

15th February 2021

Oliver Gibson
Principal Planning Officer
Place Shaping & Town Planning

Dear Mr Gibson

Thank you for inviting the Belgravia Neighbourhood Forum to comment on your draft paper in respect of Early Community Engagement. We fully support the objectives of this initiative and are in overall support of it.

There are however three areas where we consider that it does not go far enough. These are set out below followed by some comments with respect to specific points in the paper.

1. Asymmetry

Whilst the suggested methods and procedures for community engagement as set out in the paper are all admirable, we have a concern that developers and applicants may be able to apparently fulfil all their obligations in this regard whilst at the same time managing to evade 'true consultation', resulting in a mere 'going through the motions', box-ticking exercise. A key issue here is the considerable asymmetry between developers and the community, a kind of 'David vs Goliath' situation, namely

- Developers are professionals (and have access to professional resources); the community are amateurs
- It is relatively easy for developer to present only the most favourable aspects of a planned development, attractive artists' impressions taken from flattering angles, glossy brochures and presentations; it is difficult for the amateur to read behind the plans or, often, even to understand them
- A disparity of focus. For developers getting planning permission is their day job; for the community it is often just noise on the edge of their consciousness (until, of course, it is too late)

It is hard to know how this imbalance can be redressed and we would be interested to learn what suggestions you might have in this regard. Possible options which come to mind include:

- An independent 'audit' of developers' consultation materials by a professional third party (i.e. to ensure that materials presented are accurate and give a fair representation of the project)
- An obligation on the part of developers to produce a balance sheet of positive and negative outcomes for the community

- A community 'champion' to be appointed, i.e. a professional who is able to act as an independent interpreter of the proposals for the community and represent the community's interests.

2. Lack of appropriate developer response

Having undertaken all the stages of community engagement it is still relatively easy for a developer simply to ignore the community feedback, and particularly, objections. This is likely to be for a number of reasons:

- The objections are fragmented, un-coordinated and conflate trivial with serious concerns
- Having lodged an objection, objectors rarely follow up on the extent to which objections have been taken into account
- Developers may state that they have taken account of objections but have not in fact done so
- Developers fail to appreciate the strength of opinion or seriousness of objections

How can your engagement guidelines be strengthened to ensure this does not happen?

3. Community Engagement in the case of Non-Major Developments

Most of the engagements in your paper are intended for major developments of 1,000 sq m and over. Your recommendations for Non-major developments are limited to good practice and 'encouragement' only.

It may surprise you that in Belgravia it is often the non-major development which causes as much if not more annoyance, disturbance and distress to local residents. There are many house enlargement projects, which whilst not meeting your size criterion for a major project, are in fact very large. These include substantial house rebuilding, large rear extensions, basement excavations, under garden excavation, and tunnelling between houses. Such projects can last up to two years causing neighbours untold misery in noise, dirt, road closures, loss of parking and potential damage to their own homes. Other than the standard planning notification letters which are sent out to immediate neighbours, giving only 21 days within which to respond (and often having arrived on the doormat with less than this period left to run) there is no obligation for applicants for such projects to consult with neighbours. And certainly not at an early stage.

We strongly believe your recommendations in this paper must formally include such not-so-small non-major projects.

Some of our thoughts on this are:

- Instigators of such projects are often absentee owners/developers who do not have any idea of the disruption / damage that their project might cause
- On occasion, applicants for such projects have withdrawn or revised them following major neighbour opposition (however, this only happens if there has been a concerted and vigorous neighbour campaign requiring real effort and commitment), and often leads to subsequent ill-feeling between neighbours.
- Potentially early formal consultation with neighbours could lead to revised designs which are more mutually acceptable; or even joint projects with neighbours (A problem that has arisen in Belgravia is the one of too many houses in the same

street being worked on at the same time – local neighbour consultation could help to co-ordinate or sequence such projects according to the neighbours’ preferences.)

Now to a few specific points in your paper:

- P6 Engagement Forums. These are inevitably a very intensive form of engagement and it is likely that much importance will be accorded to their output. However, they will inevitably involve only a small number of people due to their format, preparedness of people to participate, self-selected nature of those participating, etc. How can you ensure that these are not derailed by an inclusion of too many people with specific views, who will thus dominate the consultation outcome?
- P7 Table 2. This is good, but could not the green ticks stretch a little further to the left. Even a small block of 24 units can make a big local impact.
- P8 First and third bullets. Vision and aims, and positive and adverse impact, these should specifically include impacts on the local community
This section should also include information on how the feedback will be acted on.
- P9 Para 2. As stated above in point 2, we would like to see a much stronger, formal process here.

With kind regards

Yours

Dennis Wheatland

Chairman

Belgravia Neighbourhood Forum

From: [Gibson, Oliver: WCC](#)
To: [Gibson, Oliver: WCC](#)
Subject: Invitation to Comment on Westminster's Draft Early Community Engagement Guidance
Date: 05 October 2021 10:18:26

From:
Sent: 22 February 2021 15:20
To: Gibson, Oliver: WCC <ogibson@westminster.gov.uk>
Cc: 'Monica Lucas' 'Jeremy Lucas'
Subject: RE: Invitation to Comment on Westminster's Draft Early Community Engagement Guidance

Dear Mr Gibson

Further to my note to you of 15th February, we would like to make another point for your consideration.

You mention Neighbourhood Forums as one of the bodies which should be consulted by developers at an early stage of planning a project. This is good.

Once a Forum has a 'made' Neighbourhood Plan, the Forum needs to have the right to engage with officers to ensure that the policies contained within their plan have been appropriately considered. Such a Plan will have particular significance, given that it will have had the endorsement of the community by virtue of having passed a referendum.

Even at this stage, with our Plan only in draft, the community and any advisors they may retain, must have the opportunity for detailed discussions with the relevant council officers from the very start right through all stages of the process to ensure that the community view is appropriately represented.

Best wishes

Dennis Wheatland

*Chairman
Belgravia Neighbourhood Forum*

From: [Gibson, Oliver: WCC](#)
To: [Gibson, Oliver: WCC](#)
Subject: Discussion Forums on Westminster's Draft Early Community Engagement Guidance - 3rd and 4th March at 5.00pm
Date: 05 October 2021 10:18:59

From: Chairman BRA
Sent: 02 March 2021 20:03
To: Gibson, Oliver: WCC <ogibson@westminster.gov.uk>; Armsby, Deirdra: WCC <darmsby@westminster.gov.uk>; Nally, Vincent: WCC <vnally@westminster.gov.uk>; Coulson, Amanda: WCC <acoulson@westminster.gov.uk>; Brandon, Steven: WCC <StevenB@westminster.gov.uk>
Cc: Hamilton, Jane: WCC <jhamilton@westminster.gov.uk>; West, Kimberley: WCC <kwest@westminster.gov.uk>; Rigby, Robert (Cllr): WCC Green, Matthew (Cllr): WCC
Subject: Re: Discussion Forums on Westminster's Draft Early Community Engagement Guidance - 3rd and 4th March at 5.00pm

Dear Oliver

On behalf of the Belgravia Residents Association we would like to let you have our initial feedback to assist.

The draft proposal for the Early Community Engagement is neither early, nor does it seem to engage the Community very much ?

We should like to see the following amendments:

1) Non major developments up to 10 residential units:

Local Leaflets/mailshots + online communication with residents/business in the immediate area and the nominated amenity society for the given area . We appreciate that you currently do send us on line communication as current to planning@belgraviarresidents.org.uk and this should be continued .

2) 10+ residential units:

As for no 1 above

+

Interactive digital engagement

3) 25+ residential units:

Early engagement forum plus Points 1&2

The current draft does not seem to be in the spirit of community engagement and falls somewhat short of the mark on its first reading . We hope this feedback will be taken in the spirit of cooperation in helping the council formulate policy going forward .

We are copying in the Belgravia Neighborhood Forum which is still being evolved and hope they may concur with our views

Kind Regards

James Wright



Registered Charity No: 1168619
An amenity Society recognised by City of Westminster

Response to Westminster's latest proposals for early community engagement.

1.1 The Belgravia Society (the Society) is the largest residents' society in Belgravia. We are recognised as an Amenity Society by Westminster City Council (WCC). The raison d'etre of the Society is "to celebrate the past, improve the present and engage in its future".

1.2 The Society is the largest amenity society in Belgravia. No subscription is charged by the Society, which is a charity, in order to ensure that no one is excluded from membership. We work with the community to preserve, protect and advance the welfare of the area. This guides our views and our consideration of all factors which affect daily life in Belgravia.

1.3 We publish a monthly Magazine which we distribute digitally to our members giving details of local developments, matters of local interest, information from our elected representatives and matters of general interest. We are totally independent of any other organisation. We pride ourselves as being the only independent voice for the area. A

2.1 Westminster City Council ("WCC") initiative in relation to early community engagement is very much welcome. It is absolutely vital and appears to have been universally well received by the participants of the two groups who attended the initial virtual meetings with WCC on Wednesday 3rd and Thursday 4th March. It is an enormous task to try and reduce the stress and tension over the current outdated planning application process. If done well, the results could have huge ramifications for residents who to date have often been left exhausted, frustrated and bewildered at how disjointed the process is.

2.2 It is vital to ensure best practice with pre-application engagement with all parties and to consult early and to be open, transparent, inclusive, responsive and accessible. To reduce conflict and allow people who live and work in an area, and who know their communities, and really have a voice. Importantly, it would also help locals to understand the developer's perspective. The proposals would create a significantly wider consultation arena, which would include the policies of the local statutory neighbourhood forums, residents' associations, Ward Councillors and special interest and faith groups.

2.3 The WCC guidance document revealed a series of early community engagement expectations for developers supplemented by a realistic flowchart timeline. Mandatory methods would include leafleting, online communication, media websites, meetings with Ward Councillors, digital engagement, exhibitions, consultations, workshops and engagement forums. This would move away from the current very ad hoc situation where developers can tick a box on their application form which confirms that they have consulted with the community, when all they have actually done is

drop leaflets through the doors of properties and in some case through the doors of derelict and empty properties! This engagement format would be much wider, enabling a greater audience to engage in the process and not just to rely on a single method of logging an objection or support comment on the WCC planning portal, which is only possible after an application has actually been made.

3.1 Information and communication with the WCC One issue that we believe needs to be dealt with urgently is the difficulty in navigating the WCC website. We have found over the years that it is difficult to find information. We would recommend that the system is updated and that the search engine it provides, covers much wider criteria to enable users to find the information they require. This is particularly so in relation to WCC policies on a wide range of activities within Westminster.

3.2 The method of communication of responses to planning notifications is incredibly difficult, especially for those not very computer engaged. We are very that a much aware number of our members found it extremely difficult to get into the system. Many have abandoned their attempts. Further when asked to submit when the responder clicks on it, it is not necessarily finding its way onto the site. We believe that the requirement for passwords is a disincentive. We understand fully that maintaining the integrity of the system requires some form of identity. However, this could be obtained by simple perusal of the response which should include the sender's name, address and postcode. Obviously, that would not be disclosed to the public but it would enable officers to see whether there are multiple responses from a single address, or the persons or not local, or there was something else that ought to be noted. The need for a password should be abandoned. We see no reason why a simple email from the responder should not be sent to a specific email address for that purpose.

3.3 The Belgravia Society recommends the encouragement of more balanced design teams to "honestly advise" persons seeking planning or other consents so reducing their unrealistic expectations before they expend time and money on professional drawings. FOUR COMMUNICATIONS has worked successfully with residents in SW1 in such a fashion. In addition, WCC should update their antiquated and often difficult to navigate planning sites.

4.1 Belgravia Neighbourhood Forum has made a detailed submission in response to the current engagement. We fully support all of it and therefore have not specifically mentioned all the points in their Response.

4.2 The Belgravia Neighbourhood Forum is a statutory body with a statutory obligation to prepare a neighbourhood plan. We understand that that is in preparation and we do hope the final draft will be ready soon for the referendum. It is very important to us that the Neighbourhood Forum is involved in early community engagement. It can both guide them in their deliberations and WCC, ourselves and other stakeholders in the perceived planning future of Belgravia itself. We know that the forum is not "made" until the referendum approves the neighbourhood plan and it is adopted. However, the work being done towards that plan is very important and should be shared to inform the local community and other stakeholders including ourselves. We hope that WCC do fully engage with them both now and in the future.

5 From time to time WCC engages with a large project, very often working some considerable time to produce documentation plans and suggestions. One such scheme is the recent one "Future Victoria". Public consultations took place and there was considerable degree of consternation that the scheme should have advanced so far without input from the local community at a much earlier stage. The plans were not very well received and the method of consultation was perfunctory. We

responded formally to the proposals. We felt that the methodology of developing the plan without the input of the local societies' community was a lost opportunity to producing something which was really special for the area. We understand the importance of experienced professionals. However, no one knows better than its residents and representatives. People who are not familiar with the area, but only with how they have solved issues in other areas, do not understand how best to engage prepare acceptable and valuable plans for the future in area. Presenting scheme like Future Victoria, without consultation engagement is a missed opportunity to produce something truly valuable which will be welcomed and supported.

6 Conclusions. We welcome the initiative WCC is taking to deal with engagement at an early stage. It is vital that the Belgravia Forum is part of the engagement as indeed, our own Society. This does mean developers in the area and WCC itself. We look forward to future meetings and continued engagement to continue an era of openness, transparency and consultation.

11th March 2021

Mary Regnier-Leigh

For The Belgravia Society

From:
To: [Gibson, Oliver: WCC](#)
Cc:
Subject: Consultation on Early Community Engagement Guidance Note
Date: 10 March 2021 12:00:19

Dear Oliver,

Many thanks for circulating the draft guidance note and the chance to comment on it at the online session on 3rd March. I am writing as secretary of the Fitzrovia West Neighbourhood Forum.

These comments are based on the first draft guidance note: We understand a revised draft will be circulated.

We welcome the greater clarification in the Note and the aim to make the process more effective and meaningful.

Our experience over the years has been that developers approach the process very differently. Some are genuinely interested in public feedback, others use it as an opportunity to 'sell' the scheme and are clearly unwilling to make any changes to the planning application. Quite often PR consultants are employed to prepare a report on the consultation which often tends to accentuate positive comments and play down the criticisms or suggested improvements. Where exhibitions of drawings and models are organised, these tend to be very short, i.e. 1 or 2 days, not always well advertised and not always open in the evenings and weekends.

In summary our suggestions for improving the process are as follows:

Give neighbourhood forums and amenity societies a much bigger role in the process;

Specify a minimum period for the duration of the consultation (e.g. 4-5 days) and ensure that it occurs as early as possible and before the pre-app consultation;

Specify when a proposed development requires prior public consultation: the case officer should consult the forum/amenity society and ward members about which method would be most relevant where any redevelopment or change of use over a certain site or floor area is proposed. This should not be left to the developer to decide and should be determined before the pre-app meeting takes place;

Engage the neighbourhood forum and amenity society early on and ensure they are fully briefed on the application. Use the consultation to draw in 'rarely heard' groups and stakeholders;

Table 2 should be amended to allow for special cases involving controversial sites, listed

buildings, redevelopment in CA's etc and not just the size of development. Forums and amenity societies should be consulted by the Council as to what type of consultation would be most effective in each case;

The applicants should prepare a report summarising comments after the consultation and this should go to council officers AND the forum/amenity society and ideally all those submitting written comments. The report should also summarise any changes to be made to the plans arising from the consultation and before the full application is submitted;

How to judge a successful consultation process:

- i. Is the consultation process inclusive of all stakeholders affected?
- ii. Is the process transparent in that publicity is comprehensive and all participants are kept informed?
- iii. Does the application show evidence of changes resulting from comments by statutory and public consultees?
- iv. Does the application conform with key policy statements in the City Plan and any relevant Neighbourhood Plan?

Successful consultation also depends on using the most appropriate method(s) in relation to the size, type and location of the proposal and the stage in the process when the consultation takes place.

best wishes

Nick Bailey
Secretary
Fitzrovia West Neighbourhood Forum

Nick Bailey
E:

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From: [Gibson, Oliver: WCC](#)
To: [Gibson, Oliver: WCC](#)
Subject: Discussion Forums on Westminster's Draft Early Community Engagement Guidance - 3rd and 4th March at 5.00pm
Date: 05 October 2021 10:17:51

From: Kay Buxton
Sent: 19 February 2021 18:44
To: Gibson, Oliver: WCC <ogibson@westminster.gov.uk>
Subject: RE: Discussion Forums on Westminster's Draft Early Community Engagement Guidance - 3rd and 4th March at 5.00pm

Hello again Oliver,

My main comment really is on usability, and potentially sending people off on wild goose chases in the links, which are not landing in the best places.

I think the section on groups is missing a helpful narrative about exactly who does what, and where influence lies/the hierarchy of influence.

- For example on Amenity Societies you could explain that these are statutory consultees in Westminster and receive all planning notifications and each has a planning spokesperson/committee. Then link to the map of all the recognised Amenity Societies.
- On Neighbourhood Forums you might differentiate between those with a Plan in place and those without. And why that's important. Also differentiate between residential and mixed Neighbourhood Areas. Explain the difference. Mixed areas are going to find it harder to reach consensus on planning proposals. But they can be a good audience for socialising a scheme, and are good at getting the message out about proposals on websites and in newsletters
- On BIDs you could business-led, schemes could find support amongst local businesses, and as above BIDs are good at getting the message out about proposals on websites and in newsletters.

Amenity Societies

The best resource is the map – which is actually hosted on the WASF website. You'd end up going through every single website before you gave up and went to the link below and found the map.

Neighbourhood Forums

Link lands on the wrong page – currently lands on how to apply to be one, not the map or list of them. Here is the map:

<https://lbhf.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=e20e30fae8814b6aaee5c6171dc231f7>

Contact details are out of date and in fact it's impossible for Forums to update their details, we've been trying for years and no one seems to know who owns this page web wise.

BIDs

You'll see I have copied you into my email to Haylea Asadi. This page has been updated but is currently hosting a lot of out of date material. At the moment the user of your guidance note would have to go through every single (out of date) BID proposal to check which BID they might

be in.

My only other comment is about Table 3 – I would disagree it's and/or ward councillors/community. It has to be both.

I'll come along to the webinar, but keep quiet, as these are mainly presentation points.

Kay

From: [Gibson, Oliver: WCC](#)
To: [Gibson, Oliver: WCC](#)
Subject: FW: KNF re: Invitation to Comment on Westminster's Draft Early Community Engagement Guidance
Date: 05 October 2021 10:24:55

From: Simon Birkett <>
Sent: 09 March 2021 19:40
To: Gibson, Oliver: WCC <ogibson@westminster.gov.uk>
Cc: Hamilton, Jane: WCC <jhamilton@westminster.gov.uk>; Armsby, Deirdra: WCC <darmsby@westminster.gov.uk>; Nally, Vincent: WCC <vnally@westminster.gov.uk>; Coulson, Amanda: WCC <acoulson@westminster.gov.uk>; Brandon, Steven: WCC <StevenB@westminster.gov.uk>; West, Kimberley: WCC <kwest@westminster.gov.uk>; Robathan, Rachael (Cllr): WCC; Devenish, Anthony (Cllr); Hitchcock, Elizabeth (Cllr)
Subject: KNF re: Invitation to Comment on Westminster's Draft Early Community Engagement Guidance

Dear Oliver

Thank you for this consultation. My apologies for not replying sooner.

Please align Westminster's guidance to the Knightsbridge Neighbourhood Forum's 'Best practice guidance on community engagement' on which we had extensive legal advice:

<https://www.knightsbridgeforum.org/best-practice-guidance-community-engagement/>

Two points:

- Please ask applicants to consult the local amenity society and neighbourhood forum before submitting the application
- Please ensure that applicants understand that 'made' neighbourhood plans are a full part of the development plan. I am amazed that Savills and others still don't seem to understand that (even when they are told repeatedly!).

I would be pleased to discuss this with you.

I have copied our councillors.

Best.

Simon

Simon Birkett
Chair
Knightsbridge Neighbourhood Forum

M:

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W: knightsbridgeforum.org

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From: [Gibson, Oliver: WCC](#)
To: [Gibson, Oliver: WCC](#)
Subject: FW: Invitation to Comment on Westminster's Draft Early Community Engagement Guidance
Date: 05 October 2021 10:23:11

From: Planning Sub Group
Sent: 04 March 2021 21:15
To: Gibson, Oliver: WCC <ogibson@westminster.gov.uk>
Cc: Gordon Morrison
Subject: Re: Invitation to Comment on Westminster's Draft Early Community Engagement Guidance

Dear Mr Gibson

Thank you for inviting us to comment on the Early Community Engagement Guidance. On behalf of the Mayfair Neighbourhood Forum, we welcome the proposed clarification for developers as to how they should engage with the community.

The role of the Neighbourhood Forums is, unfortunately, understated in the guidance and particularly where a Neighbourhood Plan has been adopted, we would like to see prior communication with the Forum being made a requirement. This should be a specific engagement and not part of a wider consultation event.

Since the Mayfair Neighbourhood Plan was adopted 15 months ago, the Forum has proactively and successfully engaged with developers and their agents, focusing on those schemes which are affected by the Plan policies. Although these have tended to be the larger schemes which are likely to be impacted by the Plan, a number of smaller schemes, some of which we don't get consulted upon prior to submission, can also be in potential conflict with the Plan. It is important therefore that while this guidance is designed for larger projects, that developers of smaller schemes should also undertake community engagement where their proposals are likely to be contentious.

The guidance to consult with the Forums should therefore extend to applications that are less than 1000m² - which for many areas would be a very large application. We would further suggest that Forums which have an adopted Plan should be notified by the developer in advance of an application being made where the

potential application involves an increase in floor area of more than 100m² or where a change of use is proposed.

I hope that these comments are of use to you and I look forward to receiving a copy of the final version in due course.

Yours sincerely,

Nigel Hughes MBE FRICS

Planning & Public Realm Committee

Mayfair Neighbourhood Forum

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From: [Gibson, Oliver: WCC](#)
To: [Gibson, Oliver: WCC](#)
Subject: FW: Additional topic (Right to Regenerate) for discussion at scheduled sessions on 3rd and 4th March
Date: 05 October 2021 10:30:21

From: Chair, Marylebone Forum

Sent: 12 March 2021 15:11

To: Gibson, Oliver: WCC <ogibson@westminster.gov.uk>

Cc: Armsby, Deirdra: WCC <darmsby@westminster.gov.uk>; West, Kimberley: WCC <kwest@westminster.gov.uk>; Herdman, Cecily: WCC <cherdman@westminster.gov.uk>; Nally, Vincent: WCC <vnally@westminster.gov.uk>; Coulson, Amanda: WCC <acoulson@westminster.gov.uk>; Brandon, Steven: WCC <StevenB@westminster.gov.uk>; Hughes, Alun: WCC <ahughes@westminster.gov.uk>; Ferguson, Luke: WCC <lferguson1@westminster.gov.uk>

Subject: RE: Additional topic (Right to Regenerate) for discussion at scheduled sessions on 3rd and 4th March

Hi Oliver

The Forum of Westminster Forums have met to discuss the initial draft of Westminster City Council's **Early Community Engagement Guidance Note**.

A number of colleagues who are leading individual Forum Steering Groups have also been involved in a number of discussion groups as the guidance was developed. There is a real concern that the Neighbourhood Forums are not fully embedded into the City Council's consideration on this Guidance and also how they are structured within wider community interest groups and representative bodies in the planning process.

National Planning Guidance favours local neighbourhood plans and their respective forums so we are keen collectively to see greater weight on this in your emerging guidance. We would also welcome an opportunity to review the next iteration as a group of Westminster Forums.

Kind regards

Yael Saunders

Chair, Marylebone Forum & Forum of Westminster neighbourhood Forums

www.maryleboneforum.org



10 March 2021

Mr. Oliver Gibson
Principal Planning Officer
Place Shaping & Town Planning
Westminster City Council
13th Floor, City Hall, 64 Victoria Street, London, SW1E 6QP

Dear Oliver,

Thank you for organising the evening sessions last week and giving us an extended opportunity to comment on your Early Community Engagement guidance draft. We appreciate all the work that you and others at Westminster have put into it.

I think you have already heard the following requests from us and others:

- A greater emphasis on neighbourhood Forums in this process.
- The earlier the better—we concur with others on the call that having an opportunity to review a brief or outline of proposals **before** the architectural design begins could save time and money for the developer and help to ensure a more positive reception from the community. This could be as simple as supplying a document that identifies the site and provides a statement of the proposal. In the absence of a local Neighbourhood Plan, this early engagement will allow the community to make positive suggestions on things like plantings/ landscaping and will also allow them to make clear what might not be acceptable, such as excessive exterior lighting. This might also be an opportunity for a community to give its opinion on what is missing from the area or the project, or what they think might not work.
- We feel that even small schemes should be subject to early consultations or at least a notice to the local community groups. As you have pointed out in your document, collaborative approaches that consider a wide spectrum of ideas tend to yield the most creative and successful projects, and so we feel this guidance should be for all developments, irrespective of size.

Two additional thoughts we had were:

- While these consultations generally include the developer, community groups, ward councillors, etc., a group that is often left out is the end-user. A good developer will have done their homework and a good architect should know what the end user needs, but perhaps the involvement of an impartial third party to represent these end-users could contribute ideas and feedback to help ensure the success of a project. This impartial third party might also be useful where there are conflicts between community groups and a developer.
- Community notice boards in each of the neighbourhood areas might help to get these potential projects on the radar of local people, especially for those who might not have access to the internet or social media.

Thank you again for your work on this document and we look forward to seeing the next iteration.

Best wishes,

Suzanne Forte
for the
Notting Hill East Neighbourhood Forum

From: [Gibson, Oliver: WCC](#)
To: [Gibson, Oliver: WCC](#)
Subject: FW: Invitation to Comment on Westminster's Draft Early Community Engagement Guidance
Date: 05 October 2021 10:24:05

From: Peter Ruback
Sent: 07 March 2021 15:56
To: Gibson, Oliver: WCC <ogibson@westminster.gov.uk>
Subject: RE: Invitation to Comment on Westminster's Draft Early Community Engagement Guidance

Dear Oliver

Thanks for the opportunity to comment on this draft guidance. The response below amplifies the points I made on Wednesday.

Consultation on Early Community Engagement

1. Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this draft guidance note aimed at developers/applicants for planning permission. (consultation about consultation)
2. Pimlico Neighbourhood Forum has the following comments and issues that its considers the final document needs to address.

General

3. Neighbourhood Forums have been established to promote the legitimate community interests of the residents and businesses in their area. They are democratically accountable (as all residents and businesses may join them) and in general they will have undertaken extensive engagement with their local communities as to what they do and don't want and need in their areas. Most Forums have been established with the purpose of developing a Neighbourhood Plan including planning policies for their areas and they will have done some or all of the following:
 - Establishing a high level vision for their area
 - Collecting views on what matters most for an area as regards future development
 - Consulting on priorities for policy areas
 - Consulting on policy proposals in draft Plans, designation of sites for development or for protection etc
 - Having their Plans made and therefore established as binding policy.
4. In addition they will have been consulted on planning applications in their areas.
5. It follows that Forums will be in a special position to respond and can soundly base their input into consultations. Of course, before a Neighbourhood Plan is "made", Forums will need to be measured about how strongly they can back a view on proposed development, but for areas that they consider there has been strong support they ought to put forward a correspondingly strong view. This will be more straightforward if they have already consulted on a draft Plan.
6. Without seeking to minimise the value of other input, particular weight ought to be attached to the input from Neighbourhood Forums and it is of concern that they feature as just one of a very wide number of organisations whose view will be sought during pre-application discussions.
7. We have the following particular comments.

3. *Who to Consult – Inclusive Engagement*

8. This section ought to give stronger emphasis to the role that Forums can play and acknowledge that they have formed views on types of development (both form and function) based on community wide input.

5. *How to Consult – Types of Consultation, Content & Techniques*

9. This section covers content of consultation as well as means and techniques. There needs to be more robust guidance on issues to be covered.
10. In relation to specifically Neighbourhood Planning issues, developers/applicants ought to be asked to set out during any engagement:
 - how their proposals relate to visions established for an area by a Forum and Forums covering nearby areas; and
 - how they fit with emerging policies in Neighbourhood Plans. We recognised that these policies may not yet be binding on planning authorities, but they should nonetheless play a role in community engagement, because they enable communities to respond in a precise way to proposals.
11. In relation to considering fit with City Plan policy objectives, the guidance requires development. For example, in the CAZ there are conflicting priorities that are only fully reconciled by a close reading of several policies. It is not clear how a developer/applicant can properly deal with this simply at the “policy objective” level. While it may be thought that fit with policies is best dealt with in Officer discussions and in Officers’ recommendations, we think that an analysis of fit with policies should explicitly inform community engagement.

Yours sincerely,

Peter Ruback

From: Gill FitzHugh
To: [Gibson, Oliver: WCC](#)
Subject: Statement of Community Involvement in Planning
Date: 10 March 2021 19:17:55

Dear Oliver

I was told that the response time has been extended.

Please can you add to 8.5

consultation with the parish/ community council

yours sincerely

Gill Fitzhugh

Comments

1 'Right to Contest'

- The consultation suggests to us that WCC should review all the property it holds on our behalf and designate a best possible use in order to deal with challenges under the 'Right to Contest' rule.

- We suspect this would only arise rarely in Westminster, given the scarcity of unused land. Apart from land, are there unused buildings in the hands of WCC? [The only remotely related example of a local group challenging the lack of use of a property we've ever come across was a planning application rather than this process, and involved a college and not WCC - a local group wanted to use the disused school-keepers house in Peter Street and put in an application].

Some of us remember cases in (? 1980s) Southwark where the LA owned numerous neglected Victorian houses which they could not afford to renew, although housing was needed. These were often squatted, with some of the squatters eventually claiming them, and housing co-operatives forming so that they were occupied with the council's consent with the hope that funding would eventually be found. Not empty land, but in those days, it would probably have been permissible to knock those houses down and redevelop!

- Agree with WCC that ransom strips might be a problem, and there may be other unintended consequences.
- We are not necessarily in favour of developing every piece of land owned by a local public body. This can be shortsighted: eg the Magistrates Court on the Marylebone Road - the south half of the site was sold off for housing. This means that any possibility of expanding on that site, should the need arise, is gone forever.

2 Early Community Engagement Guidance Note

- How would the early consultation process work? Meetings with all parties? The Zoom /Teams experience this year shows that online meeting is an option, and in the case of this kind of meeting, might produce better attendance as people are reluctant to travel to City Hall or elsewhere for a meeting - takes a big chunk out of the day, and many of our most useful volunteers are working people.
- We have long noticed the effects of pre-app consultation on the developer schemes presented to us. On the positive side, we know through long observation of planning apps roughly what WCC requires, and this cuts out a lot of completely unacceptable proposals. But in many ways, given that a developer

has already satisfied the planning authority, there is often very little point in consulting us.

When we see particularly unsuitable residential applications, we often think it is a pity that smaller developers and individuals don't also access the pre-app process ...

The pre-app process often doesn't include things which are important to local people: in our case, as a local history society, we are interested in preserving the character of re-used buildings - an example is Marylebone House where a previous scheme retained part of the building but *not* the original metal balcony railings which enriched the period design.

Also often missing from the pre-app process is local knowledge of the area and the knock on effects of the proposal on it, or activities in the area which might affect the new scheme.

General problems with local consultation:

Massaging of results of consultation: reportage should be accurate.

- One of the features of current developer consultations which we particularly dislike is the questionnaire which they hand out at their exhibitions which usually consists of a number of questions, often multiple choice, carefully phrased to elicit a positive response, and which often don't include what we see as specific issues for that site.

- WCC can also be guilty of presenting consultation responses as wholly positive when actually mixed, and sidelining dissenters.

Here's an example concerning Seymour Leisure Centre proposals. In our case, we had a number of disgruntled swimmers objecting, who wanted the original large pool restored, and not partitioned. The swimmers felt that their view should be represented in the update, even if the council had decided not to do what they wanted:

We would like to include in our update that ***"the stakeholder resident representatives expressed positive comments about the overall proposal draft of leisure centre refurbishment to include a larger swimming pool and new sports hall, as well as the revised co-location of the new library within the building."*** We hope that you are in agreement with this, or if you have anything else to add please reply to ...

Another example is the WCC response to the 1st Luxborough St consultation in 2018, where a number of respondents wanted to see some sort of community space on the site, and the council's second stage consultation announced that there would be housing on the site with no community space. (Following a

strong reaction against that, WCC reconsidered). Locals were offended by the presentation of the 2nd stage proposal, which managed to imply that a scheme of only housing was what (all) respondents wanted to see.

In some cases, outside commentators distort the consultation result. This was noticeable in the Baker St 2Way development, where a number of patrons of a particular restaurant objected to the proposal - most of them lived in North London, not Marylebone. Similarly, London-wide cycle lobbies had a particular view, (more justifiable, we think than the restaurant, which effectively organised a petition of outsiders with no insight into local conditions). In such a large scheme, the origin of such responses must be examined, as indeed WCC did in this case.

We recognise that it is often difficult to get local residents/ businesses to participate in consultations generally, and draw their attention to planning apps etc., without the process being costly in a time of cuts.

Our society has the same problem: we often alert our members to issues via email, and receive almost no responses. We do not have the resources to do more.

Most people seem to only respond to things that touch them directly, such as a project next door, or a road scheme that might affect their usual driving behaviour.

However, as far as our participation is concerned, we have sometimes seen useful changes in projects as a result of our participation. It helped in the BS2W project. However we have also failed in many of our efforts, especially where WCC has a particular agenda we do not share or cannot afford to do the best thing - Cosway Street Schoolhouse, for example.

From: [Gibson, Oliver: WCC](#)
To: [Gibson, Oliver: WCC](#)
Subject: FW: Confirmation of attendance at Early Community Engagement Guidance discussion on 4th March at 5.00pm
Date: 05 October 2021 10:21:14
Attachments: [image001.png](#)
[Draft Early Community Engagement Guidance Note \(Consultation Draft V8 120221\) CLEANmbv.docx](#)

From: Matthew Bennett
Sent: 04 March 2021 18:57
To: Gibson, Oliver: WCC <ogibson@westminster.gov.uk>
Cc: Armsby, Deirdra: WCC <darmsby@westminster.gov.uk>
Subject: Re: Confirmation of attendance at Early Community Engagement Guidance discussion on 4th March at 5.00pm

Oliver/Deirdra

I attach a tracked changes version of the document which i hope is useful.

Matthew

From: Gibson, Oliver: WCC
Sent: Thursday, February 25, 2021 11:24 AM
To: Gibson, Oliver: WCC
Subject: Confirmation of attendance at Early Community Engagement Guidance discussion on 4th March at 5.00pm

Thank you for confirming your attendance at the discussion forum on Thursday 4th March at 5.00pm to discuss the Draft Early Community Engagement Guidance. The link to the online forum session is in the email below. I look forward to meeting you at the session.

Kind Regards,

Oliver Gibson
Principal Planning Officer
Place Shaping & Town Planning
Westminster City Council
13th Floor, City Hall, 64 Victoria Street, London, SW1E 6QP
Tel: 07971026919



<https://www.westminster.gov.uk/>

Any views or opinions expressed in this email are those of the sender, and whilst given in good faith, do not necessarily represent a formal decision of the Local Planning Authority unless a statutory application is or has been made and determined in accordance with requisite procedures, planning policies and having had regard to material considerations.

Early Community Engagement Guidance Note for Applicants and Developers

Draft V8 - February 2021

1. Introduction and Purpose

This guidance sets out our expectations for how applicants and developers should engage with local communities at the earliest stage of scheme development and explains the information applicants should provide to demonstrate the engagement they have undertaken and how it has positively influenced the evolution of their development proposals.

The council strongly supports the view expressed by Government in the National Planning Policy Framework (2019) (para 39) that early engagement has significant potential to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the planning application system for all parties. Best practice pre-application engagement with all parties, including the local community, enables better coordination between public and private resources and improves outcomes for communities and developers by delivering high quality, sustainable development.

The advice in this guidance note builds upon the expectations and requirements set out in Section 8 of our Statement of Community Involvement (2014)¹, which we will update during 2021, and explains how public engagement on emerging development proposals should be undertaken by developers following the **principles of good engagement**, namely that it is *early, open, transparent, inclusive, responsive and accessible*.

2. What is Early Community Engagement & What are the Benefits?

Early community engagement is the process of engaging with residents, Councillors and other local stakeholders at the earliest possible stage in the scheme development process, providing the opportunity for the engagement to be multi-phased, enabling an informed 'conversation' with communities. Initial engagement which set out in writing the concept, vision and objectives of a development and states that discussion is welcomed on that concept and as it is designed and developed are likely to work better rather than notifying stakeholdersthem of an already defined proposal. It provides communities with a meaningful role in shaping their places and allows developers to benefit from the insight that communities can provide through their unique local knowledge, test and refine ideas at an early stage and gather support for the general principles of their development proposal. Well executed community engagement following best practice makes the planning process a more positive experience for all participants.

¹ Statement of Community Involvement in Planning (2014): www.westminster.gov.uk/media/document/core-008---statement-of-community-involvement-in-planning

The planning system is often viewed as a complex and highly technical process; it can be confusing, and people can feel that their views are not considered sufficiently when engagement is poorly executed or timed, leading to a breakdown in trust between all parties. Effective well thought out early engagement can reduce conflict, allow communities to have their say at a stage where their views can genuinely influence design decisions and consequently result in better development that is more responsive to local need and resilient to future changes in local behaviour and demand.

Early engagement can also help communities understand the developers' perspective; communities may not agree with the final proposal or the outcome but may still accept the reasoning. It offers a vital opportunity for developers to explain their vision and aims to local communities and demonstrate how they propose to realise these having regard to site and economic constraints. By sharing their vision with local communities in an open, transparent and collaborative way, developers can utilise early engagement to reduce the number and severity of objections raised at formal application stage. This can assist the council to make more timely decisions, and this in turn can help applicants by reducing unnecessary delay and cost.

When done well, early community engagement improves trust and relationships between developers and local communities, building greater overall support for development and a greater appreciation of the positive benefits that can be delivered for existing local communities by well-designed development.

3. Who to Consult – Inclusive Engagement

It is important to engage with as many members of communities affected by proposals, from as diverse a cross section of those communities, as possible. All community engagement must be compliant with the Equality Act 2010 and uphold the values of equality, diversity and inclusion.

You should ensure that your engagement seeks to reach all groups within communities, including minority groups and those that are disengaged, as well as more established community groups. To support this approach engagement should be disability positive.

Westminster has many long-standing, active community groups and amenity societies who are regularly involved in consultations or community engagement and have made a significant and positive contribution to planning in Westminster over many years. The opinions of all groups have value and you should ensure they are all engaged with in the most appropriate way and aren't marginalised as a result of their involvement (or lack thereof) in previous community engagement.

We recommend that as a minimum you ensure that the groups listed below are included when undertaking early community engagement. You should also seek advice from local community groups and planning officers who may be able to assist you in identifying additional community stakeholders and help you to understand their particular interests and needs, and how best to engage with them. Recommended groups for inclusion in early community engagement include:

- For all development proposals the occupants of those properties immediately adjacent to the development site should be a particular focus

- the local communities including residents, workers and businesses in the vicinity² of the development site, having special regard to how traditionally ‘rarely heard from’ groups can be engaged;
- Ward Councillors;
- existing community, residents and tenants’ groups,
- recognised amenity societies³⁴;
- neighbourhood forums⁵;
- community councils (Queens Park Community Council – where applicable);
- Business Improvement Districts (BIDs)⁶;
- local faith groups;
- special interest groups³ (e.g. ‘friends of’ groups, conservation groups etc.) and semi-recognised amenity societies³.

In addition to early community engagement, you should also engage with officers using the council’s Pre-Application Advice Service⁷ and consult other relevant statutory and non-statutory consultees.

4. Engagement Methods – Making it Open, Accessible & Meaningful

Early community engagement can take many forms, ranging from awareness raising, for example leaflets, posters, online content/a website, to consultation using questionnaires, interactive social media, public meetings or groups discussions and more collaborative and participatory approaches such as design workshops and forums.

Over recent years digital consultation technology and platforms have advanced significantly and this is reflected by the Government’s call for greater use of digital technology to aid planning consultation, in their recent Planning White Paper (August 2020)⁸. Consultation undertaken on the council’s own development proposals demonstrates that digital consultation methods and platforms reach a wider range of people within communities, often from those groups that are disengaged when using more traditional non-digital consultation methods.

The range of consultation methods available fall into three categories; namely informative, consultative or collaborative engagement (see Table 1).

Table 1: Types and Methods of Engagement.

² ‘Vicinity’ should be determined having regard to the scale and impact of the proposed development.

³ List of recognised amenity societies, semi-recognised amenity societies and special interest groups: www.westminster.gov.uk/sites/default/files/list_of_amenity_societies_in_westminster2018.pdf

⁴ Link to Westminster Amenity Society Forum: <http://westminsteramenitysocietiesforum.org/>

⁵ List of Neighbourhood Forums: www.westminster.gov.uk/neighbourhood-forums

⁶ List of BIDs: <https://www.westminster.gov.uk/businesses/westminster-business-improvement-districts/bids>

⁷ Pre-Application Advice Service: <https://www.westminster.gov.uk/planning-building-and-environmental-regulations/planning-applications/request-pre-application-planning-advice>

⁸ Government Planning White Paper ‘Planning for the Future’ (August 2020): https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/907647/MHCLG-Planning-Consultation.pdf

Informative Engagement	Leaflets and traditional media
	Development website/ council's website/ social media (where informative with no interaction)
Consultative Engagement	Interactive digital engagement/ social media (where interaction is included)/ online questionnaires
	Public exhibitions/ meetings
	Meeting(s) with Ward Members & other statutory/ non-statutory consultees
Collaborative Engagement	Engagement forums/ workshops

For major development you should use some or all of these techniques depending on scale of development (see Table 2) and you should include a mix of techniques to ensure your engagement is inclusive and reaches different audiences and communities within the vicinity of the development site. However, it is important to tailor the engagement approach taken on a case by case basis to ensure you overcome the particular barriers to participation that may exist in different communities.

When planning early community engagement, you should identify any potential barriers to engagement and design your engagement strategy to minimise them where possible. There are groups in all communities who are more difficult to engage. Potential barriers to their involvement include: (i) the capacity and ability of different stakeholders (e.g. visible and non-visible disability, childcare/ caring commitments or employment commitments); (ii) being members of typically 'rarely heard from' groups such as young people, older people, minority groups or socially excluded groups; (iii) those with limited computer literacy and/ or access to technology; and (iv) those with more limited literacy and/ or numeracy or a dominance of oral culture. Ensuring that an engagement strategy is inclusive and accessible to the widest range of community members contributes to its value and its legitimacy.

For engagement events held at a venue in the vicinity of a development site you must ensure the chosen venue is fully accessible. You should consider whether the use of non-traditional venues would assist in reaching disengaged groups. Venues that can provide appropriate audio or visual aids should be prioritised. A minimum of 2 weeks notice of engagement events should be given.

We recommend that the types and methods of engagement included in Table 1 are designed in accordance with the example formats outlined below. However, it should be noted that this does not preclude developers from pursuing a more bespoke approach where this would respond to the particular needs of the local community and would lead to enhanced engagement outcomes.

Method 1: Leaflets/ Use of Traditional Media & Development Information Website

Written and/ or email correspondence/ newsletters/ leaflets setting out the key aspects of a proposed development (see Section 5 for content requirements) and advising where further information can be obtained and, for larger developments, where comments can be made (i.e. by reference to an informative website/ public exhibition/ engagement event).

Method 2: Meeting(s) with Ward Councillors

Meeting with a Ward Councillor(s) specifically arranged for the purpose of discussing the development proposal and setting out any concerns relayed by their local residents. Developers should notify officers where a meeting has been arranged with a Ward Councillor(s). Ward Councillors may invite officers to attend the meeting*. The use of new technologies and 3D modelling should be used for these meetings, where appropriate, to help articulate the development proposals.

**Note that officers are not required to attend as whilst Ward Councillors can provide valuable advice on the key concerns of their constituents, the views they may express are their own and not representative of the council as Local Planning Authority.*

Method 3: Interactive Digital Engagement

Use of an interactive website and/ or digital consultation/ social media platforms to provide detailed information on the proposed development and key objectives for the site, and provision of the opportunity to comment (i.e. by use of online questionnaires, surveys, comments portal or similar). Method 3 may incorporate the use of new technologies/ interactive features and 3D modelling. It may also include digital online forums and exhibitions.

Where targeted online consultation is utilised, the parameters for consultation (i.e. the geographic and demographic profile of those targeted etc.) should be arrived at with the aim of ensuring the consultation is inclusive of all communities within the vicinity of the development site and for the purpose of transparency and openness, these parameters should be specified in the Early Engagement Strategy submitted at pre-application stage and the SCI submitted at application stage.

Method 4: Public Exhibition/ Consultation Event/ Drop In Session

A public event held be at a venue in the immediate vicinity of the development site where visual displays of the proposed development are provided, with the opportunity for the public to comment on the proposed development. Such events should be appropriately publicised in advance (including use of Method 1).

Digital alternatives to 'in person' events should also be considered and may help to reach a wider range of persons from the local community. A digital format would take the form of a webinar, which enable the presentation of the same material as could be presented in a physical space and also enable comments to be made via a question and answer session, and via follow up email or phone correspondence.

It is recommended that a professional facilitator⁹ is appointed to compile consultation materials, organise the format for collecting consultee's views and lead engagement with the public at the event.

⁹ 'Professional Facilitator' means a person or persons appointed by the developer outside of their retained development team (i.e. appointed specifically to manage and host engagement events and not retained for the purpose of handling on-going development proposal communications), who has relevant professional experience in advising on consultation content and facilitating community engagement on development proposals.

Officers should be invited to the event in an observational capacity. All feedback should be provided to officers following the event to inform their advice in response to pre-application advice requests.

Method 5: Workshops

Workshops are a more collaborative approach to engagement than public exhibitions and consultation events. Workshops typically provide attendees with greater scope to offer their opinions on the form and function of a proposed development.

Workshops should be held at a venue in the immediate vicinity of the development site or online and publicised in advance. They are likely to be more effective when held during the earliest stages of scheme development and are typically more productive when limited to a specified number of attendees that represent a cross section of all parts of the local community. Consideration should be given to the use of professional facilitators to prepare workshop materials, set discussion topics and questions and lead the workshop session. Officers should be invited to workshops in an observational capacity.

You may wish to consider livestreaming or making recordings of workshops available online for those unable to attend (i.e. where attendee numbers may have been limited to maintain the effectiveness of the session) and provide alternative online method of submitting feedback to broaden the reach of these events.

Method 6: Engagement Forums

Engagement Forums (EFs) are more structured interactive events attended by local community stakeholders, to which Ward Councillors may also be invited. EFs would normally be appropriate when developing schemes of more strategic scale and the thresholds set out in Table 2 reflect this. EFs should be organised by developers, or preferably on their behalf by a professional facilitator, and held at an appropriate venue in the vicinity of the development site. EFs should typically last 2 to 2.5 hours and comprise a concise introduction of the site and key facts regarding the proposed development.

Officers should be invited to EFs. Note that their involvement will be as impartial observers and they will not provide comment on the acceptability of the proposal to the developer or other attendees. Officers will provide an overview of the policy context for the site being discussed.

The session should conclude with a forum discussion and a question and answer session between the developer and attendees that is chaired by the appointed professional facilitator. You should ensure that the developer presentation is limited to not more than 30 minutes to ensure sufficient time for open and unconstrained discussion between participants. The developer should take minutes of the EF and these should be shared with and agreed with the attending officer. Alternatively, a recording of the EF may be made and shared where appropriate agreement has been received from all attendees. The attending officer will use the record of the EF discussions to inform subsequent written pre-application advice provided by officers.

Like workshop events, EFs may also be undertaken in a remote format, particularly where in-person events are not possible (for example due to the impact of the Coronavirus pandemic). You may wish to consider livestreaming or making recordings of EFs available online for those unable to attend and provide alternative online method of submitting feedback to broaden the reach of these events.

When a local or national emergency has been declared that prevents the carrying out of face to face engagement, such as the Coronavirus pandemic, digital and online versions of these engagement methods should be utilised rather than reducing or ceasing community engagement during the affected period.

5. How to Consult – Types of Consultation, Content & Techniques

For major development, the council’s Statement of Community Involvement in Planning sets the expectation that all applicants/ developers will engage with the local community prior to making a formal application. For larger proposals, which are likely to have a significant impact on the environment or on the local community and/ or generate a high level of significant local interest, it is especially important to undertake early consultation on a wider scale.

Table 2 sets out the expected early engagement formats for different scales of development. Developers are encouraged to exceed these where this would enhance the value of the community engagement to be undertaken.

Table 2: Early Community Engagement expectations for developers.

Expected Developer Engagement Format(s)	Development Scale (GIA floorspace*)				
	Non-Major Development	1,000-2,499m2 add. floorspace or 10-24 new residential units	2,500-4,999m2 add. floorspace or 25-49 new residential units	5,000-19,999m2 add. floorspace or 49-99 residential units	20,000m2 + add. floorspace or 100 + new residential units
Method 1: Leaflets/ online communication. 	Encouraged	✓	✓	✓	✓
Method 2: Meet Ward Councillor(s)** 	Encouraged	Encouraged	✓	✓	✓
Method 3: Interactive Digital Engagement 	Encouraged	Encouraged	✓	✓	✓
Method 4 or 5: Public Exhibition/ Workshop 				✓	✓
Method 6: Early Engagement Forum 					✓
Expected Collaboration with Officers					

Submit Early Engagement Strategy with Pre-App 		✓	✓	✓	✓
Share Consultation Responses/ Data 		✓	✓	✓	✓
Invite case officer to engagement event(s) 				✓	✓

* GIA Floorspace refers to additional floorspace in the case of proposals for extensions and all floorspace where new building is proposed (including new build schemes behind a retained façade).

** Meetings are subject to the agreement of the Ward Councillor¹⁰. Note they are not obliged to meet on all major schemes and will prioritise development that they consider to have significant impact on communities in their ward. Officers may be invited to meetings by Ward Councillors.

When carrying out all methods of engagement for major development, a minimum level of key information regarding the proposed development should be included in the community engagement material:

- the vision and aims for the proposed development/ what the proposal is seeking to deliver and how this contributes to the Council's City Plan policy objectives;
- site layout and details of the use, function and form of proposed development (interactive and/ or 3D modelling should be used wherever possible);
- identified positive and adverse impacts of the development, including its contribution to tackling the climate emergency¹¹ and increasing the sustainability of the city's building stock;
- the S106 and other public benefits to be offered (where applicable);
- the value of any CIL contribution (where applicable) and;
- an outline timeline for delivery of the proposed development and how any foreseeable significant construction impacts could be mitigated;
- alternative options for development of the site (at initial engagement sessions);
- summary of feedback from earlier consultation, amendments to earlier scheme iterations and rationale for amendments (for follow up engagement sessions);
- details of how feedback can be given during and following the engagement event.

Where set out in Section 4, professional facilitators should be used to ensure that the presentation material, format, questions to participants and scope of those invited to participate are balanced and impartial and representative of all communities within the vicinity of the development site. The

¹⁰ List of ward councillors: <https://committees.westminster.gov.uk/mgMemberIndex.aspx?bcr=1>

¹¹ Westminster's Climate Emergency declaration: <https://www.westminster.gov.uk/climate-emergency-0>

professional facilitators should also chair/ lead the engagement sessions where their involvement is recommended.

The council encourages the use of 3D modelling tools when carrying out engagement. These can greatly assist with the visualisation of proposed development and help to show it in the context of existing townscape. This can help consultees to better understand the impacts of proposed development and, in some cases, allay concerns they may otherwise have had. The council uses 'Vu.City' when assessing development proposals. We encourage you to use this platform, or a compatible model specification, when including contextual 3D modelling in your early community engagement. Note that when seeking pre-application advice for major development, the provision of a Vu.City compatible 3D virtual model of the proposed development will also assist officers in providing advice on your proposal. A specification to ensure 3D models are compatible with Vu.City is provided in Appendix B.

All development proposals (PLEASE move this up the document, perhaps within Section 2)

Whilst there is not an expectation for prospective applicants to engage with the community on non-major development, engagement is still encouraged and should be proportionate to the scale of the proposed development. For all scales of development, but particularly non-major development, it is important to consider how you would want to be treated if a development was proposed near you. For example, for extensions and alterations to houses, we would encourage applicants to consult those living adjacent or very close to the site at an early stage. The type of engagement expected for smaller scale proposals will include, but should not necessarily be limited to, written notice of the proposals and/ or offering a meeting with neighbours and allowing the opportunity for their comments to be made at an early stage.

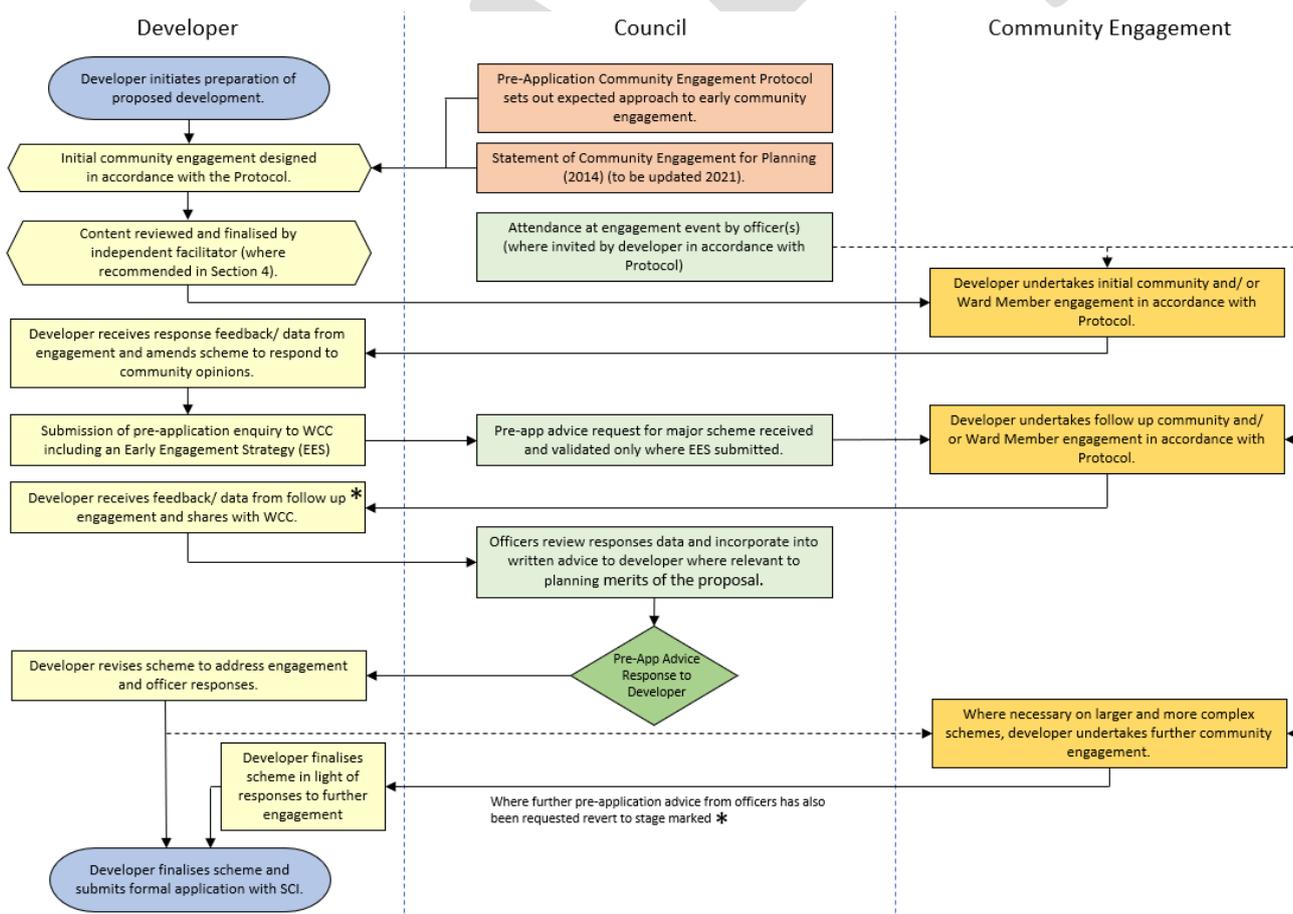
6. When to Consult – Early & Responsive Engagement

Community engagement should begin at the very earliest stage of scheme development. It is recommended that the first stage of engagement is communication in written form (possibly aided by illustrative sketches) to those in the vicinity describing the vision, aims and objectives of the development and makes clear that the applicant welcomes discussion of the proposals as they are worked up. It is often the underlying principles of applications which create debate. If these can be resolved at the initial stages, the details of subsequent design may well be more easily agreed. Table 3 sets out a good practice timetable for community engagement during the scheme development process. Following this timetable will ensure that the early engagement undertaken informs the design of the scheme and enables pre-application discussions and subsequent advice from officers to be better informed by the views and expectations of the local community. We therefore strongly recommend that initial community engagement is carried out prior to seeking pre-application advice from officers wherever possible, especially on larger schemes and those where more than two phases of community engagement are planned.

The scope and timetable for the proposed community engagement activities should be captured in an 'Early Engagement Strategy' (EES). The EES should be submitted along with other documents when

making a pre-application advice request to the Place Shaping and Town Planning Service. Feedback from early community engagement should be shared with officers during the pre-application advice process, either as part of the submitted EES where community engagement has already commenced or as a subsequent addendum to the EES where community engagement is scheduled to take place concurrently with pre-application discussions with officers. Officers will include reference to relevant comments and views expressed by the local community in their written pre-application advice where these are consistent with the policy requirements of the City Plan.

Table 3: Early Community Engagement Process & Example Timeline. *PLEASE SIMPLIFY and suggest putting Community Engagement in the centre and Council on the right as currently it still reads visually as if community engagement comes last. It may also make the arrow flow timeline work better. The need for the differing shapes of the boxes is not clear and can confuse.*



The EES submitted with your pre-application advice request should set out the following information demonstrating how early community engagement has/ will be achieved:

- **What engagement has already been undertaken?** Early community engagement should have started well in advance of seeking pre-application advice. Therefore, you should include details of all early community engagement that has already been undertaken prior to the submission of the pre-application advice request, including community feedback from this engagement. All comments received should be included within an appendix to the EES.
- **Who will you engage with?** You should demonstrate the scope of community engagement proposed by including a list of community groups and other statutory and non-statutory consultees that have/ are to be consulted and provide a statement or methodology setting out how the engagement will encompass the principles of equality, diversity and inclusion.
- **How will they be engaged?** Confirmation of which methods will be used with reference to Table 2. The EES should specify how many phases of consultation are proposed and how feedback on earlier engagement is to be provided to stakeholders. It should also confirm that professional facilitators have been employed to organise and chair/ lead engagement events where this is recommended in Section 4.
- **How will you ensure engagement is constructive, accessible and inclusive?** Where possible media/ presentation content for the initial round of engagement should be provided in an appendix. For traditional and digital methods of consultative engagement, the questions to be asked of consultees should be provided and a rationale for the proposed approach provided. For digital/ social media consultation, where particular demographics or geographic areas are to be targeted, these should be set out and a rationale for the proposed approach given.
- **When will you carry out engagement?** A schedule for initial and follow-up engagement should be provided (note it is recognised that the date of follow up consultation may be subject to change dependent upon the response received to initial consultation).
- **How will you capture, record and share feedback?** Provide a methodology for how comments and feedback will be captured and recorded and confirm the format and timeframe for sharing the feedback with officers and (where appropriate) community stakeholders. You should also confirm that the comments and any associated personal data has/ will be captured with appropriate consents (where necessary).

Where community engagement is carried out prior to seeking pre-application advice from officers and this guidance note recommends attendance at the engagement event by officers, you should contact the relevant planning area team (see contact details in Appendix C).

Further views should be sought on the evolving proposals from all those who respond to initial engagement before a planning application is submitted, so that amendments that have been made can be communicated to stakeholders. This approach helps to build trust and enhance transparency in the planning process and enables stakeholders to see that their input has resulted in tangible benefits to the local community. Conversely where changes to a scheme cannot reasonably be made, further engagement enables developers to set out why this cannot be achieved in advance of formal

consultation at application stage. For larger scale major development, it is likely that more than two phases of community engagement will be appropriate to secure the best outcomes.

In addition to the steps set out in Table 3, developers of larger scale major development may also wish to present their emerging proposals to the Cabinet Member for Business, Licensing and Planning and/ or the Chairman of Planning (as appropriate) where the development is of a scale or complexity described in Appendix A of the Guidance Note for Developers¹². In addition to falling within one of the categories in Appendix A, developers must also demonstrate that they have already made a pre-application advice submission to the Place Shaping and Town Planning Service and provide evidence of initial community engagement (i.e. by the submission of an EES with their pre-application advice request). Feedback from the community engagement should be shared with officers in advance of any meeting with the Cabinet Member or the Chairman of Planning.

7. What is Expected at Application Stage – Promoting Transparency

Where an applicant has undertaken community engagement prior to making a planning application, a Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) must be submitted with a formal planning application in accordance with our Validation Checklist requirements. The SCI should build on the content provided in the EES at pre-application stage. It must set out the type of community engagement undertaken and the success of these methods, along with details of the views expressed and the changes made by the applicant in response. Where no changes have been made, the SCI should explain why not. You will need to consider how you can demonstrate measurable community representation and support for the proposal. The SCI should follow the outline format set out below:

- Identify the scope of community engagement expected by this guidance note and explain how this has been achieved.
- Details of the engagement methods that have been utilised to meet the expected scope and provision of data to demonstrate the reach and inclusivity achieved using the chosen methods of engagement.
- Provision of a schedule/ timeline of when the engagement was undertaken relative to other milestones such as engagement with officers and/ or Councillors and application submission.
- Provision of a full schedule of the comments/ feedback provided by those consulted during each round of engagement and how the scheme has been amended to address these. Where no amendments were made, the decision not to amend the scheme should be justified/ a rationale given. Best practice would be for consulted groups to sign off that the comments/feedback in the SCI represent a fair summary of the points made.

Where an application is reported to a Planning Applications Sub-Committee for determination the SCI will be used to inform a section of the report outlining the engagement that the applicant has

¹² Pre-application Engagement with the Cabinet Member for Business and Planning and the Chairman of Planning – Guidance Note: www.westminster.gov.uk/media/document/cab-memberandcop-meetings-guidance-notedec2020-finalpdf

undertaken with the local community and how this engagement has contributed to the finalised design of the proposed development.

8. GDPR / Freedom of Information

The City Council is under a legal duty to disclose any pre-application documentation or correspondence if it receives a Freedom of Information request. If any information disclosed as part of the pre-application process is commercially sensitive you must confirm this to the City Council in writing, however the City Council can only withhold information if it falls within one of the statutory exemptions and whilst it will take your representations into account it is ultimately the City Council's decision as to whether information should be withheld.

The City Council operates in full compliance with GDPR and will not disclose any personal information to third parties.

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Appendix A – Useful Publications

1. Statement of Community Involvement in Planning (June 2014):
www.westminster.gov.uk/statement-community-involvement
2. Pre-application Engagement with the Cabinet Member for Business and Planning and the Chairman of Planning - Guidance Note for Developers:
www.westminster.gov.uk/sites/default/files/planning_preapplication_guidance_notes_for_developers_1.pdf
3. National Planning Policy Guidance 'Before Submitting an Application':
www.gov.uk/guidance/before-submitting-an-application#local-people-at-pre-application-stage
4. Draft National Design Code and Guidance Notes of Design Codes (February 2021):
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/957205/National_Model_Design_Code.pdf
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/957207/Guidance_notes_for_Design_Codes.pdf
5. Good Practice Guide to Public Engagement in Development Schemes – Planning Aid (2010):
<http://camdencen.org.uk/Resources/Planning/Communities/Good%20Practice%20Guide%20to%20Public%20Engagement%20Development%20Schemes.pdf>
6. 10 Commitments for Effective Pre-Application Engagement – Local Government Association (2014): www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/10-commitments-effective--927.pdf
7. 'Rebuilding Trust' – Grosvenor (July 2019):
Findings Summary: www.grosvenor.com/Grosvenor/files/a2/a222517e-e270-4a5c-ab9f-7a7b4d99b1f3.pdf
Discussion Paper: www.grosvenor.com/Grosvenor/files/b5/b5b83d32-b905-46de-80a5-929d70b77335.pdf

Appendix B – 3D Modelling Specification

The Council is uses Vu.City to provide a bespoke model environment of Westminster and central London. To ensure your 3D modelling is compatible with Vu.City software please ensure it meets the following specifications:

- **Geo-referenced position.** The model should be geo-referenced in space to ensure an accurate insertion into the Vu.City model
- **Scale.** Please ensure the model is correctly scaled to the appropriate dimension.
- **File format.** The model should be in the original file format. Preferred file formats are FBX or Revit files but all standard 3D modelling formats are acceptable.
- **Simplified layers.** The 3D model should not be the final detailed design, but a basic model that illustrates the form and location of the proposed buildings.
- **Scope.** Ensure the model is solely within your red line/development boundary and does not include proposals for adjoining sites.

Further information on the use of Vu.City can be found at: <https://vu.city/>.

Appendix C – Planning Area Team Contact Details

Where the early community engagement will pre-date the submission of a request for pre-application advice from officers you should contact the relevant planning area team via the email addresses below to alert them to the proposed community engagement and request officer attendance. You should provide at least 14 days notice of the intended community engagement event.

Central Planning Team: centralplanningteam@westminster.gov.uk

Covers the W1 area.

South Planning Team: southplanningteam@westminster.gov.uk

Covers the SW1, SW7, WC2 and EC4 areas.

North Planning Team: northplanningteam@westminster.gov.uk

Covers the NW1, NW6, NW8, W2, W9, W10 and W11 areas.

DRAFT

WCC EARLY COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT GUIDANCE NOTE FOR APPLICANTS AND DEVELOPERS
RESPONSE OF THE THORNEY ISLAND SOCIETY TO CONSULTATION DRAFT V8 – FEB 2021

The Thorney Island Society thanks Westminster City Council for its invitation to comment on the above document and for organising consultation workshops on 3 and 4 March 2021.

The Society

The Society is a recognised conservation and amenity society and has approximately 250 members. It takes its name from the island formed where the channels of the Tyburn met the north bank of the Thames. Its geographical area of interest now extends between Westminster and Vauxhall Bridges and includes the Palace of Westminster and Westminster Abbey World Heritage Site, two Royal Parks, 11 conservation areas, and a very high concentration of Grade I and Grade II listed buildings.

The Society's charitable aims are:

- (i) to promote high standards of planning and architecture in the area;
- (ii) to educate the public in the geography, history, natural history and architecture of the area, and
- (iii) to secure the preservation, protection, development and improvement of features of historic or public interest, from oldest times to the current day.

Since its formation in 1985, the Society has engaged closely with developers, whether established players or recent buyers, using its intimate and extensive knowledge of the area to help fashion development proposals for the benefit of all parties. The Society also responds to national and local consultations on policy and procedural matters that affect its aims.

Planning matters within the Society are generally delegated to a sub-committee, headed by the Society's planning officer. In significant cases, the sub-committee will consult with members of the Society and others to ensure our views take in the broadest range of opinion.

The Society works closely with its sister amenity society, The Westminster Society, with residents' associations and with the Victoria Neighbourhood Forum (which covers a small part of the Society's area of interest). The Society is a member of The London Forum of Amenity and Civic Societies.

General comments

The Society welcomes the Council's affirmation of the potential of early engagement to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the planning system. We support the basic principles of good engagement, namely that it is early, open, transparent, inclusive and responsive.

Our main concern is that the proposals are merely recommendations of good practice and carry no sanction for non-compliance. At the minimum, we believe that developers be asked to confirm in either the validation checklist or the application form itself that they have followed the recommendations, or explain why they have not.

We are not aware of any recent consultations that could be regarded as exemplars of good practice, save perhaps those cases where a proposal is essentially benign and non-contentious, such as Christchurch Gardens. In our experience, developers generally appear well-intentioned at the outset

but the process ultimately becomes frustrating. In a few cases, we encounter developers who make no attempt to engage with the community, or are unaware of any need to.

Specific comments

3. Who to Consult – Inclusive Engagement

- (a) We continue to hear reports from residents that they were unaware of proposals affecting neighbouring properties until they received formal notices of submitted planning applications. We believe that those living adjacent or close to a site should be treated as a separate bulleted category.
- (b) The listing of recommended groups should distinguish statutory and non-statutory consultees.
- (c) The text of Footnote 3 should make clear that it includes residents' associations.
- (d) The 2018 list linked in Footnote 3 should be brought up to date, and kept up to date in real time on the City website.
- (e) The text should make clear that neighbourhood forums should be consulted, whether neighbourhood plans have been made or not.
- (f) Developers should not engage closely with Council officers until the first stage of community consultation has been completed. A common mishap in the current process is the tendency of developers to state or imply that proposals have already been cleared in principle by officers. We feel that some developers use engagement with council officers to short-cut the need to understand local planning policies and the local planning climate.
- (g) Developers should prepare a short outline proposal in plain English before commencing any consultation meetings, so that all consultees start from the same level of knowledge. As with exaggerated claims of officer support, it is not uncommon to hear claims that proposals have already been supported by other consultees.
- (h) Developers should prepare records of meetings with consultees, and should submit them to the consultees for approval before preparing a Statement of Community Involvement.

4. Engagement Methods – Making it Open, Accessible & Meaningful

- (a) Before discussing engagement methods, the guidance should set out a clearer method of classifying applications. This section of the guidance refers to major developments, and by implication, non-major developments. The next section refers to non-major development and four categories of major development. The Planning Advice Fees Schedule refers to seven categories of development. The Guidance Note on Pre-Application Engagement with the Cabinet Member for Business and Planning and the Chairman of Planning (3 December 2020) has nine categories of major development.
- (b) In our view, only four levels of development, as defined in the Fees Schedule, are relevant to community engagement:
 - a. Householder Development
 - b. All other non-major development
 - c. Major development
 - d. Large-scale major development
- (c) In an area as intensely developed as Central Westminster, it is important to encourage engagement in even small developments because of their potential impact on the appearance and setting of the local neighbourhood, especially on heritage assets.

- (d) There is considerable scope for using existing digital technology to enhance consultation. For example, the idox platform currently used by the Council could be modified to allow anyone who is tracking a particular building, street or postcode to be notified as soon as a developer notifies the Council of an interest to develop (ie well before making a pre-app). Likewise, any person who has commented on a previous planning application affecting the same property should be automatically notified.
- (e) Applications to name or rename public spaces should be recorded using the existing (but unused) facility on the idox platform. Naming and renaming applications should always be regarded as major applications because of their enduring impact on the area.
- (f) In the case of householder development, there is an even simpler method of engagement than Method 1, ie a courtesy email, letter, phone call or neighbourly chat to notify those living adjacent or close to a site.
- (g) Method 2 – as noted above, the close involvement of council officers at an early stage is not recommended.

5. How to consult – types of consultation, content & techniques

- (a) As discussed above, we believe that Table 2 should be revised as follows:
 - a. Insert a new first column for householder development
 - b. The column for (other) non-major development becomes the second column with a cut off size of 1,000 m2 office or 10 residential units
 - c. The next two columns are deleted
 - d. The next column is re-titled 'Major Development'
 - e. The last column is re-titled 'Large-scale Major Development'. This would be when it involves a masterplan and more than a single building.
- (b) The listing of key information for major development (page 8) should make clear that detailed plans should not be prepared at this stage as they create the impression that significant professional fees have already been incurred and that there is little inclination to consider amendments as a result of community engagement.
- (c) If the proposal involves the whole or partial demolition of an existing building, the community engagement material must include a statement explaining (a) why it is not possible to retro-fit the current building, and (b) how it is proposed to minimise and/or fully offset the embodied carbon cost of constructing the new building, as well as the ongoing carbon footprint of the new building.
- (d) The engagement material should include a statement that the proposal, as defined in outline, is compliant with the relevant neighbourhood plan (if any).

6. When to Consult – Early & Responsive Engagement

- (a) This section is confusing in that it covers three separate topics: (a) community engagement prior to the submission of a request for pre-application advice, (b) the request itself, and (c) Cabinet-level presentations following the submission of the pre-application advice request and the EES.
- (b) In the first bullet point on page 10, early community engagement should have been substantially completed in advance of seeking formal pre-application advice from officers.

7. What is Expected at Application Stage – Promoting Transparency

Completed Validation Checklists should be published on the planning website.

8. GDPR / Freedom of Information

Given that there is a legal duty under the Freedom of Information Act to disclose any pre-application documentation, public faith in the planning system would be enhanced if all pre-application advice submissions were published on the website (redacted as necessary to protect commercially-sensitive information). We are aware of at least one planning authority that publishes such submissions and officer responses.

Additional comments

While the draft paper covers the period from the earliest stage of scheme development to the submission of an application for pre-application advice, good community engagement continues through to the conclusion of the process of determining the submitted application. Engagement may continue even further where material issues are left to be resolved by planning condition. The current consultation should therefore be extended to cover the entire process of community involvement from beginning to end. We would be happy to make comments on the overall process, based on our long involvement in local planning cases.

We understand that further iterations of the draft are anticipated, and look forward to further dialogue with the Council as the proposals evolve.

Lucy Peck
Planning Officer, The Thorney Island Society
12 March 2021

Oliver Gibson
Principal Planning Officer
Place Shaping & Town Planning
Westminster City Council
13th Floor, City Hall
64 Victoria Street
London SW1E 6QP

[via email]

12th March 2021

Dear Mr Gibson,

Early Community Engagement Guidance Note for Applicants and Developers. Draft V8 - February 2021.

Consultation Response from the Victoria Business Improvement District and Victoria Westminster Business Improvement District.

The Victoria Business Improvement District (VBID) was established in April 2010 and is now in its third term. We work in close partnership with businesses, resident organisations, Westminster City Council and key bodies such as Transport for London and the Greater London Authority on a range of initiatives and in promoting our strategic and operational objectives. The Victoria Westminster BID (VWBID) became operational in October 2018. The collective purpose of both BIDs is to bring together the business community to help shape and influence Victoria's future development and infrastructure, positioning Victoria as a vibrant and thriving destination with a high-quality environment.

We support early and meaningful community engagement for new development. This strengthens relationships between applicants and developers and communities and also local planning authorities. We are also aware of the levels of distrust that communities afford to the planning system and developers. Accordingly, we welcome the opportunity to comment on this draft of the Early Community Engagement Guidance Note for Applicants and Developers.

Comments:

1. The council may wish to provide an example illustrating what it considers acceptable and not acceptable determinations of the word 'vicinity' (page 2) to provide clarity over its expectations and as a guide for applicants and developers and communities alike.
2. As part of section 3, 'Who to Consult – Inclusive Engagement', the council may be minded to refer to the voice of business and the role that Business Improvement Districts play in working with developers and local communities and in helping to create prosperous environments.
3. In terms of the size of applications that need to adopt the process the council may wish to consider if 1,000m² is appropriate and if it should it be smaller or whether a lower threshold might be appropriate for some types development.

4. The example of non-major development in section 5 could be broadened to include examples of office environments and the public realm (only extensions and alterations to houses are mentioned currently) and the council might also wish to set out what the benefits are of engaging with the community on non-major development and the potential dis-benefits of not doing so in the same section.
5. There is a difference in the extent of feedback to be provided to officers and councillors. For example, the council expects to receive from applicants and developers “a full schedule of the comments/feedback provided by those consulted during each round of engagement” within the Statement of Community Involvement at application stage (p12) whereas only a “summary of feedback” is expected in the community engagement material (p8). It is not clear whether Ward councillors, as part of engagement Method 2, can also be expected to receive a full schedule “of concerns relayed by their local residents” to the developer of their plans or if this is also a summary, so too for the feedback that is to be shared with officers by developers prior to meetings with the Cabinet Member for Business, Licensing and Planning or the Chairman of Planning (p11). We would submit that the extent of feedback shared throughout the application process should be consistent so that discussions are anchored to the same information. Were the council to retain the production of summaries, details of the methodology used to create summaries from feedback should be provided as part of the application process.
6. The benefit of engaging the services of a professional facilitator for both the applicant, developer and the local community could be explained where this role is first mentioned. The council might also wish to make reference to complementing this resource as set out by Grosvenor in their document, Rebuilding Trust (2019) that sought to understand the drivers of distrust afforded to developers and councils by communities and proposed ways to address this and, in this example, that: “Developers should, where possible, embed an independent commentator to scrutinise the public consultation of a large-scale development and help explain objectively to a wider audience the choices available and the decisions made by both the developer and the council.”
7. The list of the minimum level of key information to be included in community engagement on page 8 could be expanded:
 - a. The UK will host the 26th UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties in November this year. Given the role of the UK in this CoP, and the anticipated impacts of climate change such as wetter winters, and that Victoria in particular suffers from surface water flooding, it would seem an opportune moment to also specify that details of the development’s flood risk strategy should also be highlighted in community engagement materials.
 - b. Given the multifunctional benefits of green infrastructure and its beneficial role in creating prosperous places and communities and the increased value that has been placed on green infrastructure during the coronavirus pandemic, details of green infrastructure and biodiversity loss and gain should be provided.

- c. Recalling the Rebuilding Trust document, the council might be minded to request developers publish costs and returns information and to publish its own cost information also. In this regard the document states: “Developers and councils should jointly publish their forecast ranges of commercial costs and returns in simple, publicly accessible and understandable terms – leading, over time, to greater standardisation. Both sides should offer a simple explanation of differences in these forecasts, as well as of the costs and benefits of the development proposals, allowing the public to weigh them up.”.
8. The activity outlined at section 6, that “Feedback from early community engagement should be shared with officers during the pre-application advice process, either as part of the submitted Early Engagement Strategy (EES) where community engagement has already commenced or as a subsequent addendum to the EES where community engagement is scheduled to take place concurrently with pre-application discussions with officers.” is only partly captured within Table 3. Presently it does include the step for EES addendum activity or for community engagement to take place concurrently with pre application discussions with officers.
9. Table 3 is presented as being an “example timeline” though no timings are given. The council might consider including the length of time an applicant or developer can expect to receive feedback from officers.
10. The expected content of the EES set out in bulleted form over pages 10 and 11 is essentially about the applicant or developer reporting to the council how its activities have met or will meet the Community Engagement Protocol. Outside of Table 3 the Protocol is never mentioned, yet it seems to underpin all community engagement activity. It would seem appropriate to refer to the Protocol at this point within the document and to introduce it, its purpose, and where it can be located on the council’s website earlier in the document.
11. We would suggest the developer also sets out and shares a principle early on in regard to language, notably as proposed by Grosvenor in its above-mentioned document, that: “Developers should publish their own plain English gold standard for public consultation setting their pledges for meaningful, practical and popular influence over large-scale development proposals over each stage of design, against which they can be judged.”.
12. Finally, in terms of capacity, to ensure that the activity set out in the document can be realised, is the council confident that the requisite level of resourcing exists within the planning team to ensure officers are able to respond timely to applicants, developers and communities and attend community events when invited?

We have welcomed the opportunity to comment on this draft of the Early Community Engagement Guidance Note for Applicants and Developers and hope that the above comments help strengthen the planning system and relationships between applicants, developers and communities as they strive to create better places.

Please do not hesitate to contact me should you have any queries regarding our submission or need any further information.

Yours sincerely,

David Beamont
Placemaking Project Manager
Victoria and Victoria Westminster Business Improvement Districts



NEW
WEST END
COMPANY

BAKER STREET
QUARTER
PARTNERSHIP



Heart of
LONDON
Business Alliance

PaddingtonNow | BUSINESS
IMPROVEMENT
DISTRICT



Victoria
LONDON STARTS HERE



Victoria
Westminister

Oliver Gibson
Principal Planning Officer
Westminster City Council

10th March 2021

Dear Oliver,

Re. Early Community Engagement Guidance Note for Applicants & Developers

We are writing to you with our representations on the draft Early Community Engagement Guidance Note, on behalf of the eight designated Business Improvement Districts within the Westminster City Council authority, which includes around 2,800 business members and a number of property owners.

Firstly, we very much welcome the sentiments and principles of the draft guidance, particularly its emphasis on encouraging openness and transparency on development proposals in the borough. From our extensive experience, early engagement can help in building trust in the development process and we applaud embedding some of the more recent creative forms of consultation, including a greater focus on digital engagement as a way to contact and engage with a broader spectrum of interested parties and harder-to-reach groups.

We also note that many of the major developers are already adopting a number of the principles, approaches and methods set out in the draft guidance. Furthermore, the Westminster BIDs strongly welcome the recognition of BIDs as an important early consultee, given our role in getting the message out about prospective future developments and helping develop relations with the business community, in addition to serving on local bodies such as neighbourhood forums.

However, there are some amendments which we would suggest to improve the draft guidance.

Policy

We believe that the draft guidance should emphasise up front that planning is a balance, and the importance of adopted planning policies in helping to secure and achieve this balance.

Ultimately planning applications must be considered and determined by officers and elected politicians in line with adopted policies whilst also taking account of local sentiment. We believe that this emphasis is important in helping to manage expectations and ensure that applications are not ultimately a local plebiscite.

Early Engagement

We welcome the adopted principle of undertaking early engagement where possible on future development sites. However, the guidance should recognise that there will be occasions when early engagement is not feasible or appropriate prior to seeking pre-application advice from officers. For example:

- Requiring PLC board approval to publicise development proposals;
- When clarity is required on significant policy points (such as heritage) through a pre-application meeting before it is possible to discuss ideas locally;
- Sensitivities around workforce or tenants – for example where there are a significant number of staff employed in a major retail store who would need to be informed or tenants with sensitivities around leases.

In the event that applicants do require pre-application advice, we are also of the view that meetings and any minutes must remain confidential and not for publication, to protect the commercial sensitivities outlined above and allow the applicant to manage engagement activities.

Concerning the guidance about engagement with ward councillors, we also believe that this should be clarified. The guidance states that applicants are required to inform officers when they are engaging with ward councillors and that officers may attend the meeting. However, if the discussion was being undertaken as part of the 'early engagement' officers will not be aware or briefed as to what materials will be presented and may be unable to provide a considered comment to members without a pre-application meeting having taken place.

Finally, in the draft diagram within the guidance, it currently states "either / or" for ward councillors and the wider community. This should be amended to clarify both should be engaged with.

Professional Facilitators

Whilst well-meaning, we are unable to see how the employment of professional facilitators at early engagement forums or public exhibitions will improve openness or trust in the planning process. Ultimately the facilitators will still be paid for by the applicant and we consider that this could add a further layer of confusion to consultees if such personnel are encouraged to sit separate to the employed communications and engagement agency.

If there are concerns about the impartiality of consultation material, we consider that it would be more appropriate if this is shared with officers in advance to confirm that they feel it is appropriate and meets the requirements set out in the guidance.

Consultees

The Westminster BIDs very much welcome the recognition of BIDs as important early consultees. We provide a multi-faceted service to assist with consultation, acting as a sounding-board for new development proposals, helping developers build relationships with the local business community, promoting consultation events and in helping to provide a broad range of views on Neighbourhood Forums.

However, there is a discrepancy in that BIDs are recognised by the draft guidance but are not consulted by the City Council themselves as a statutory consultee on planning applications. At present BIDs rely on the applicant or their communications consultant informing us that applications have been submitted or by scanning the planning register which in itself can be laborious and time-consuming.

We would ask that the Council considers how BIDs can be informed more formally on planning (and licensing) applications in their area. The information can be issued in the same way as to other statutory consultees – ie electronic and with full-disclosure.

More broadly, the guidance could also note the importance and value of early engagement with alternative groups and individuals, particularly given Westminster's global position. For example, a number of developers are now establishing and working with Youth Forums in the borough to help guide early principles of development, ensure spaces will be attractive to future users and help to educate younger people on the development process. The guidance should also note the importance of engagement with employees and workers in an area, to help obtain a broader perspective.

With regards to the wider list of early engagement consultees, the final guidance should include additional information about each of the identified groups. For example, clarifying which Forums have a made plan, or a plan in progress, and the guidance should include a link to an updated single

GIS map where applicants can click on their location and see who the local early consultees should be including the ward councillors, amenity societies, Forums and BIDs and up to date contact details for each group.

We very much hope that these reflections and comments assist in the development of the early engagement guidance.

Yours sincerely,

Penny Alexander

Ros Morgan

Kay Buxton

Jace Tyrrell

Ruth Duston OBE

Chris Peers

5 March 2021

Westminster City Council Community Engagement Guidance

1. Background

The WPA recognises the crucial role of meaningful consultation and engagement, with a range of parties, in successfully managing change in the built environment. This was a key theme of our Insight Paper in 2018, [Building Trust, prepared by Professor Tony Travers](#). This identified earlier engagement with local communities as a key recommendation.

Our Members' experience is that extensive community consultation already occurs on most large and strategic scale development proposals in Westminster. There is, however, always the scope for further improvement. For example, the last year has shown the particular importance of new technologies in ensuring meaningful and accessible consultation to a wide range of groups, despite the restrictions of Covid-19.

The Association therefore welcomes the opportunity to be involved with the production of further guidance on best practice in this area, particularly in making it as accessible as possible to a wide variety of groups.

2. Key 5 recommendations

1. Launch a pilot based on interim guidance before finalising, so that the framework can be tested and refined with feedback from participants
2. Expand the principles of early engagement to all groups, regardless of whether property, business, resident or amenity, which all consult their local communities
3. The criteria should as flexible as possible so individual site circumstances, not just unit size, can be taken into account
4. Any rigid barrier to dialogue with officers pre-engagement could be detrimental to bringing forward some schemes, and could cause delay. The option should remain
5. Facilitators may be useful in some instances, but once again flexibility as to if/when to appoint one is important

3. Context and the Decision-making process

Westminster is home to a very significant residential population as well as an exceptional diversity of other businesses, charities, institutions and other uses. It has a local, regional, national and international role as the centre of London's World City offer. Its role is, accordingly, complex and varied, as are its built form, mix of uses, and the competing pressures and constraints on land use, development and planning decision making that it faces.

It is, therefore, important, that the role of the planning system in striking a balance between these competing pressures is recognised so that Westminster can continue successfully to perform its global, regional and local roles.

We suggest that the final Guidance Note should explain the broader context of planning decision-making and place local consultation in the context of what is, ultimately, a quasi-judicial function with decisions required to be made in accordance with the overall Development Plan, including its regional, local and – where applicable – neighbourhood components, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

Consequently, there will be occasions where the requirements of the Development Plan may not fully align with local views as expressed on a particular application. Comprehensive consultation and engagement will play a vital role in explaining development proposals, improving them, and mitigating effects in many cases, but there will be occasions where it is not able to fully overcome the principled, considered disagreements that may arise over the design and use of land and buildings that are at the heart of the planning system.

4. Principles

The draft document sets out the expectations of the City Council for developers' engagement with communities and other parties in relation to planning applications. It suggests the following principles that consultation and engagement should deliver:

- Early
- Open
- Transparent
- Inclusive
- Responsive
- Accessible

The Association welcomes and supports these principles, which will guide and assist developers in undertaking consultation and engagement with communities.

We suggest these principles are also applied by other groups who also consult with local communities, including BIDs, amenity societies and neighbourhood forums.

5. General Approach and Structure

There are a variety of ways to achieve these principles whilst reflecting the fact that the nature and extent of community engagement best suited to a development will be bespoke and highly variable, depending on the specific context of the site.

Factors will include, for example, the proposal's location within the City, the nature of surrounding uses and the local built form (especially the proximity of residential communities) and the scale and nature of the development proposed.

This does not fit neatly into specific categories based only on the scale of development, as suggested within the matrix at Table 2 in the document.

As an example, a (relatively) small change of use below 500sqm may in some instances justify a much greater extent of pre-application and community engagement than a larger, redevelopment scheme, depending on the specific context and, in particular, the nature of the use proposed and its proximity to residential neighbours.

The Association suggests, therefore, that the final Guidance Note should, instead, set the principles that must guide the engagement process, and then provide **examples** of ‘tools’, such as media, techniques and pathways, which could be selected and adapted to the context, nature and scale of development, including the likely level of disruption to neighbours. This could be assisted by providing illustrative example developments, setting out the various types of engagement which could be considered proportionate and suitable, to show the reasoning applicants should apply.

This would allow engagement to be undertaken with the required flexibility to ensure the appropriate type of effective, inclusive and proportionate community engagement, without leading to consultation fatigue.

To assist developers and communities to provide meaningful engagement strategies, some guidance on the consultation ‘catchment’ used or recommended by the City Council for consultation on developments could also be included in the document, including the geographical scope of formal statutory consultation that will be undertaken by the City Council once an application is submitted.

Draft Guidance – Specific comments

6. Who to consult

We fully support inclusive engagement. We suggest, in some cases, other uses of space or facilities, as well as residential communities and those groups listed in on Page 2, should also be consulted. This could include workers, visitors, students or other groups potentially affected by proposals.

We suggest the reference to “disability positive” is expanded as we are unclear as to whether this is a specific standard. It would be helpful to provide specific examples of how developers can make their engagements disability positive, perhaps with case studies of how this has been done well for existing developments. The council could also point guidance from an independent disability charity or association if appropriate.

7. Section 4: Engagement methods

The benefits of undertaking small meetings with a variety of individuals or groups, whether in person or online, should be included in the Draft Guidance and added to the list at the end of Section 4.

In the Association’s experience, such forums can be a highly successful forum for engagement with a range of actors. This can include local amenity groups, conservation groups, Residents Associations, or individual consultees.

Individual meetings can achieve focused feedback on specific topics or issues and can ensure the views of less well-represented groups are heard (unlike in larger forums). They can also be arranged more easily and practically and allow more people to be involved, at times and in formats that best suit them, rather than requiring them to participate in a set-piece workshop or public meeting.

We therefore suggest they are specifically considered within the Draft Guidance.

8. Table 2 (Engagement Expectations) and Table 3 (Example Process)

As noted above, we suggest these are reworded to be clear that they are indicative / provide examples of potential consultation routes, but are **not** intended to be definitive or prescriptive so that consultation arrangements can be tailored to the circumstances of individual sites, achieve the objectives of comprehensive engagement that the guidance sets.

It will not be practical, in all cases, to show alternative options for the development of the site. Anything shown needs to be commercially and practicably deliverable and not give rise to potential misunderstandings on the extent of change possible.

Clarity would nonetheless be useful regarding those change of use applications which do not comprise physical works and the principles and approach to engagement which are suggested. There is no detail on this aspect in Table 2 in relation to the type of activity which should be undertaken.

This section of the Guidance also recommends the use of Vu City as a modelling tool in engagement. The Guidance should clarify that there are a range of such visualisation tools available and the most appropriate tool or tools for the specific proposal should be used. For example, other programmes or visualisations such as CGIs may better demonstrate the changes and finished nature of a development than Vu City.

9. Methods 4, 5 and 6: Independent facilitators

The Association queries the need for ‘facilitators’ in most cases. This will add unnecessarily to the timescales and complexity involved in undertaking community engagement. Communications consultants, planners and others have a clear track record of undertaking meaningful, inclusive consultation in a variety of formats without the need to bring an additional third party into project teams. In most cases, we consider this to be unnecessary.

Ultimately, the facilitator would be paid, provided and prepared by the developer in any case and so would not be entirely separate from the wider consultant team.

10. Section 6: When to Consult, EES & pre-application discussions

An Early Engagement Strategy (‘EES’) should not automatically be required before entering into pre-application discussions in all cases. The flow chart (Table 3) should be amended. This is a serious concern. Pre-application requests should not be invalidated, or otherwise rejected, where an EES is not provided. This would be likely to lead to further delays and complexity in submitting requests. It would, of course, be open to officers to recommend strongly that early engagement is undertaken.

The suggested approach requiring the production of an EES at the very early pre-application stage, setting out the scope and timetable for community engagement, is inflexible and could unnecessarily delay, or further complicate, seeking meaningful engagement with officers on other, technical, matters.

There will be some cases where engaging with the community first, before planning and other officers at the City Council, is appropriate and beneficial. The recognition that this is acceptable is welcome.

Conversely, there will be many proposals whose nature and complexity mean they are driven by technical matters, on which it is appropriate to seek officer advice in advance of consultation. This could include, for example, heritage constraints, complex land use issues, highway matters, or similar. Community consultation can be improved by holding such discussions in the light of feedback on what may be technically feasible.

We recognise that, on larger or more complex sites, it will be appropriate to discuss, and agree, consultation and engagement arrangements with officers, and to seek their advice.

Developers and occupiers will also, frequently, be under obligations to respect commercial confidentiality, constraining earlier, wider, discussions. This can often be to ensure staff whose jobs could be affected by a proposed relocation are properly made aware of proposals in advance of wider publication, but this should not prevent some engagement with the City Council.

Publishing pre-application responses or feedback from the City Council in the public domain as a matter of course would, therefore, cause concern and is likely to impact negatively on the effectiveness of the pre-application process, which is productive and highly valued.

The potential order of engagement set out in the Draft Guidance should also be considered. In some instances it is suggested, as an example, that engagement with Ward Councillors would occur before any pre-application discussion has taken place with Planning Officers. Given that the starting point for development should be the Development Plan, and the fact there may be various technical considerations to be discussed with the City Council first, it is suggested this should be reconsidered.

The Guidance Note should also clarify that, as set out in planning Regulations, engagement is not expected in relation to, for example, development under Permitted Development Rights or applications for Certificates of lawful use or development. These are examples of some of the processes which are removed from the 'usual' application process by the relevant planning regulations.

11. Other Matters - resources

There is a complex array of geographically defined groups across the City, reflecting its complex geography. The provision of up-to-date, and perhaps interactive maps, providing contact details of groups such as Business Improvement Districts ('BIDs'), Neighbourhood Forums and Amenity Societies would be a useful tool to assist with pre-application engagement.

12. Conclusion

The Association welcomes the principles set out in this guidance and the constructive suggestions made as to how to best realise them. It suggests that the final document make clear that, ultimately, consultation and engagement methods will need to be tailored to the circumstances of each sites, following the guidance and examples provided, but that a prescriptive approach should be avoided.