



Tunbridge Wells Borough Council

Statement of Community Involvement

Approved

April 2016

■	Chapter	
1	Introduction	2
2	Involvement in Planning Policy	4
3	Consultation Techniques	9
4	Consultation on Planning Applications and Notifications	12
5	Where can you get additional help and advice?	15
■	Appendices	
1	List of Statutory and General Bodies	16
2	Glossary	17

1 Introduction

1.1 This Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) sets out how Tunbridge Wells Borough Council will involve the community in the preparation and review of planning policy for the borough, through the Local Plan and Supplementary Planning Documents, and in decision making on planning applications.

1.2 It is a requirement for all local planning authorities to produce a SCI setting out their strategy for public participation in planning matters and associated decision making. The SCI, approved on 14 April 2016, forms part of Council policy.

Revised Statement of Community Involvement (SCI)

1.3 The Council's first SCI was adopted in 2006. Since this time, the Government has introduced a series of changes to the planning system. These were principally through the Localism Act 2011 and the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) in March 2012. This was subsequently followed by the Planning Practice Guidance (PPG), which is updated periodically by Government.

1.4 These changes have resulted in the streamlining of plan preparation, as well as a number of other relevant changes, including introducing a duty to cooperate with neighbouring local authorities and other organisations on matters of cross-boundary significance. This revised SCI takes account of this legal background and the changing ways in which to consult stakeholders and the general public.

1.5 The Council is committed to using new and innovative ways of involving the community in the planning system and will use a combination of methods, such as public exhibitions, meetings and online consultations. The objective is to ensure that everyone with an interest in planning understands how they can contribute to, and influence, the planning decision-making process.

1.6 We recognise that diversity and equalities are key considerations within the planning system and are committed to addressing these issues through the planning process. Local Plan documents and determination of planning decisions must comply with the general duty in the Equality Act 2010. The Council is committed to equality and diversity and will apply some general principles to any planning consultations it carries out. These are:

- involvement will be open to all, regardless of age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion and belief, rurality, sex and sexual orientation
- we will seek views of interested and affected parties as soon as possible
- consultation publications will be clear, concise and avoid unnecessary jargon

1.7 The Council recognises that there are particular parts of the community that are more difficult for us to reach out to than others, due to their specific needs or because they may have been under-represented in the past. It is important to us that every section of our community has the opportunity to contribute to the planning process.

1.8 The SCI forms part of the suite of policy documents produced in planning policy and sits alongside the Local Development Scheme (LDS)⁽¹⁾ and the Authority Monitoring Report (AMR).⁽²⁾ It sets out how the Borough Council will engage with the public in both planning policy matters and in decision making on individual planning applications.

1 The Local Development Scheme sets out the timetable for preparing the Local Plan and Supplementary Planning Documents.

2 The Authority Monitoring Report sets out what development has taken place in the borough and assesses the effectiveness of Local Plan policies.

1.9 Consultation is carried out for a variety of reasons: to provide people with information about proposals; to ask people to comment on proposals; or to ask people to contribute to the decision making process. The Council, when carrying out planning consultations, will be guided by certain principles and we will, whenever possible:

- make it clear what the consultation is about and why we are seeking views
- choose the most appropriate method(s) of consultation for the intended audience
- raise awareness of consultations in the most effective way, to make it as easy as possible to take part and ensure that we provide enough time and information for people to give their views
- consult at a time when proposals are still at a formative stage so views can be listened to and considered before making decisions
- carefully analyse consultation responses so that results are accurate and reliable
- publish consultation results and provide feedback on any decisions taken or next steps
- monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of our consultations so that we can continue to improve
- work in a co-ordinated and joined up way within the Council and with our partners to ensure that consultations are carried out in the best possible way

1.10 Through recent changes in national planning guidance, great importance has been placed on providing the means by which local people and communities can be involved in the planning process at the early stages in decision making. In order to ensure that communities, local residents and other key stakeholders understand the process of decision making, this document sets out how and when people can get involved and acts as a framework to how decisions are made.

1.11 The benefits of community involvement include:

- widening public understanding of the planning system and its strengths and limitations
- drawing on local knowledge of issues and potential concerns
- greater sense of buy-in to decisions made in local areas
- ensuring that sectors of the community who are harder to reach can participate
- minimising conflict, encouraging joint working with local community groups and
- better outcomes meeting local aspirations and requirements

1.12 The Borough Council already works closely with a number of partners on delivering the Council's corporate Vision and Objectives through its [Five Year Plan](#) and has a good record of actively engaging with communities and their representatives on planning matters. The SCI sets out the formal approach the Council will take on planning policy matters and planning applications, building upon the wider objectives in the Five Year Plan. The planning service will also work with other Council departments to ensure a consistent approach is taken to consultation and may link planning consultation events to other corporate events and activities being undertaken by other departments.

1.13 The SCI covers the areas of plan making (Planning Policy) and the planning application process (Development Management).

1.14 Planning Policy is involved in setting out the policy framework for the future against which planning applications will be considered.

1.15 Development Management is the process under which planning and listed building applications and prior notifications are considered and determined. Applications are decided in accordance with planning policy, so it is important that the community and stakeholders are involved in both policy formulation and commenting upon specific planning application proposals.

2 Involvement in Planning Policy

2.1 The local planning authority is required to produce a Local Plan for its area. Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) can also be prepared to add further detail to policies in the Local Plan. The Local Plan is subject to greater levels of consultation and is examined by an independent Inspector prior to being adopted as policy, whereas SPDs can be topic- or site-specific, require fewer stages of consultation and are not formally examined by an independent Inspector.

2.2 There are many aspects to the community interests in Tunbridge Wells Borough. There are local residents of all ages; people working locally; people with special needs; those from different racial, ethnic and national groups, including the gypsy and traveller communities and people of different faiths. There are also business groups and local traders; statutory and other agencies, service providers with responsibilities in the area; adjoining authorities; town and parish councils; varied voluntary organisations active locally; and the development industry. All have their areas of interest and consequent understandings and concerns.

2.3 Planning Regulations require local authorities to carry out certain levels of community involvement in policy making and specify a number of organisations who must be consulted on policy documents. The bodies are known as statutory consultees or statutory stakeholders (Appendix 1).

2.4 In addition, the Council has a planning policy consultation database of individuals and interested bodies who have indicated that they wish to be informed of emerging policy and with whom we consult on policy formulation. This is regularly updated and anyone who wishes to be added to the database or to have their details amended can do so by contacting the Planning Policy team on 01892 554056 or by email at planning.policy@tunbridgewells.gov.uk.

2.5 The specific consultation bodies identified in the regulations are frequently involved in planning matters and are consulted by a large number of authorities and agencies, meaning that time is often at a premium. Equally, many voluntary and business organisations need to arrange meetings and canvas opinion to represent their members' views adequately. They may also have limited resources. Accordingly, the Borough Council will provide clear and up-to-date timetables for participation exercises and consultation periods and will provide draft documents as early as possible at each stage, to provide maximum opportunity to comment and engage in consultations.

2.6 As part of the monitoring and evaluation of the effectiveness of community consultation, the Council has to prepare a 'consultation statement' with each document to show how the wider community and interested parties have been involved in the various stages of the evolution of the document. Ultimately, one of the tests of the soundness of a Local Plan is whether the Borough Council has complied with the Statement of Community Involvement, which will be checked by an independent Inspector.

2.7 The people and organisations that the Borough Council will seek to engage with in the preparation of planning policy plans and documents will range from those conversant with planning procedures and those specialising in specific fields, to those likely to have had little or no previous involvement with the planning process.

2.8 It is therefore essential that the Borough Council sets out clearly how people can get involved and at what stage. A key objective in the process of policy making is to seek to identify and address issues and concerns at the earliest opportunity. The Borough Council, therefore, will follow two general principles:

1. To recognise the needs of different groups in the community by making communication timely, relevant and accessible and
2. To provide for community involvement in ways that make best use of people's time and available resources.

Stages of consultation for Local Plans

2.9 Local Plans go through eight stages of plan making. Table 1 identifies what the Council will do at each stage, and how the community can get involved.

Table 1 Stages of plan making for Local Plans

Stage 1	Evidence base	The Council collects an up to date information base on a range of social, economic and environmental matters.
Stage 2	Public participation in the preparation of a Local Plan (regulation 18)	<p>The results of stage 1 are used to identify the main issues that the plan needs to address and the options that are available. An assessment of the plan's social, economic and environmental impacts is also produced at this point, called a sustainability appraisal (SA). At this stage the Council is required to notify each of the statutory consultees that may have an interest in the proposed plan, and any appropriate general consultation bodies as to the subject of the proposed plan, and invite them to make representations. Local residents and businesses may also be informed and invited to comment. The Council maintains a consultation database of interested parties.</p> <p>The Council must take into account any representations received as a result of preparing the plan.</p>
Stage 3	Preparation of the Local Plan	The Council continues to develop the plan. This includes considering any comments from stage 2 and the findings of any new studies.
Stage 4	Publication of the Local Plan (regulation 19)	<p>The Council publishes the final draft of the plan. A more detailed sustainability appraisal (SA) and a draft proposals map showing any changes that would result from the adoption of the plan are also published. The Council will undertake a public consultation for a minimum of six weeks.</p> <p>A statement of consultation will be produced, which provides a summary of the main issues raised by the representations. This allows officers and borough councillors to review the representations and to consider what, if any, changes should be made to the plan before submission.</p>
Stage 5	Consider representations /objections	<p>The Council will consider any points raised in the consultation and will make minor changes where required. If there are significant issues the Council may withdraw the plan and return to stage 3.</p> <p>Once all issues raised have been addressed, the plan can move to stage 6.</p>
Stage 6	Submission (regulation 22)	The Council will send the plan and any supporting documents to the Secretary of State to be examined.
Stage 7	Examination (regulation 24)	An Inspector appointed by the Government will carry out an independent examination of the 'soundness' of the plan. Those who objected to the plan during stage 4 may be allowed to appear in front of the Inspector in person, at the discretion of the Inspector.

Stage 8	Receipt of Inspector's report and adoption (regulations 25 and 26)	The Inspector writes a report of the examination and decides what changes (if any) need to be made. Once the Council receives the Inspector's report, the plan has to be changed in line with their recommendations if the Council wishes to adopt it. It is this version of the plan that will be adopted.
---------	--	---

Stages of consultation for Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD)

2.10 SPDs go through four stages of plan making. Table 2 identifies what the Council will do at each stage, and how the community can get involved.

Table 2 Stages of plan making for SPDs

Stage 1	Development of evidence base	The Council collects up to date information on a range of social, economic and environmental matters.
Stage 2	Preparation of the draft SPD	The Council produces a draft version of the SPD based on the evidence collected at stage 1.
Stage 3	Consultation on the draft SPD (regulation 12)	Once the draft document has been produced, the Council will undertake a public consultation for a period of between four and six weeks. Any representations made will be considered and amendments will be made to the document where required.
Stage 4	Adoption (regulation 14)	The Council will adopt the SPD in line with regulation 14 requirements.

2.11 The types of policy documents being produced and their likely timescales are set out in the Council's adopted Local Development Scheme, which can be found on the Council's website under the Planning Policy section, at <http://www.tunbridgewells.gov.uk/residents/planning/planning-policy/local-development-scheme>.

2.12 In addition to the above documents, each stage of production of a Local Plan needs to be accompanied by a Sustainability Appraisal (SA). This document seeks to ensure that the policies and proposals in the Local Plan reflect sustainability principles. At the start of producing a DPD the Council will publish a SA Scoping Report for consultation about what it is proposed that the SA should contain, subject to nationally set guidelines. SPDs do not require a SA.

2.13 The Borough Council recognises that the public, our communities and stakeholders can offer a wealth of expertise and assistance through involvement in the early stages of policy formulation and plan preparation. Chapter 3 of this SCI sets out the types of communication techniques the Council will use to ensure as many as possible have the opportunity to be involved.

2.14 It is important to give people confidence that the Borough Council is progressing plan making effectively and efficiently and that they will have access to good information and feedback. Publicity and information are vital to maintain interest, understanding and trust. The Council will use a variety of techniques to maximise opportunity for involvement and also to engage with harder to reach groups through specific, targeted engagement exercises.

2.15 In relation to plan making, the Government introduced a Duty to Cooperate in the Localism Act 2011; many of the consultees required under the Duty to Cooperate are already included in the list of 'statutory consultees' and 'general consultation bodies'.

Duty to Cooperate

2.16 The Duty to Cooperate is not defined as consultation, but ensures that the Council works with neighbouring authorities and other public bodies to address strategic issues that affect local plans and cross local authority boundaries. This will ensure that infrastructure providers are involved in decisions about how the borough may change over time, and are able to incorporate this into their calculations for the provision of their services. This is important, as the planning system does not have control over all infrastructure and services and is therefore reliant on their provision by external bodies. The Council will report on how it meets the Duty to Cooperate in its Authority Monitoring Report.

Neighbourhood Plans

2.17 Neighbourhood Plans (NDPs) were introduced into the planning system through the Localism Act 2011 as an opportunity to allow communities to set planning policies to guide development in their areas (alongside the Development Plan). Consultation procedures for Neighbourhood Plans are set out in the Localism Act 2011 and the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012.

2.18 The responsibility to produce a Neighbourhood Plan lies with the qualifying body (a Parish Council, a Town Council or, in a non-parished area, a Neighbourhood Forum). The extent to which a prospective forum has included residents, business and local elected members from across the neighbourhood area will be one of the factors the Local Planning Authority will consider in deciding whether to designate the group as a neighbourhood forum. An application for neighbourhood forum designation must include a copy of the forum's written constitution and a statement of how they will meet the conditions for designation as a neighbourhood forum set out in the Localism Act.

2.19 The qualifying body is responsible for consulting upon a draft Neighbourhood Plan before they submit to the Local Authority.

2.20 In terms of consultation, the following comments apply to a Local Authority:

When will we consult? When a Neighbourhood Plan application is submitted a consultation will occur on a Neighbourhood Forum Application Stage:

- this stage will be subject to a six week consultation
- when a submission Neighbourhood Plan is received by the authority a six week consultation will be undertaken at this stage
- a Neighbourhood Plan is subject to an examination by an independent Planning Inspector; full details of the Inspector and examination process will be made publicly available
- a Neighbourhood Plan will also require a referendum, of which all details will be made publicly available

Who will we consult?

- there is a requirement to consult those who live, work and carry out business in the area
- all those on the Neighbourhood Plan database who have previously responded and requested to be kept informed of the process

How will we consult?

- all individuals, businesses, and organisations on the NDP consultation database will be contacted direct. Where an email address is supplied, the contact will be via email, otherwise a letter will be sent
- we will work with the relevant Parish/Town Council or Neighbourhood Forum to maximise publicity using methods such as leaflets, posters, the Council website, social media channels, press releases, a press notice, and displays in Council offices
- officers will be available at the Council offices during normal office hours upon request to give information/answer questions
- consultation documents will be available to view at all libraries in the borough, at post offices in villages where there is no library and at Council offices
- consultation documents will be available to download from the Council's website, or will be supplied by email or as a paper copy on request

3 Consultation Techniques

3.1 Since the original 2006 SCI, the way in which the Council works with its community and stakeholders has significantly changed, principally due to the wider availability of technology and the use of the internet. It is likely that there will be continuing innovation in this area and the Borough Council will continue to explore the use of new methods of working and engagement.

3.2 More active community involvement does put pressure on resources. It is therefore important that the consultation techniques employed offer as many opportunities to be involved as possible and that the communication is effective. The Council currently works with many partners who are already engaged in, and take interest in, planning matters. Accordingly we will work towards more creative partnership working, particularly through existing bodies (such as the Town and Parish Councils, associated forums and community groups, the Youth Council and local schools and colleges), learning from and using their skills and strengths in order to optimise the use of existing resources.

3.3 The network of town and parish councils within, and adjoining, the borough can have a particularly valuable role, by drawing together the range of issues and interests relevant to the areas they cover and the local communities they serve. The Council will also seek to build new partnerships; for example, in the Royal Tunbridge Wells area where there are no parish councils the Town Forum and Residents' Associations play an important liaison role (<http://www.townforum.org.uk/>).

3.4 Opportunities for joint discussions on issues of common interest, combining consultation exercises and engaging with existing forums and groups will be pursued wherever possible. However, when organising and facilitating involvement in the preparation of policy documents, the Borough Council will be mindful of the need to consider meeting with individual organisations on a one-to-one basis. In a few cases, planning mediation using a third party may be advantageous in the later stages of negotiations.

Website/Emails

3.5 Use will be made of the Borough Council's website (www.tunbridgewells.gov.uk) to post documents, progress reports, advice on opportunities for participation and consultation arrangements and timescales.

3.6 The Council's consultation portal will be used to enable people to view and comment on draft documents online during the relevant consultation periods. All those who have registered with the consultation portal and provided an email address will be notified of the various documents published and their consultation timescales. As increasing use is being made of electronic communications, due to the cost of postal notifications, anyone interested in receiving notification of a consultation is encouraged to register themselves on the portal at <http://consult.tunbridgewells.gov.uk> or by contacting Planning Policy on 01892 554056 or planning.policy@tunbridgewells.gov.uk.

Media

3.7 Local newspapers and radio will be notified of forthcoming consultations through the issuing of press releases and the offer, where relevant, of a press briefing. In addition, any necessary statutory notices and advertisements will be sent to the local press (usually the Wealden Advertiser and The Tunbridge Wells Courier in the case of planning policy documents and the Kent Messenger in the case of planning applications). The Council will also include articles and news items in its own quarterly magazine called "Local", which is delivered to all households in the borough, to publicise consultation events where publication dates and consultation dates correspond.

Social Media

3.8 Use will be made of the Council's Facebook and Twitter accounts to publicise draft policy documents where appropriate and the wider use of social media will continue to be explored as a way of reaching a wider audience.

Paper Documents

3.9 The Council will continue to make paper copies of planning policy documents available for public viewing at its offices and in public libraries. A paper copy of all Local Plan and Supplementary Planning Documents will be provided to each Town and Parish Council and to statutory bodies upon request. Copies of documents can also be purchased by community groups and the public and can be translated/enlarged to suit specific needs.

Public Exhibitions

3.10 For major consultations on the Local Plan, the Council will organise a series of local exhibitions in each of the main settlements affected. These will be widely publicised on the website and through other media opportunities. Posters and leaflets will be displayed in advance of the local event on noticeboards and in public places as well as delivered to local shops. Town and Parish Councils will also be made aware of such exhibitions and encouraged to publicise these events on their own websites/noticeboards.

Workshops

3.11 For all Local Plan and SPD consultations, the Council will hold workshops for interested parties to attend and find out more about the specific proposals or policy document. These will take a variety of formats from single afternoon/evening 'open-house' sessions for drop in appointments, to specific workshops encouraging discussions between groups of similar bodies, such as statutory consultees, neighbouring authorities, town and parish councils, business forums, equalities groups and young people. These workshops will mainly be held at the Council Offices but may be moved into more local community settings where attendance is likely to be enhanced (such as a school hall for engaging with young people).

3.12 The Council believes this form of community engagement is critical in seeking to reach those groups which have previously been poorly represented in consultation where small group work or drop in sessions are more likely to encourage people to attend.

Surveys/Questionnaires

3.13 The Council will continue to use surveys and questionnaires during early stage engagement as part of the consultation process and in conjunction with other consultation methods, to determine attitudes and opinions to issues raised.

Feedback

3.14 In assessing responses and the outcome of statutory consultations, the Borough Council will:

- summarise all responses and make the summaries available on the Borough Council's website
- prepare a report on all responses and set out the Borough Council's views on these, including recommendations on the way forward. Such reports will be made publicly available on the Council's website and will be placed in public libraries

3.15 Responses to consultation on the Sustainability Appraisal/Strategic Environmental Assessment will be taken into account during the preparation of the Local Plan. When a document is adopted, a statement will be made available on the Council's website, in the Council's offices (at the Gateway in Tunbridge Wells), and in public libraries, summarising how the Sustainability Appraisal/Strategic Environmental Assessment has been taken into account in the document's preparation.

How your comments help

3.16 The information we obtain through community and stakeholder engagement will be used to inform our decisions and shape the documents we produce. The Council acknowledges that an important part of community involvement is to report back to those who have taken the time to get involved. While we welcome and encourage comments, it is difficult to find solutions that satisfy all, but we do listen and seriously consider all comments and suggestions that are put forward in response to consultations.

4 Consultation on Planning Applications and Notifications

4.1 As well as the preparation of new Local Plan documents, the community can also be involved in the process of determining planning applications considered by the Council.

Pre-Application Stage

4.2 We already encourage applicants or their agents to discuss their proposals with planning officers before making a formal application. Full details of procedures for this, including fees where applicable, are clearly shown on our website at:

<http://www.tunbridgewells.gov.uk/residents/planning/make-a-planning-application/pre-application-advice>.

We have also produced an information sheet on pre-application advice, which sets out guidance to help ensure applications are properly made and can progress quickly through the planning system.

4.3 The objective of pre-application discussions should be to air the issues surrounding the proposals and to clarify the format, type and level of detail needed to enable us to determine a formal planning application. Good quality information at an early stage will also enable any problems to be resolved sooner rather than later.

4.4 It is at this early stage in discussing planning applications that we will encourage potential applicants/developers to engage with local people before a planning application is submitted.

4.5 The Localism Act makes it compulsory for developers to consult local communities before submitting certain planning applications. The requirements cover three points:

- developers must consult communities before submitting certain planning applications, having regard to any advice that their local planning authority may provide
- they must consider any responses they receive before they finalise their proposals and submit their applications
- when submitting their application they must account for how they have consulted the local community, what comments they have received, and how they have taken those comments into account

4.6 Where a major and/or controversial development is proposed, applicants will be expected to carry out pre-application community engagement that is tailored to reflect the nature and scale of the proposed development. These community engagement arrangements will be managed, organised and funded by the potential developer.

4.7 In other cases, voluntary consultation may be appropriate and is recommended, although ultimately it will be for an applicant to decide whether, and in what ways, they wish to undertake such consultation. First and foremost, we must ensure that the probity of the Council is ensured at all times.

Benefits of pre-application community involvement

4.8 Early engagement will always be important but, especially for major or controversial planning applications, early community involvement will benefit everyone – the wider community, potential developers, potential investors and the local planning authority.

4.9 It is at this stage, before a planning application is submitted, that local people can have the greatest influence on development proposals and feel engaged in the process. Pre-application community involvement activities will give members of the public the opportunity to have their say while the details of the scheme are still being put together. The early exchange of information about the site and its surroundings is likely to produce a scheme that better fits its local environment.

4.10 Pre-application community involvement is also important from a business point of view in that it may well prevent abortive work being carried out or unnecessary delay in the planning approval stage.

The application stage

4.11 The Borough Council has, for many years, had the policy of consulting neighbouring residents and other occupiers about planning applications which directly affect them. We will continue to publicise planning applications in various ways to meet our objective of involving the community in the planning application decision-making process.

4.12 However, there are a number of different types of applications and notifications (i.e. not just planning applications), including a number of 'light touch' notifications introduced by the Government in recent years. Many of these are 'time limited', have different legislative requirements in respect of consultation to planning applications and the matters which can be considered in their determination are often narrower. Therefore, the following information on consultation only relates to applications for planning permission. Consultation on other applications and notifications varies depending on the type of application/notification.

4.13 Consultation with neighbours on planning applications is as follows:

- a copy of the application will be sent to the appropriate town or parish council
- occupiers of properties having a common boundary with an application site will be notified of a current planning application by letter and invited to comment
- a site notice will be placed at the property
- all applications will be advertised on the Borough Council's website
- certain applications will be advertised by press advertisement
- the results of any such consultations will be reported and taken into account in decisions made by, and on behalf of, the Council

4.14 You do not need to have received a consultation letter to make a comment on a planning application.

4.15 Weekly lists of applications can be searched online by ward and parish and all applications and notifications, including plans, are available for viewing online. It is possible to search for applications and notifications in a number of ways, including by street, ward or parish, or by viewing the online map, and to register through the website so you can be alerted to any applications or notifications within a particular locality (for example, near where you live). The Council's website can be accessed from the Gateway in Tunbridge Wells, libraries and the Weald Information Centre at Cranbrook for those without access to a computer. Information on how to comment on planning applications only and advice on issues that are relevant to decisions on planning applications is provided on the Council's website.

4.16 Statutory consultees, including essential service providers where relevant, will be consulted on relevant planning applications in line with national legislation and guidance, and regard is had to all comments received.

4.17 Town and parish councils are important consultees on planning applications and the Borough Council carefully considers all comments received from them. They receive copies of all planning applications in their area, and some make copies available to the public. Most town and parish councils have open planning meetings where you can speak. It is suggested you contact your local town or parish council to check specific arrangements.

4.18 In addition, various local organisations are actively involved in planning matters and regularly make representations. These are varied, but include; Conservation Area Advisory Committees, local amenity groups, and local resident associations. The Council will continue to ensure that these organisations are able to engage and have access to planning information either via the Council's website or by direct consultation in appropriate cases.

4.19 The Borough Council facilitates a Planning Application Forum for certain major planning applications. This brings together residents possibly affected by a proposed development and the applicants at an early stage in the planning application process. At the forum there is an opportunity for the developer to explain the proposals and for residents to raise any issues of concern. Full details are set out in our leaflet 'Planning Application Forum' (August 2005) which can be downloaded at http://www.tunbridgewells.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0015/16422/Planning-Application-Forum-Guidelines.pdf.

4.20 The majority of planning applications are determined under delegated powers (i.e. by senior officers in Planning Services), but some are determined by the Planning Committee. Applicants, and those making comments, have an opportunity to speak at the Borough Council's Planning Committee meetings if an application is reported to it. Full details, including how to register to speak, are contained in the leaflet 'Your Right to Speak at Planning Meetings' available on the Council's website. There is also a general leaflet entitled 'Your Right to Speak', which can be found at <http://democracy.tunbridgewells.gov.uk/documents/s11716/Your%20Right%20to%20Speak%20at%20Meetings%20Leaflet.pdf>.

4.21 What happens after a decision is made? As soon as a formal decision is made on an application, the decision notice will be published on the Council's website, along with the relevant 'delegated' or 'committee' report (and minutes), which explains how the Council has reached its decision.

Planning Appeals

4.22 If an application for planning permission is refused by the local planning authority, or it is granted with conditions, an appeal can be made to the Secretary of State against the refusal or the conditions attached. There is also a right of appeal if an application is not determined within a specific time. Appeals are examined by an independent Planning Inspector. We will advise neighbours who have previously commented on the relevant application when an appeal is submitted. Further advice on the appeal process is available at: <http://www.planningportal.gov.uk/planning/planninginspectorate>.

Customer Service and Feedback

4.23 In addition to consulting on individual planning applications, the Borough Council seeks feedback from customers on the way the planning service is provided. We do this in the following ways:

- seminars for town and parish councils
- a focus group for planning agents (architects, surveyors and others who regularly submit applications)

4.24 The feedback is used as part of the regular monitoring and review of planning services.

5 Where can you get additional help and advice?

5.1 Principal government documents relating to the new planning system are the Localism Act 2011, National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, 2012) and the Planning Practice Guidance (PPG, periodically updated). The Department for Communities and Local Government, as the department responsible for planning and local government, is leading the changes in the planning system. The relevant government website is: <http://www.gov.uk/dclg> .

5.2 If you want independent help and advice on any planning matter you can contact:

Planning Aid for the South East
Regional Co-ordinator:
Kent Architecture Centre
1st Floor, Admirals Offices
The Historic Dockyard
Chatham
Kent ME4 4TS

Tel: 01634 831167

E-mail: sec0@planningaid.rtpi.org.uk

5.3 Useful general information on the planning system can be found on the Planning Portal (www.planningportal.gov.uk).

5.4 Historic England has published useful information regarding its advisory services for planning and development including pre-application discussions and Neighbourhood Plans. This is available on its website (<http://www.historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/charter-headvisory-services/>) (<http://content.historicengland.org.uk/content/docs/planning/planning-environmentneighbourhood-advice.pdf>)

5.5 Please contact Planning Policy if you need any further support or advice regarding this document:

Planning Policy
Planning Services
Tunbridge Wells Borough Council
Town Hall
Civic Way
Royal Tunbridge Wells
Kent TN1 1RS

Telephone: 01892 554056

E-mail: planning.policy@tunbridgewells.gov.uk

Appendix 1: List of Statutory and General Bodies

Statutory Consultation Bodies

The statutory consultees (specific consultation bodies) that the regulations require the Council to consult are:

- The Environment Agency
- Historic England
- Natural England
- Network Rail
- Highways England
- Kent County Council
- Town and Parish Councils
- Kent Police
- Adjoining authorities
- Telecommunications providers
- Kent and Medway NHS Trust
- Utility providers (water, sewerage, gas and electricity)
- The Homes and Communities Agency
- Secretary of State for Transport
- The Civil Aviation Authority

General Consultation Bodies

The general consultees (general consultation bodies) that the regulations require the Council to consult, where appropriate, are:

- Conservation Area Advisory Committees, Civic Societies, local amenity groups, local resident associations, neighbourhood forums
- Voluntary bodies
- Bodies which represent the interests of different racial, ethnic or national groups
- Bodies which represent the interests of different religious groups
- Bodies which represent the interests of disabled persons
- Bodies which represent the interests of persons carrying on business

Appendix 2: Glossary

Authority Monitoring Report (AMR)	Local planning authorities are required to produce regular reports, assessing progress with and the effectiveness of, planning policy documents such as the Core Strategy and Site Allocations Development Plan Document. Formerly known as the Annual Monitoring Report.
Consultation	Procedure for assessing public opinion about a plan or major development proposal, or in the case of a planning application, the means of obtaining the views of affected neighbours or others with an interest in the proposal.
Core Strategy	The Core Strategy is a long-term strategy document, which sets the overarching agenda for future planning and decision making in the borough by defining how much development of each main type will take place and broadly where it will go. The Borough Council's Core Strategy was adopted in 2010, setting growth between 2006 and 2026.
Development Plan	As set out in Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, the Development Plan consists of the Development Plan Documents contained within its Local Development Framework.
Development Plan Document	A Local Development Document which must be subjected to a statutory adoption process before it can be formally adopted by the authority. The process consists of consultation, submission of the document to the Secretary of State, Independent Examination, receipt of Inspector's Report, and formal adoption. They can include a Core Strategy, Site Specific Allocations of land, and Local Plan.
Independent Examination	The process of formal consideration and examination of draft Development Plan Documents, chaired by an independent inspector appointed by the Secretary of State.
Inspector's Report	A report issued by the Inspector who conducts the independent examination, setting out their conclusions on the matters raised at the examination and detailing the amendments which they require the local planning authority to make to the submitted document. The report is binding.
Issues and Options	Produced during the early production stages of the preparation of DPDs and may be issued for consultation.
Local Development Document	These include statutory Development Plan Documents (DPDs) and non-statutory Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs), which together deliver the spatial planning strategy for the local authority area.
Local Development Scheme (LDS)	A document setting out the local planning authority's programme for its Local Plan; in particular, the Local Development Documents it intends to produce and the timetable for their production and review.
Local Plan	A Development Plan Document which sets out the long term spatial vision for the Borough, the spatial objectives and strategic policies to deliver that vision.
National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)	The document which sets out the Government's planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied. The NPPF must be taken into account in the preparation of local and neighbourhood plans, and is a material consideration in decisions on planning applications. It replaces Government planning policies previously set out in Planning Policy Guidance Notes (PPGs) and Planning Policy Statements (PPSs).

	Further guidance on particular topics, entitled Planning Practice Guidance, is provided on the Department of Communities and Local Government website. This is intended to supplement the NPPF and be updated as necessary.
Neighbourhood Plan	Neighbourhood Plans were introduced into the planning system through the Localism Act 2011 as an opportunity to allow communities to set planning policies to guide development in their areas.
Planning Inspectorate (PINS)	Government body whose main work is the processing of planning and enforcement appeals and holding inquiries into local development plans. They deal with a wide variety of other planning related casework including listed building consent appeals, advertisement appeals, and reporting on planning applications.
Statement of Community Involvement (SCI)	This sets out the methods and standards which the planning authority intend to achieve in relation to involving the community in the preparation, alteration and review of all LDDs and in development management decisions. The SCI was originally subject to independent examination, but this is no longer the case and it is now approved by the local authority.
Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)	A generic term used to describe environmental assessment as applied to policies, plans and programmes. The European 'SEA Directive' (2001/42/EC) requires a formal 'environmental assessment of certain plans and programmes, including those in the field of planning and land use'. It is a tool for integrating environmental considerations into decision-making by ensuring that any significant environmental effects of the decision are taken into account. The Strategic Environmental Assessment must form an integral part of the adoption process for Development Plan Documents and must be taken into account from the initial stages of plan preparation.
Supplementary Planning Document	Documents which add further detail to planning policies. They can be used to provide further guidance for development on specific sites, or on particular issues, such as design. Supplementary planning documents can be a material consideration in planning decisions but are not part of the development plan.
Sustainability Appraisal	An appraisal of the economic, environmental and social effects of a plan from the outset of the preparation process, to allow decisions to be made that accord with sustainable development.

If you require this document in another format, please contact:

**Planning Policy
Planning Services
Tunbridge Wells Borough Council
Town Hall
ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS
Kent TN1 1RS**

Tel: 01892 554056

Email: planning.policy@tunbridgewells.gov.uk