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OXFORD CITY COUNCIL

Overview of Involvement and Communication Methods

This help sheet provides an overview of the main methods of community involvement/communication and how they will be used by the City Council as part of the planning process. Applicants considering undertaking major or other significant development should consider some of these methods for engaging with the community. This information may also be useful to Neighbourhood Forums as they consider engaging with local people and businesses as part of the Neighbourhood Development Plan process.

Method of Involvement or Communication	Advantages	Disadvantages	How the City Council uses this method
Electronic			
Website (www.oxford.gov.uk)	Able to share a wide range of detailed information with a large audience. Is often more accessible to some hard-to-reach groups (e.g. younger people). Information is available at any time. Resource efficient.	Excludes those without access to the internet. Technical problems could hinder access to information. Information can be hard to access if there is too much or it is not well structured/displayed.	The website is the main way that we share information. We currently: ▪ Make sure that the relevant webpages are kept up to date on the progress of planning policy document production (including providing copies of evidence and consultation reports); and ▪ Ensure that information on current planning applications is made available through the electronic publication of the weekly list and via 'Public Access' (see below).
Public Access (Online system for viewing and commenting on planning applications. Accessed via our website.)	Enables people to access a wide range of information relating to planning applications and appeals. Comments are instantly received. Resource efficient.	Excludes those without access to the internet. Technical problems could hinder access to information /submission of comments.	Public Access is currently the main way that we share information about planning applications. People who do not have access to the internet at home are able to use the computers at our offices in St. Aldate's Chambers or city libraries during opening hours.
QR Codes (Barcode like symbols that can be scanned by a compatible smartphone or tablet that then takes users through to a specific webpage.)	Enables quick and easy access to detailed information on the move. Is often more accessible to some hard-to-reach groups (e.g. younger people).	Excludes those without compatible smartphones or tablets with the necessary app. Smartphone and tablet screens may be too small to view detailed plans and documents properly.	QR codes are currently used on site notices. When scanned, they take users through to the Public Access page on our website where they can view planning application information and submit comments.
Consultee Access (System for notifying local interest groups and other organisations of planning applications within a specified area. Comments can also be submitted via this system.)	Allows groups to more easily manage their consultation responses. Resource efficient.	Excludes those without access to the internet. Technical problems could hinder access to information or the submission of comments. Operated by third party provider - limited control of service/ technical issues.	Consultee Access is a service that we currently offer to local interest groups and other organisations in addition to Public Access.
Planning Finder (Planning application notification system. Registration via our website. Uses postcode data to notify users of planning applications they may be interested in.)	People can specify multiple areas that they are interested in. If they 'flag' an application they will also be notified when the application has been determined. Resource efficient.	Excludes those without access to the internet. Technical problems could hinder access to information /submission of comments. Operated by third party provider - limited control over quality of service/ technical issues.	Planning Finder is not the Council's main consultation method for planning applications. However, it provides a useful tool for members of the community to keep up-to-date on planning applications in specific areas.
Email	Direct contact with specific individuals. Minimal delay between email being sent and being received. Resource efficient.	Can only contact those people who have provided their email addresses specifically for this purpose. Email addresses/contacts may change over time meaning that the database can easily become out of date.	We normally use emails in the following situations: ▪ To inform statutory consultees of relevant planning policy and planning application consultations ▪ To inform councillors of planning applications and appeals (by emailing weekly lists). ▪ To provide updates to people who have specifically registered their interest in the progress of planning policy document production.
Facebook (Online social network)	Able to share information with a large audience. Is often more accessible to some hard-to-reach groups. Resource efficient.	Excludes those without access to the internet. Could generate online comments and debates rather than formal consultation responses which may be hard to manage, monitor and assess.	The Council's Facebook account may be used as an additional means of notifying people when consultation periods start and close for planning policy documents and major/significant planning applications and appeals.

Twitter (Online social network)	Able to share information with a large audience. Is often more accessible to some hard-to-reach groups. Resource efficient.	Excludes those without access to the internet. Could generate online comments and debates rather than formal consultation responses which may be hard to manage, monitor and assess.	The Council's Twitter account may be used as an additional means of notifying people when consultation periods start and close for planning policy documents and major/significant planning applications and appeals.
Online Consultation Portal (Online system available via our [website](#) where people can register to receive alerts when consultations are being undertaken and/or complete a questionnaire/survey.)	Sends automatic email alerts to registered users to let them know about new consultations. People can manage their own profiles/settings. Consultations responses are automatically input into a database. Resource efficient.	Excludes those without access to the internet. Only notifies people who have registered with the system and who have said that they are interested in planning and regeneration.	The online consultation portal is currently used for the majority of planning policy consultations to allow people to view consultation documents and to make comments via an online questionnaire.
Printed			
Site Notices	Provides notice of development proposals in the area most likely to be affected. Resource efficient.	May be damaged or removed. May not be seen or be ignored. May be less accessible to some hard-to-reach groups (e.g. people who are housebound due to illness or disabilities).	Site notices displayed on and/or near the site will be the main way that we notify people of planning applications. Site notices will be printed on yellow card to increase their visibility and laminated to protect them from rain. Notices for amended schemes will be printed on pink card so that they can be differentiated from the original notice. Notices will be displayed at least 21 days before the consultation closes in line with statutory requirements.
Paper copies of documents	Accessible to those without access to the internet or who are unable to use computers. Enables large plans to be viewed more easily.	Locations may be inaccessible to some (e.g. people who are housebound due to illness or disabilities). Opportunities to view documents is limited by opening hours.	We currently: ▪ Make sure that paper copies of planning policy consultation documents are available to view at our offices in St. Aldate's Chambers and city libraries during their opening hours; ▪ Make paper copies of major planning applications available to view at our offices in St Aldate's Chambers during opening hours; ▪ Make paper copies of other types of planning application available at our offices during opening hours upon request.
Letters (Printed letters sent via the post.)	Easy to target people in a specific area. Letters can be sent directly to all properties. Is often more accessible to some hard-to-reach groups (e.g. housebound, disabled and frail elderly people).	Delay between letters being produced and being received. Where properties are rented, the letters may not be seen by the property owner. Not environmentally friendly. Postage and printing costs.	We will not normally use letters to notify people of planning policy or planning application consultations. Letters will only be used be in the following situations: ▪ To notify statutory consultees of planning policy and planning application consultations where we do not have email addresses. ▪ To notify people of planning appeals. (Letters will be sent to adjoining properties and all those who commented on the original planning application.)
Leaflets	Easy to target people in a specific area. Leaflets can be delivered directly to all properties. Is often more accessible to some hard-to-reach groups (e.g. housebound and frail elderly people).	Delivery can be highly resource intensive. Limited information can be given (summary only). Where properties are rented, the information may not be seen by the property owner.	Leaflets may be used for planning policy consultations where we need to target a specific geographical area of the City.
Paper response forms / questionnaires	Accessible to those without access to the internet or who are unable to use computers.	Locations may be inaccessible to some (e.g. people who are housebound due to illness or disabilities). Access limited by opening hours.	For planning policy consultations, we will make sure that paper copies of response forms/questionnaires are available at our offices in St Aldate's Chambers and city libraries during opening hours. A printable version of the response form/questionnaire will also be made available on our website.
Posters	Can be used to highlight key information and events. Poster locations can be chosen to target a wide range of people. Publicity 'in the community'(local libraries, shopping centres, sports centres community centres and [community noticeboards](#)).	Can be easily dismissed or overlooked. Information provided is limited.	Posters may be used for planning policy consultations where we need to target a specific geographical area of the City.

Newspaper advertisements
Newspaper advertisements may take two forms:
  i)   Statutory notices
  ii) Press releases
	Potential to reach a large number of people to raise awareness of plans, proposals, and consultations/opportunities to get involved.	Public notices may be overlooked. Information provided is limited. Expensive.	Statutory Notices
			We currently advertise the following types of planning application in the Oxford Times: major applications, listed building applications, developments in a conservation area, developments in the Green Belt, EIA development, City Council applications and departures from the development plan.
			Planning policy consultations will only be advertised through a statutory notice in the local press when required by the regulations (in most cases, this is no longer required).
			
			Press Releases
			We will usually issue a press release to share key information about planning policy document production (such as consultations, examinations and adoption). We may also issue press releases to advertise consultations and progress on significant development and regeneration projects.
			We also notify the local press (Oxford Times and Oxford Mail) of all planning appeals.

Public exhibitions (unstaffed)	Able to present information in interesting and easily-accessible manner. Focused attention on specific project(s). Resource efficient. Locations can be targeted to reach people most likely to be affected by development proposals (e.g. those in specific areas of the city).	No opportunity to clarify issues or receive feedback directly. Can be missed if not well publicised in advance.	We may hold unstaffed public exhibitions relating to planning policy consultations to raise people's awareness of key issues and to encourage people to look at the consultation documents online/at deposit points. We may also do this for major / significant planning applications.
Verbal / Face-to-Face			
Telephone	Provides an opportunity to explain/clarify issues and answer queries. Is often more accessible to some hard-to-reach groups (e.g. disabled, frail older people and those with literacy difficulties).	Resource intensive. Does not reach a wide audience.	Comments on planning applications and planning policy documents must be formally made in writing and therefore telephone conversations are not one of the main ways that we would usually consult members of the public. However, the City Council's telephone number is widely available and officers will discuss cases with members of the public if they call as part of our commitment to provide excellent customer service.
Public exhibitions (staffed)	Able to present a lot of information. Focused attention on specific project(s). Opportunities to clarify and discuss issues and to receive feedback. Locations can be targeted to reach people most likely to be affected by development proposals (e.g. those in specific areas of the city).	Resource intensive (staff time, cost of producing exhibition materials, venue hire, etc). Time limited. Can be missed if not well publicised in advance.	We may hold staffed public exhibitions as part of our consultations on Planning policy documents to raise people's awareness of key issues and provide an opportunity to discuss those issues with City Council officers. We may also do this for major / significant planning applications.
Structured Public Workshops	Public workshops can generate ideas, improve understanding and develop 'ownership' of proposals. Participants get to hear each other's perspectives during the discussion.	Resource intensive (requires significant preparation, staff time, venue hire, etc.). Relies on people being available at the specified date/time.	We may use workshops in consultations on policy documents to facilitate discussion and gather different perspectives on emerging policies.
Public meetings	Means of sharing information with a wide audience. More efficient if part of a pre-arranged meeting (for example visits to Parish Council or Neighbourhood Forum meetings).	Potential to be dominated by an un-representative minority. Others may be intimidated so not all views may get heard or put across. Resource intensive. Relies on people being available at the specified time/date.	We may try to reach community groups through existing forums dealing with local issues when undertaking consultations on planning policies. This option may be considered for exceptional, significant schemes but is not normally used as a preferred method of consultation.
One-to-one meetings with selected stakeholders	Useful means of identifying key issues and involving specialist organisations.	Resource intensive.	Planning policy documents often require on-going informal dialogue, such as with statutory consultees, key delivery partners and neighbouring local authorities under the 'duty to cooperate'. This may take the form of one-to-one meetings.

Steering/advisory group	A way to get key organisations involved in overseeing or acting as a sounding board for the production of planning policy documents. Particularly appropriate for area action plans or topic- based policies. The role of the group needs to be clear (via terms of reference) and there should be a transparent approach to selecting members.	Resource intensive.	Steering groups may be used in overseeing the preparation of technical studies and emerging policies, for example to test key assumptions or methodology, in planning policy.
Radio	Can reach a wide representation of the community and raise the profile of plans and proposals.	Expensive. Time consuming to produce. May only reach some social groups.	Not normally used as a method of informing people about consultations, however this option may be considered for exceptional, significant schemes.