

16 June 2020		ITEM: 8
Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee		
Housing Development Consultation Process		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: N/A	
Report of: Keith Andrews, Housing Development Manager		
Accountable Assistant Director: David Moore, Interim Assistant Director of Place Delivery		
Accountable Director: Andy Millard, Director of Place		
This report is Public		

Executive Summary

On 29 October 2019, the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee were asked to comment on a Housing Development Process, which set out how Council-owned sites could be identified and brought forward for further consideration as part of the Council's Housing Development Programme.

That process gave a commitment to comprehensive consultation with Councillors and local residents on sites that were being brought forward. This paper sets out the framework and process for that comprehensive consultation process.

1. Recommendation(s)

1.1 Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee are asked to comment on the proposed consultation process.

2. Introduction and Background

2.1 In October 2019, Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee reviewed the process by which Council owned sites could be identified as potential locations for new housing development, as part of the Council's Housing Delivery Programme.

2.2 In broad terms it was agreed that, following initial analysis of a site and the development of an architecturally led study to explore the potential type and quantity of housing, each site that is considered potentially suitable to progress will then be subject to a rigorous consultation process. This report sets out the consultation process proposed.

2.3 Once this process is adopted, template consultation documents will be produced to ensure the consultation process is delivered in a consistent manner. This proposed consultation process has been developed in conjunction with the Council's Communications and Community Development and Equalities teams.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

3.1 The proposed consultation process is split into five main stages:

1. Setting an over-arching Strategic Objectives and Guiding Principles
2. Understanding each Stakeholder Environment
3. Consultation and engagement – pre-planning
4. Consultation and engagement – post planning
5. Monitoring and Evaluation

Strategic Objectives and Guiding Principles

3.2 The Council has clearly stated ambitions to develop new housing, with the aim of enhancing the lives of existing and future residents through providing safe and affordable places to live.

3.3 The Council is equally committed to involving its existing communities in the process to design new housing, to ensure that new developments are sensitive to local considerations. This is an important aspect of the Council's Vision and the commitment to 'collaborative community' and reflects the Council's vision and priorities in the themes of people, place and prosperity.

3.4 With a pipeline of housing sites to deliver, this consultation process defines a consistent approach to engagement on housing development projects, with the aims of:

- Defining a best practice approach to consultation and engagement activity which gives Members and residents confidence that a robust process will be followed for all housing development sites.
- Defining a proportionate approach to consultation and engagement to ensure interested parties are engaged with at the right time and in the right way to make a meaningful contribution to the development of housing projects.

3.5 The guiding principles adopted for this consultation process are:

- A **Member-first approach**, where Members are briefed on a project ahead of each phase of community engagement.
- A **proportionate approach**, with the extent of engagement activity defined by the scale, complexity and sensitivity of the site and the proposals
- A commitment to starting engagement **early in the design development process**, so that community views can influence proposals at a formative stage
- A commitment to make consultation and engagement programmes **easily accessible** for local communities, through a combination of face-to-face events, online tools and direct distribution.
- A commitment to present consultation information in an easy to understand way, in Plain English without technical jargon, to help **encourage participation** for all, including hard to reach groups.
- A commitment to inform communities of the results of consultation activity, with a clear “you said, we did” approach.

Stakeholder Environment

- 3.6 For each site, it is important to understand the stakeholder environment in which the proposed project exists. This will help to define a proportionate approach to consultation and engagement. The two key elements to this are to undertake community and stakeholder mapping and then to risk assess the planned approach from a consultation and engagement perspective.
- 3.7 Stakeholder mapping will be undertaken to identify who may be affected by a project and who will want to be made aware of it and/or actively influence it. The use of a stakeholder matrix will help guide the level of activity to undertake with each stakeholder or group as part of a consultation plan.
- 3.8 This will ensure the full range of stakeholders are identified early on including Councillors, local residents, local business, statutory planning consultees and local community and interest groups. The Council’s Community Development and Equalities service will be well placed to assist in this mapping exercise with their extensive understanding of local groups.
- 3.9 The preparation of an engagement risk register for each new site will give an early indication of the likely areas of concern, to ensure the consultation process recognises and properly addresses these. These risks may include site-specific risks or engagement and consultation risks. For example, the risk register may identify groups who are hard to reach, so the consultation process needs to consider appropriate design and use of different consultation tools. In an environment where face to face contact may be limited and where there is increasing use of digital tools, it might be useful to

think about those who are not digitally engaged as new hard to reach groups. Similarly such process may open up consultation to those groups such as young people who often fail to engage in more traditional consultation exercises.

- 3.10 Decisions on who will be directly consulted are important areas for consideration. Factors to be considered when deciding will include:
- The size and scale of development – understanding who will be directly impacted by the proposal, and this will be one of the factors to determine the geographic distribution of consultation material
 - The current use of the site – must be considered. For instance, if the site is currently public open space, it may be used by people beyond the surrounding properties, who may have expectations of being consulted
 - The engagement risk register – will be used to ensure the consultation is inclusive and appropriate for the proposal
 - The geography of the area - natural barriers will be used when drawing the boundaries of the consultation area. Natural barriers include things such as roads, railway lines or rivers.
- 3.11 At the boundaries of a consultation area, there will be some households that receive direct mail and others (just outside the area) that do not. The use of tools such as social media, the Council's consultation portal and careful design of material placed in areas such as libraries, can help to extend the reach of the consultation process beyond those who receive written material, whilst still maintaining proportionality to the process.

Consultation and engagement – pre-planning

- 3.12 The proposed consultation process enforces a consistent approach to Member and officer briefings in the period leading up to a consultation. The intention is to start this process early – a minimum of 6 weeks ahead of the planned 'go live' date, to ensure internal alignment on the strategy and the consultation material..
- 3.13 At least three weeks ahead of the planned consultation, the Housing Portfolio Holder will be briefed on the detail of the planned activity. Following that, (approximately two weeks ahead of the consultation launch) the appropriate local Ward Councillors and the Chair of Housing Overview and Scrutiny will also be briefed, in line with the Member first approach described earlier.
- 3.14 The resident pre-planning consultation stage will ensure early and comprehensive engagement with local communities. At each stage of activity, the guiding principles are adhered to with the use of a range of consultation media and tools to support the process. For larger projects, consultation will

be in two phases. Firstly, about the principles of a project, and then a second consultation on the detailed proposal. A template for a typical two stage consultation process is attached at Appendix A. For smaller projects, a single stage process is proposed - as attached at Appendix B.

3.15 The range of consultation tools available for selection is extensive and will be tailored on a site by site basis but can include:

- Consultation letters and leaflets
- Press releases
- Social media publicity
- Use of the consultation portal and its different functions
- Other digital tools including video
- Consultation events and meetings
- Exhibitions and drop-in sessions
- Stakeholder workshops
- Pre-arranged telephone discussions
- Use of secure virtual meeting software such as Microsoft Teams

3.16 Each approach will be appropriate to the scale of the event. The current Coronavirus pandemic has changed things and social media has enabled those isolated in their homes to stay in touch with family and friends using tools like Zoom, Skype and FaceTime. rather than just a simple phone call, have found themselves in a virtual world able to see others expressing their views and contribute their own. Careful use in the right time and place of such tools could ensure those less able or confident to speak out in a public forum can have their views heard.

3.17 As we recognise that those without digital access or skills may become harder to reach we also anticipate existing hard to reach groups such as young people who often refrain from engaging in public life have the tools and know how to engage more effectively on a digital platform.

3.18 By combining telephone, postal and web based communications with face to face events, it will be possible to have an effective and inclusive approach to resident and member consultation while maintaining social distancing for as long as necessary.

3.19 The final phase of pre-planning consultation will be feedback and reporting. This is in line with our 'you said, we did' commitment. Using a variety of communication channels feedback will be given to the community on changes made to proposals as a result of consultation activity and a summary document will be prepared in support of any planning applications which captures a record of how the consultation was undertaken, comments made and how they have influenced proposals.

Consultation and engagement – post planning

3.20 Following grant of planning permission a post planning engagement plan will be developed running from planning approval, through to the start on site and then ultimately the completion of the scheme. This sets out the key events and activities necessary to ensure Councillors and local residents are kept up to date on plans. This may include:

- Web based updates on next steps to avoid the drop off in communication to local communities so often experienced immediately post planning decisions
- Communication to residents on planned pre-start site activity such as surveys and clearance or demolition works.
- Meet the contractor events

Monitoring and Evaluation

3.21 Key to successful learning and improvement in any activity is to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of actions. This proposed consultation process should include the final stage of monitoring and evaluation so that we can learn from mistakes and improve what we do.

3.22 At this stage it is proposed we will use the Council's consultation portal to track levels of engagement, and monitor the effectiveness of engagement techniques through assessing the volume and quality of engagement. Learning from each consultation event will be recorded and shared thereby informing future events.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

4.1 The recommendation is informed by previous reports and the agreed Housing Delivery process. The proposed engagement strategy will help to ensure that the Council can achieve its Housing Delivery targets in an open and transparent manner and in close liaison with local communities and can then focus on the effective delivery of schemes.

5. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

5.1 This paper provides opportunity for Members of this Committee to review the proposed Housing Development Consultation process.

5.2 Housing Overview and Scrutiny committee has also previously considered the Housing Development Process on 29 October 2019, and the Housing Development Options List on 11 February 2020.

6. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

6.1 The proposed housing development consultation process aligns closely with the Council's Vision and Priorities adopted in 2018. In particular it resonates with the "Place" theme which focuses on houses, places and environments in which residents can take pride.

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Jonathan Wilson**
Assistant Director, Finance

The proposed consultation process will enable the Council and TRL to move forward with delivering a house programme which will contribute to the wider objectives of the Council and support the Council's MTFS (where schemes are developed through TRL).

Costs associated with the consultation process will need to be considered depending on the nature of the scheme and whether it is subsequently developed by the HRA or TRL.

The proposed process is also likely to reduce the level of capital receipts available to the Council to fund other priorities.

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Courage Emovon**
Principal Lawyer / Manager Contracts Team

The Council have a duty to consult stakeholders regarding its proposed Housing Development Programme and this report sets out a process for meeting that requirement which is to consult with residents, Councillors and any other applicable stakeholder with respect to any new Housing Development Projects. Legal Services will be on hand to provide any legal advice (if any) arising from this report, as and when required by the Council.

7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Roxanne Scanlon**
Community Engagement and Project Monitoring Officer

The service has completed a Community Equality Impact Assessment (CEIA) in line with Equality Act 2010 requirements and to gather an understanding of the impact on protected groups through the implementation of housing development. The findings from that CEIA established that the implications for each protected group is currently considered neutral. Individual CEIAs will sit alongside development proposals with information gathered in consultation with communities determining potential impacts and mitigation where identified for individuals or groups with protected characteristics.

7.4 **Other implications** – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder)

None

8. **Background papers used in preparing the report** (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

- Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee report 18 June 2019 (New Council HRA Home Building Programme)
- Extraordinary Meeting, Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee report 29 October 2019 (Housing Development Process)
- Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee 11 February 2020

9. **Appendices to the report**

- Appendix A – Two stage Consultation and engagement process
- Appendix B – Single Stage Consultation and engagement process

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Place