

Development Consultation Forums

Guidance for Developers and Public

What are Development Consultation Forums?

The Council is committed to improving community involvement in the planning process. In December 2013, the Council adopted its 'Statement of Community Involvement' (SCI) which sets out how the Council will involve the community in plan-making and when considering planning applications (major, minor, other, listed building and conservation area) at both pre and submission stages of a planning application.

The Council also reviewed its formalised pre-application advice protocols in September 2014, for all types of developments and future applications with the aim of improving Councillor and stakeholder involvement in the pre application process, and providing greater understanding for developers of community expectations of development within the Borough.

The Council also holds a 'Consultation Forum' for large schemes with the aim of improving Councillor and public involvement in the pre-application process, and providing greater understanding of potential large developments within the Borough.

This document should be read in conjunction with the SCI Guidance and the Development Consultation Forum would be part of a wider SCI process where developers engage with the local community.

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**WELWYN
HATFIELD**
BOROUGH COUNCIL



What are Development Consultation Forums?

The Development Consultation Forum is a meeting held in public, where a developer is able to explain proposals directly to Councillors and the public at an early stage, prior to a decision being made on a planning application, about a development site. The process is designed to assist the developer to deal properly with important issues and to reduce delay and frustration on everyone's part in the formal planning process.

The process was established in the hope that it would improve the planning process in connection with schemes that would have a wider impact on the local community within the Borough.

It is important that the presentation takes place at an early pre-decision stage in the development process so that developers may rethink certain aspects of their proposals or commission further survey work to explain their proposals.

What is the Development Consultation Forum's purpose?

Its prime purpose is to help identify issues that a proposal, which is considered by Members, may need to address. In particular the discussion will:

- Enable the developer to explain development proposals directly to Councillors and the public at an early stage
- Identify any issues that may be considered in any formal application
- Inform Councillors and the public of a development proposal at an early stage in the pre application process
- Inform officer pre-application discussions with the developer to enable the developer to shape an application to address community issues

Which type of developments will be discussed at the Development Consultation Forum?

The following types of development schemes, which are still at pre-application and pre-decision stage, will be considered:

- Proposed large-scale developments which include significant social, community, health or education facilities, or where early public discussion of issues would be useful
- Proposed developments of 50 units or more of housing
- Proposed developments of 10,000 or more square metres of industrial, commercial or retail floorspace

Which type of developments will the Development Consultation Forum not consider?

Straightforward major applications
Proposals for minor or householder planning application such as those to alter or extend houses
Proposals to erect advertisements
Amendments to proposals which have already been discussed at the Development Consultation Forum

What does the Development Consultation Forum not do?

It is **not** a decision-making meeting
Its purpose is to answer questions and raise issues. **If** a formal application is submitted in the future the Council will decide the application on its merits following normal planning rules. A decision on a planning application will **not** be made at the Development Consultation Forum
It does not replace the legal duty to publicise certain types of planning applications that they receive. Welwyn Hatfield's current consultation standards and practices for publicising applications will not change
Welwyn Hatfield Councillors and officers who attend will not express any opinions of the merits of the proposal
Members of the Committee have to keep an open mind until a formal decision on an application is made. If they express views about the proposals they will not be able to take part in any future decision. Any statements are made "without prejudice"
It cannot require the developer to make changes to the proposals as a result of the discussions at the meeting

When will a Development Consultation Forum be held?

The Development Management Service Manager will identify development schemes suitable for presentation to Members as soon as possible during pre-application discussions with developers. Agreement will be sought from the Chair of Development Management Committee and the Executive Member for Planning, Housing and Community to determine whether the proposal should be presented. The developer would be asked whether and when in the discussions he would like to take advantage of the Development Consultation Forum.

Development Consultation Forums will be held as needed and dates of meetings will be published on the Council's Website or by contacting the Committee Section on 01707 357443.

Will all pre-decision matters be referred to the Development Consultation Forum?

No. Only those proposals that are significant developments likely to raise issues sensitive to the wider community will be accepted for discussion.

If proposals are sensitive to the wider community do they have to be subject to the pre-application process and the Development Consultation Forum?

No. Whilst developers will be encouraged to use this opportunity when appropriate it is not mandatory and it will depend upon their co-operation and willingness to take part.

Is the Development Consultation Forum a substitute for the Development Management Committee?

No. The Development Management Committee will still need to consider an application based on the facts, issues and advice and nothing said at the discussion will prejudice that consideration.

Who can attend the Development Consultation Forum?

Anyone can attend and listen, however, only those invited to speak by the Chairman will be able to raise issues at the Development Consultation Forum.

Who will be able to speak?

A person can address the Development Consultation Forum as:-

Category: The developer or their agent

Category: The local Parish or Town Council or their authorised representative

Category: Any Member of the Council.

Category: Members of the public who are invited to speak by the Chairman of the Forum.

How will the public be aware of a Development Consultation Forum?

Local residents will be notified of the Development Consultation Forum by the placement of a site notice adjacent to the site, through notification to the Town/Parish Council and through any further involvement undertaken in connection with the Statement of Community Involvement by the developer or Local Planning Authority.

What if I want to speak but I am not able to speak?

You are welcome to attend the meeting, listen to the presentation from the developer and views of others. You may then wish to make written comments to officers who will forward any comments received to developers, and take account of any points made in any subsequent discussions about the proposal, if you are not able to ask a question on the evening. In any event, the Development Consultation Forum will not affect any rights to make representations when a formal planning application is submitted.

Will the Committee negotiate a proposal with a developer?

No. The purpose of the Development Consultation Forum is to ask questions about and raise issues that participants consider need to be addressed by the developer prior to submitting a planning application.

How will I know about the Development Consultation Forum?

Arrangements will normally be made about 2-3 weeks in advance of the discussion to notify local residents, by site notice and via the Town/Parish Council of the date and time of the Development Consultation Forum. Approximately 1 week prior to the meeting, the report, prepared by Officer's, will be available to view on the Council's website. The report will describe the site, the proposal, detail any relevant history, policy considerations and report any representations or consultees responses that might have been received.

What happens at the Development Consultation Forum?

The Chair will introduce the Development Consultation Forum explain who is going to speak, the order of speakers and the rules that the meeting will follow. There will be no discussion on the merits of the proposal. The order of events will normally be as follows:

(a) The Development Management Service Manager or Planning Officer will provide a background to the proposal (including planning history and planning policies)	Up to 5 minutes
(b) The developer/agent will present the proposal. The developer will be expected to supply the presentation. The presentation will include the background to the development, the process by which the design has been created and key issues that have been identified.	Up to 15 minutes
(c) Councillor members of the Development Consultation Forum may ask questions of the developer. The developer has an opportunity to respond.	Usually up to 30 minutes
(d) Invited Speakers (including local residents) will then have an opportunity to speak & raise any issues, observations and comments. The developer has an opportunity to respond.	Up to 15 minutes
(e) The Chair summarises the main points raised during the Development Consultation Forum.	Up to 5 minutes
(f) The Chair will close the Development Consultation Forum.	

What if third parties are disruptive to the process?

It is important to understand and capture any genuine objections someone may have to proposals. However anyone who becomes disruptive will only damage the process for others. Disruptive behaviour can include shouting and interrupting speakers and thereby not allowing points to be made. Such people are unlikely to be permitted to

speak at any future Development Consultation Forum event, but will be restricted to an observation role in the public gallery or may be advised that they are not welcome at any future meeting. Equally anyone who becomes disruptive will be instructed to leave.

What happens at the end of the Development Consultation Forum meeting?

The main points raised by the Development Consultation Forum will be recorded and clarified as the meeting progresses. At the end of the meeting the Chair will summarise the main issues. This will help the developer decide how, and if, he wishes to proceed with the proposal.

What happens after a Development Consultation Forum meeting?

A summary of the key points made at the meeting will be:

Posted on the Welwyn Hatfield website
Placed on the case file and/or filed with the application if and when it is received
Passed to the developer for consideration during further pre-application discussions with officers
Feedback from the developer's presentation at the Development Consultation Forum should be submitted with the planning application as part of details submitted in connection with the Statement of Community Involvement

If you would like to let you know if and when we receive a valid planning application for the site, please tick the attendance sheet at the meeting and fill in your contact details or sign up to the Council's 'Alert-it' service. Alert-it enables you to sign up for automated email alerts on planning applications within a distance of 500 metres from where you live

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