with your proposals for the site, the scope for public comment, how you will deal with comments and an explanation of what will happen next. You should provide a comments box near any displayed plans. At some time during the exhibition a verbal presentation of the proposals should be given by staff to aid the understanding of those in attendance.
- f Any event must take place at a time or times that allows as wide a cross section of the public as possible to attend. This often means including weekends and evenings.
- g You must hold any event on the application site or building, or at a venue as close as possible to the application site. Venues should be fully accessible but if not, you should make reasonable adjustments to allow access for people with disabilities. These can include libraries, but would generally not include the Town Hall. This is so that we can stay impartial.

### **Contacting community representatives and others**

- h You should contact all local community groups and any other groups or organisations, for example, service providers and government agencies, who may also have a specific interest in a proposal. **Table 3** gives you a starting point for identifying them. However, you

should discuss this with a planning officer. The officer will give you all the contact details you need and highlight any hard-to-reach groups where you should make a particular effort to make contact.

- j You should let all borough councillors know if their ward includes the application site and any parish council whose parish includes or is next to the site.
- k With regard to the second consultation step as described above the Council will take responsibility for publicising and managing this event. The Government is keen for Councillors to participate in pre-application events. A code of conduct prevents borough councillors from expressing any views on proposals at this stage. However councillors may wish to ask questions about the development in order to gain more information and understanding about a particular proposal. They must stay impartial until any application is formally presented to them at a Planning Committee.

**3.11** Our guiding principles, set out in chapter 1, are also a useful reference as to the standards we would expect you to meet.

### **Outline applications**

**3.12** You should provide as much detail as possible about your plans to allow the public to make meaningful comments. This will be

easier if your proposals include, say, illustrative layouts.

**3.13** In the case of proposals which may result in an outline application, you should be aware that you will need to explain the nature of your intended application in any presentation and try to achieve responses that tackle the broad principle of development, rather than details, at this stage.

**3.14** You may need another publicity event to tackle a detailed submission, following an outline approval. You should check with planning officers before you make these applications.

**3.15** You may not need to consult the local community on an outline scheme if we or our partners have carried out a recent exercise in preparing a planning or development brief or SPD.

### **Variations to significant schemes**

**3.16** You may also need another publicity event to tackle a formal change or modification to a proposal that already has planning permission, if this relates to a significant application. Again, you should check with planning officers before you make these applications.

### **Sending us a significant planning application**

**3.17** You should send with your planning application a statement setting out the work

you have done to involve the community. This should include:

- the extent of the area where you consulted, including a list of properties and businesses you contacted;
- a list of interest or pressure groups or other organisations you contacted;
- where any event was held and how long it lasted;
- a summary of all the comments received and issues raised;
- clear details of the comments which have resulted in amendments to the scheme and what those changes are, and which comments have not, and why
- highlighting any criticism by groups or individuals about the process you used to consult.

You should also keep all consultation responses.

### **If you do not keep to these guidelines**

**3.18** We cannot refuse to accept a planning application just because you haven't done enough (or any) community consultation before submitting a planning application. However, if this does happen, it could delay us considering your application. This is because we may need to refer relevant planning objections back to you. We may also tell all those we notify about the proposal at the application stage about your failure to keep to these guidelines.

**3.19** If you fail to carry out any community consultation or do not do enough we will let councillors know this in the officer's report on

your proposals. If, at this stage, there are still relevant public objections that you have not dealt with, the Committee will have to consider whether to refuse planning permission or defer making a decision.

**3.20** If you were genuinely not aware of our consultation requirements, we will let you know about the requirements as soon as we can and give you the chance to suspend the application to allow the community consultation needed to take place. If you refuse to keep to the guidelines, we will let you know the consequences set out above in this section.

## Chapter 4: Making it happen and reviewing what we do

### What resources are there to support this?

**4.1** The programme of events to involve you in plan making will be managed by the Planning Policy Team. The team includes four professional town planners, with technical and administration support.

**4.2** The action set out in this document is central to the work of the team at particular stages of policy development. Occasionally, we may ask for specialist experts to work with our staff. In particular, we may ask others to run specific events on our behalf. If this is the case, at least one officer from the planning and environmental policy team will be present, and one or more councillors may be there.

**4.3** We have received money from the Government specifically to help improve our planning service. We will use some of this to improve the amount and quality of feedback we receive from you on new plans and development proposals. This will be on top of the existing communication and customer feedback arrangements we already support, such as the Town Crier, the annual community survey and the Darlington Partnership.

**4.4** We will make sure the resources available for community involvement take account of:

- each of the different new planning documents we have to prepare;
- the costs of any publicity and consultation needed by law; and
- the views of the local community and others if we do not already know these. We will pay particular attention to supporting activities designed to encourage groups that, in the past, have had little involvement in local planning issues.

### What role do elected councillors have?

**4.5** Councillors have two main roles within the council – as decision makers and as community representatives. They may carry out the first role as members of the Cabinet and/or at full Council and/or as members of the Planning Applications Committee. They can act as community representatives as ward councillors and members of scrutiny committees and consultation forums. Any Councillor can ask for an application to be taken to Planning Applications Committee (rather than decided by Planning Officers).

**4.6** When we involve you in plan-making or making decisions on planning applications, your contact will generally be with planning officers. However, if we announce local events, one or more councillors may be present. Councillors find out what you think through officers' written reports, presented at regular public meetings such as Planning Applications Committee, Planning

Applications Sub Committee, Cabinet or Council meetings. In making decisions, they consider your views.

**4.7** If you want, you can make your views known to your ward councillor directly, by phone, by e-mail, by letter, or by going to a ward surgery. Councillors generally pass on these comments to planning officers. However, unless you make your comments in writing to the planning officer within the timescale given, you have no automatic right to be heard at any Committee, Council meeting, public inquiry or examination.

**4.8** If you have sent us written comments on a planning policy document, we may invite you to speak directly to the Economy and Environment Scrutiny Committee. If you have commented on a planning application in many cases you will be able to speak to the Planning Applications Committee (see 'Have Your Say at Committee' included in **Appendix 2**).

**4.9** Under our Members' Code of Conduct on Planning, the activities of Councillors who are involved in making decisions on planning applications, for example, serving on the Planning Applications Committee, are strictly limited.

### Reviewing what we do

**4.10** We will assess how effective our efforts are to involve you and we will publish a statement of our findings in

the Local Development Framework  
Annual Monitoring Report. If our  
findings or new government best-

practice guidelines show that we  
need to change this statement, we

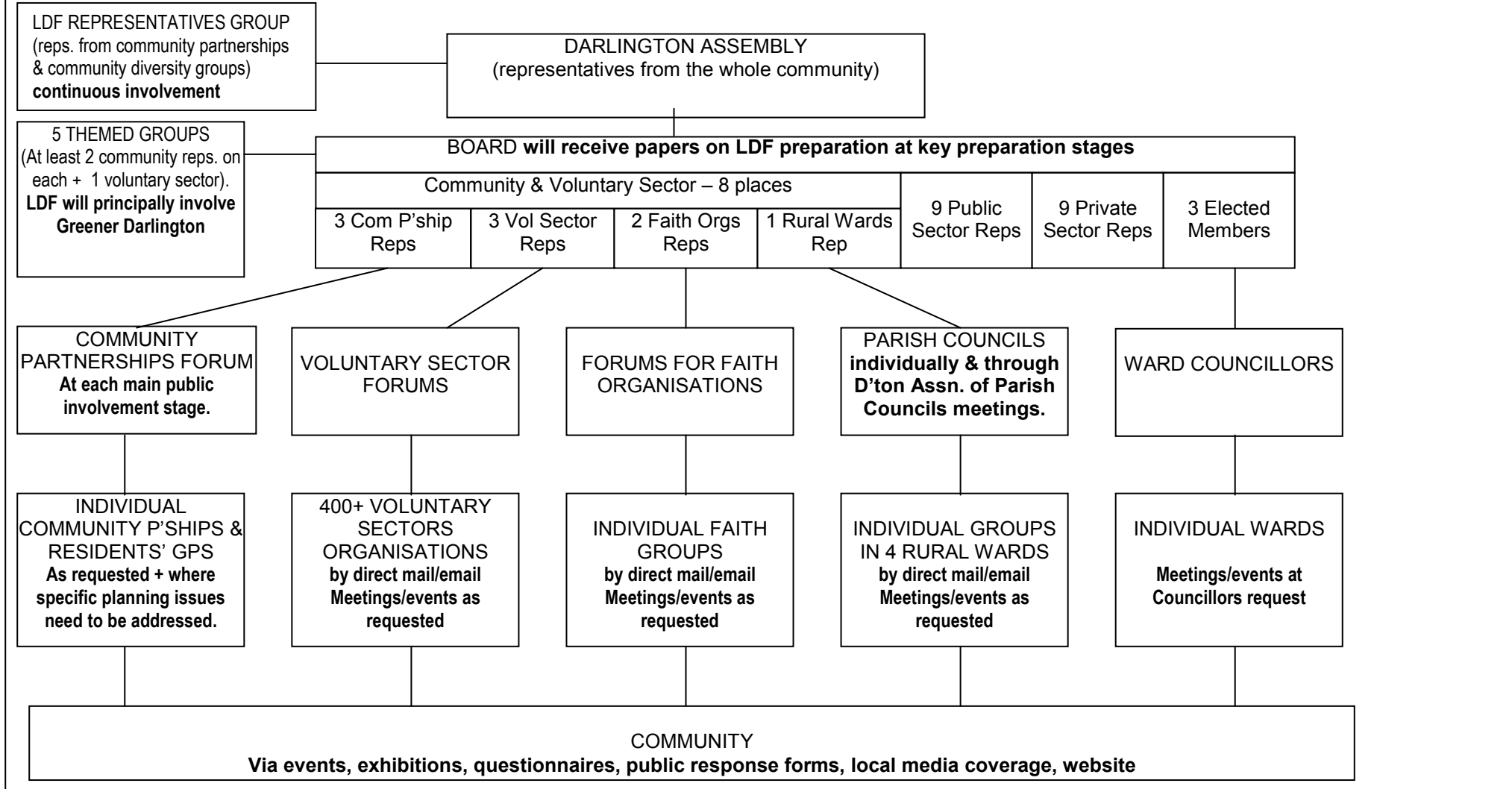
will prepare and consult on a revised  
statement.

# Appendices

## Appendix 1 – Involving Darlington Partnership in preparing plans

### Darlington Partnership The Local Strategic Partnership

Links between preparing the Local Development Framework and the Darlington Partnership Community Involvement Structure



## Appendix 2

### Existing notification and publicity practices for planning applications

#### **Publicity and Consultations on Planning Applications**

All new planning applications are publicised. The Council generally notifies adjoining occupiers by post. For some types of application, we display site notices and place adverts in the press.

All persons notified about a specific planning application will be advised where and when they can see it and how they can make comments upon it. Twenty-one days will be allowed in which to do so. If material amendments are made to an application, it may be necessary to re-notify neighbours or interested parties and in this event a further period for comment will normally be allowed.

Additional publicity is usually given to large or important applications. Extra time is sometimes allowed for comments where necessary.

Planning application records are available for public inspection during office hours (08:45-16:45 Mon-Thu and 08:45-16:15 Fri).

Information about all valid planning applications received will be compiled by way of a weekly list which will be available free of charge at the Chief Executives Department at the Town Hall, An alternative version of the weekly list is viewable online or can be e-mailed directly.

#### **How we notify people**

##### **Publicity for major development**

For residential development, we define major development as 10 or more homes and/or a proposal for a site area of over 0.5 hectares. For other forms of development (offices, industry, retail and so on) the definition refers to the development of over 1,000 square metres of floor space and/or over one hectare or more of a site. Major development also includes mining or working minerals and all waste developments. These definitions are set by the government.

Procedure: We will, subject to the individual case inform occupiers who share a common boundary with an application site and / or display a site notice (or more than one site notice if appropriate) on or near the site for 21 days. We will also publish a notice in the local newspaper (currently the Darlington and Stockton Times published on Fridays).

##### **Publicity for minor development**

Minor development is defined as the erection of 9 or less residential units or a residential development of less than 0.5 hectares in area. For other forms of development, minor development is defined as less than 1,000 square metres of floor space or less than one hectare in site area.

Procedure: We will let all people who share a boundary know. We will also consider the need to display a site notice in cases where there may be some doubt as to who may have an interest, perhaps because we don't know who

owns or uses land nearby, or because the development is likely to be of interest to more than the immediate neighbours.

##### **Publicity for change of use**

Change-of-use applications can sometimes also involve building operations. In this case, the requirements we have identified above will apply. If applications are just to change the use of land and buildings, the following guidelines apply.

Procedure: We will let people who share a boundary know; including those within the application site itself (for example, the upper floor). We will also let those people know who own and use land and buildings directly opposite. We will also consider the need to display a site notice if we are not sure who owns the land or buildings, or if a development may be of interest to more than the immediate neighbours.

##### **Publicity for householder development**

Householder developments are defined as those within the curtilage of residential property, which need an application for planning permission and are not a change of use. These include extensions, alterations, swimming pools, walls, fences, vehicle access and porches.

Procedure: We will let occupiers know as follows.

- For rear extensions – we will let occupiers on both sides know, plus any properties to the back that might be affected.
- For side extensions – we will let occupiers on both sides know, plus any properties to the front and back that might be affected.

- For front extensions – we will let occupiers on both sides know and those directly opposite.
- For porches – we will let occupiers on both sides know and those directly opposite that might be affected.
- For garages, sheds and other forms of domestic development – we will let occupiers directly next to the proposals know.

### Publicity for other development

Publicity for other proposals (for example, applications to carry out work to protected trees, hedgerows, and so on). We will notify any occupiers of land with a shared boundary with the proposed site.

If there are no clearly identifiable occupiers nearby, we will display a site notice. If needed by law, we will also put an advert in the press.

### Minor amendments

Minor changes are often proposed to an approved scheme that will have hardly any effect on occupiers nearby. These could include, for example, the following.

- Changes to materials, which do not significantly affect the overall appearance of the development.
- Alterations to approved elevations, where they do not adversely affect the privacy or amenity of the occupiers of nearby property.

Procedure: We may deal with these matters as a 'non-material amendment', and give approval by letter. However, we don't do this often and we will need a formal application for a variation if the amendment would increase the size or change the form or character of the proposed development significantly. When we receive the

application, we will let all adjoining occupiers originally notified know again.

Note: The person applying will need to identify the amendments to the revised plans by noting them clearly on the plans and/or giving a clear description of changes in an accompanying letter. These details may be sent round to affected neighbours in appropriate circumstances.

### What these notification procedures cover

The above notification procedures apply to:

- full applications;
- outline applications;
- submissions of reserved matters
- Certificates of Lawful Use (existing use)
- applications for advertisement consent
- listed building consent;
- conservation area applications;
- variations or modifications to planning permission;
- applications for work to protected trees;
- hedgerow applications; and
- applications for prior-approval for telecommunications apparatus.

It will not apply to agricultural or other 28-day determinations (because of the short timescale involved) nor to Certificates of Lawful Use (Proposed Use or Development). These applications are just decided on an interpretation of the law.

Note: We will address correspondence to the person who occupies the property. However, we will not be responsible for letting owners of land or property who do not occupy the affected land know. For example, if a property is rented, we will let the tenants know but not the landlord.

We will also add site notices (for example, telecommunications, overhead power lines and so on) and send round the weekly list of applications received.

### General service standards

The notification letters, site notices and advertisements will ask for all representations within 21 days from the date of the letter, or the date that the site notice is put up, or the date when the advertisement appears in the newspaper. For notice of amendments, where deemed necessary, we will allow a further period for comment, the length of which will vary depending on the nature of the amendment. We will not make a decision on any application before the end of the stated consultation period.

### Late representations

We will normally take account of any representations we receive outside the timescale of the publicity timetable providing we have not yet made a decision on an application. However, we cannot guarantee to report correspondence we receive on the day of a Planning Committee (including faxes and e-mails) Representations we receive after a decision has been made cannot be taken into account.

## **Commenting on a Planning Application**

### **Comments & Objections**

If you wish to comment on a proposed development in a planning application, you may submit your views to the local planning authority. All comments (including objections) received will be taken into account when considering the application.

Please note that the comments we received **cannot be confidential**. Some may be read out at Planning Applications Committee. Responses associated with a particular current planning application can be made available for members of the public to view on request.

### **Types of Issues to Raise**

Only **material planning considerations** can be taken into account for the purpose of determining a planning application. Examples include:

- the relationship to local, regional and national planning policies
- traffic impact and highway safety
- privacy, visual impact, overshadowing and overlooking
- noise
- effects on trees
- concern about crime

Comments can be in favour of, or in objection to, the proposal or any part of it. Remember that it is often possible for a proposal to be modified to take into account your concerns. Therefore it may be helpful to make any suggestions that would overcome your concerns.

### **Types of Issues not to Raise**

Non-planning issues should not be raised. Examples include:

- personal morals or views about the applicant
- possible effects on property values
- ownership disputes over land encroachment, rights of way, fence lines etc.
- restrictive covenants
- property maintenance
- loss of private views
- business competition
- conflict with other laws

Such matters cannot be taken into account when considering a planning application. If you raise them they will be disregarded.

### **Time Limits**

We leave a minimum of 21 days before determining an application to allow time for comments to be submitted. We accept comments up until the time a decision is made.

### **How to Submit your Comments**

There are several ways of submitting your comments, i.e.:

- by letter
- via email
- on a Comments Form
- via an online Comments Form

Please note that it is essential to identify the application by including its reference number. Please also include the site address.

If you wish to comment on more than one application, please use a separate letter, email

or form for each.

### **Comments by Letter**

Letters should be addressed to:

Assistant            Chief            Executive  
(Regeneration),  
Town Hall,  
Darlington,  
DL1 5QT

If you prefer, your letter may be faxed to us on 01325 388616.

### **Comments via Email**

Comments can be sent via email to either [planning.enquiries@darlington.gov.uk](mailto:planning.enquiries@darlington.gov.uk) or [planning.control@darlington.gov.uk](mailto:planning.control@darlington.gov.uk).

### **Comments Form**

A form that you can download from our website can be used to record your comments. The completed form should be sent to the above address, or faxed to us on 01325 388616. Copies of this form are also available from the Planning reception desk at the Town Hall.

### **Online Comments Form**

Our online search & display facility for planning applications also includes a facility for submitting comments via an online form. If you already know the application reference number, the site address and postcode, you may prefer to go directly to the Online Comments Form. Please note that these details will need to be filled in manually in this case, whereas they would be filled in automatically when accessing the form via other routes.



## **Have your say at committee**

### **Planning Applications Committee**

The Planning Applications **Committee (PAC)** is made up of 13 elected members. Its purpose is to make decisions on larger scale contentious applications. These decisions will take into account the officers' reports and recommendations as well as the views of the applicant and of interested and affected parties. Planning applications that are considered by the Planning Applications Committee are normally those which are contentious in nature having received objections from affected bodies or organisations.

Please note that only a minority of all planning applications go to PAC. The remainder of applications are delegated to the Assistant Chief Executive (Regeneration), to be decided in accordance with accepted policy and guidelines.

It is important that Members of the Planning committees are able to devote time to carefully consider planning applications that are more significant and that generate a lot of concern from the local community. Applications that go to Committee will therefore fall into one or both of the following categories

- i) they do not follow our planning policies,
- ii) we have received 3 or more letters of objection to them..

Some planning applications do not attract any objections and can be decided by officers under the scheme of delegation.

For applications that are less contentious receiving up to 2 objections these may also be dealt with under powers delegated to officers but only once the Chair of Planning Committee has given clearance to proceed in this way.

Any Councillor retains the right to request that a planning application be brought before the Committee should they consider there to be good grounds for doing so.

The Committee is a formal meeting of the Council and it has to be run efficiently and according to legal requirements.

To make sure that the meeting is properly run, one of the Councillors holds the position known as 'Chair', and he or she is in charge of who may speak at the meeting and in what order. We can only consider applications, which have been included on the published agenda for the meeting. Every application will have a report with it prepared by planning officers.

#### **The report**

This explains:

- the details of the application and the site;
- comments received from neighbours and other people consulted;
- the relevant policies from the Development Plan; and
- any other planning considerations relevant to the case.

The report must give the Councillors who sit on the Committee a clear recommendation which the planning officers judge to be right for the application, having weighed up any arguments for or against the proposal. The recommendation may be to either approve or refuse the application. In the case of approval, this may be recommended subject to planning conditions or legal agreements to control the exact form of development.

#### **The decision**

The planning officers' report is not the only thing that the Committee will take into account. They will also consider plans and photographs of the site displayed by the officer, the merits of the application itself, and may use their own local knowledge and judgement to reach a decision that they consider to be right for the application. Legally they must take decisions in line with the Development Plan, unless there are clear planning reasons for not doing this.

If the Committee decides to refuse permission, we will give specific reasons for this, including referring to the key planning policies that are relevant to the decision.

If you have commented in writing on an application, we will send you a letter to inform you of the decision.

#### **Speaking at the Committee**

We know that people who have an interest in contentious planning applications, such as the person applying or people who object strongly to what is being proposed, often value the chance to speak directly to the Councillors, and draw attention to the points which they feel the Committee should consider in reaching the decision. If a planning application is one that is decided by the Planning Applications Committee or sub-committee (see criteria for taking applications to Committee on previous page) you will have the right to speak to the Committee about the application.

#### **How the public-speaking arrangements work**

- You can tell officers in the Development Team in advance of the meeting that you want to speak to on an application. However, you do not have to do this.
- When you arrive at the meeting, you must report to the reception desk outside the

Committee Room. We can take your details and include you on the Chair's list of people who want to speak on particular applications.

- You should arrive at the meeting 10 to 15 minutes before the start time, which is usually 1:30pm for PAC and 5:00pm for PAS (although this can sometime vary), so that you can register and find a seat in the committee room.
- The Chair will usually make sure that we consider, as early as possible during the meeting, applications where people have said they want to speak. However, this is not always possible. You may have to wait while we consider other applications before the one you are interested in comes up.
- When the time comes for the application to be considered, the Chair will first ask the officer to present the report. Speakers will then follow in this order.
  - 1 Ward Councillor or Parish Council representative
  - 2 Objectors or their representative (see also the section 'frequently asked questions' below )
  - 3 The person applying, or their representative
- The Chair will ask speakers to take a seat at the table. There is a microphone system to make sure everyone can hear.
- The Chair will then ask the planning officer if there are any comments on the points raised.
- The Committee will then debate the application before moving on to a decision.
- Members of the Committee may ask specific questions of a speaker if they are unsure about something which was said, . However

speakers cannot take part in the debate and will not be given a further opportunity to put forward their case.

- Following the debate, the Committee will move to a decision and take a vote.

### **Frequently asked questions**

#### **How long will I be allowed to speak for?**

The approved guidelines for the scheme allow you up to five minutes. In exceptional cases the Chair may allow longer if agreed beforehand. However, you should aim to put forward your case clearly and briefly.

#### **Can anyone speak on a planning application at Committee?**

You can only speak if you have a legitimate interest in the planning application. You must keep your comments to 'material planning considerations', and avoid any personal comments.

#### **How many people can speak for or against an application at Committee?**

We allow an unlimited number of people to speak for or against a planning application

#### **Can I show the Committee my own plans or photographs?**

Yes, but you will need to leave a copy with us to go on the application file. You can refer to any visual material which has been presented by officers. You may be allowed to use our display facilities, but you must arrange this beforehand and it must be agreed with the Chair.

#### **Can I ask questions about the application?**

If you want, you can include questions as part of your comments on the application. However, none of the other people present have to answer you. You will not be able to interrupt the meeting to ask questions after you have had your time to speak.

#### **How do I find out where and when the Committee is going to consider the application I am interested in?**

If you are the person applying, their agent, or someone who has commented in writing on the application, we will write to you before the meeting and tell you the time and date. If this is not the case, you will need to contact the Development Section to find out the time and date. We always hold the meeting in a committee room at the Town Hall and it begins promptly.

#### **Can I have a copy of the officers' Committee Report before the meeting?**

Yes. The agenda for the meeting is available for the public five clear working days before the meeting. If you contact the Development Section on 01325 388 670 or Democratic Services on 01325 388 366 to ask for a copy of a report, we can usually send this to you by post, fax or e-mail. Or you can call in at the Customer Services Reception and collect a copy. There may be a small charge for this service.

#### **Will the application always be decided at the meeting?**

No. The Committee will sometimes defer an application to visit the site or to allow further information to be supplied which is important to make the right decision. We are committed to meeting government targets for the time taken to decide on planning applications. We will only defer applications if there is a good reason.

#### *Site visits*

The Committee visits sites only when they think that this is necessary for them to properly understand the planning arguments. We have to make sure that everyone has a fair and equal opportunity to put forward their viewpoint. For this reason, site visits are not the time for people applying or objecting to speak to the Committee.

The Committee do not make decisions on applications at the site visit. Members of the public are welcome to go to site visits to see what takes place. However, if this involves going on private land, the landowner will decide whether to allow access.

## **The Planning Register**

Local planning authorities are obliged to keep records of all planning applications that they deal with. These records, collectively known as "the Planning Register", include a log of all applications received, files containing the submitted forms and attachments, plus all decision notices issued.

Copies of current planning application details and recent Decision Notices are made available to members of the public. These can be viewed at the Customer Services centre at the Town Hall.

## **Application Files**

Each application is filed separately. Copies of the application forms, plans, drawings and all correspondence associated with the application are kept together in the file. Applications are numbered and filed sequentially and chronologically. Our records go back as far as 1947.

For each active application, i.e. those currently under consideration, a separate file containing copies of all the main items describing the proposal details is kept at the Customer Services reception desk. These copies are made available within three working days of the application being validated (see the application & decision process page on our website). Members of the public may view these files on request. Please note that if you wish to view non-current files, it is advisable to contact the department beforehand to ensure that the relevant files are available.

Applications for the period 1974 to 1992 have been transferred to microfiche. Those from 1993 to 1996 have been scanned and the images stored on CD-ROM.

## **Database**

Since 1997, details of each planning application have been recorded in a database, which is constantly being kept up to date. We have made these records available online so that you can search for an application and view the main details.

The search & display facility for planning applications can be accessed there too. Look for:

 [\*\*SEARCH & DISPLAY APPLICATIONS\*\*](#)  
[\*\*\(new window\)\*\*](#)

[View details of applications, back as far as 1997]

Applications may be searched by specifying criteria such as address, postcode, date, ward, parish or application number.

Please note that the application data that is accessible via the web is not 'live', but is updated daily.

A facility is provided to allow your comments on a particular application to be submitted via an online form. You are advised to read Commenting on an Application before submitting comments.

## **Database Extracts**

Some lists of applications, e.g. current applications and recent decisions, are produced periodically in PDF (picture file) format and made

available online. These can be viewed or downloaded.

Weekly lists of applications received can be viewed as part of the search & display facility.

## Appendix 3

### The 'One Stop Shop' pre-application service

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#### The One Stop Shop

The One Stop Shop (OSS) is a free and confidential advisory service that meets every two weeks and comprises officers from various Council departments and other key interests, such as the Police's architectural liaison officer and a representative of Darlington Association for Disability.

The One Stop Shop is designed to assist in determining all non-householder development proposals including unusual or potentially controversial developments. Proposals may vary from a new dwelling or a change of use to a large retail complex. The one stop shop aims to identify any consents required; offers advice on major issues or concerns likely to be raised in relation to the proposal and gives an indication on whether permission is likely to be granted

#### Why use the One Stop Shop

The One Stop Shop can help save time, numerous telephone calls and money as any potential problems will be highlighted during the One Stop Shop meeting and therefore improvements to the scheme can be carried out prior to submission of a formal planning application.

Without the advice of the One Stop Shop members key issues would only be raised during the application period and it may not be possible to overcome all issues within the set time frame, which in turn may lead to planning committee refusing the application or deferring the decision.

#### Contacting the One Stop Shop

The One Stop Shop can be contacted in a number of ways either by submitting an Informal Enquiry form (which can be found on the Council's website, [www.darlington.gov.uk](http://www.darlington.gov.uk)), or by sending a letter or e-mail identifying the works proposed. The more information provided at pre application stage the better the advice would be, it might be necessary to provide a location map, elevation drawings, information in relation to parking and access and any landscaping information. A planning officer may contact you for further information before a complete response is given.

#### Feedback from the one stop shop

Our aim is to respond to all One Stop Shop enquiries within 15 working days of receipt of each enquiry. The response may state that there were no fundamental concerns raised in the meeting and therefore a formal planning application could be submitted. Alternatively, the response may note key issues raised that would need to be addressed prior to submission in order to prevent a formal objection from a Council department or a partner during the application stage.

The response received is **not** a formal planning permission, it is an officer's informal opinion based on information provided by you and advice given by a One Stop Shop Members. The outcome of a planning application may not be

the same as the One Stop Shop feedback as new issues may arise that were not considered at the one stop shop meeting.

