

Thurrock Charette Process

Briefing for Members and Service Leads

Introduction

We are in the early stages of developing a new Local Plan, providing a framework for the development of the borough over the next 10-15 year period. This covers not just homes, but also employment, leisure, education and other community amenities.

In line with best practice and with emerging government policy, we are implementing a detailed community and stakeholder engagement programme at the earliest stage of the process. This aims to pro-actively stimulate a positive borough-wide conversation on where, when and how development can and should take place.

In brief, the process which will be followed will be:

- A borough wide workshop to review all of the baseline technical material and agree the area assessment criteria;
- Landowners workshops to collect all of the technical material being prepared by landowners and understand ownership patterns and any covenants/controls;
- Public charrettes to collect all of the online material;
- A series of regional forums to discuss feedback, hear views and then prepare area wide framework plans for comment.

As part of this, we have partnered with the Princes Foundation and Snapdragon at PLMR to implement a series of 'charettes', in tandem with extensive online engagement and community outreach to bring the community, landowners and key stakeholders into the process from the outset.

Given the current restrictions on physical gatherings and external events due to the COVID19 pandemic, the engagement processes will have a heavy emphasis on virtual and digital methods. However, it is vital to ensure that those who are not digitally enabled are not excluded from the process; measures will be put in place to facilitate engagement across all audiences and all demographics

Process & Service Areas

The Local Plan affects every different service area in different ways, setting the framework for the borough over the coming decades. The process which we are implementing will ensure that as many individuals, stakeholders, community groups and businesses have an opportunity to be engaged in the formulation of the Local Plan.

As part of the process, an internal EbD will take place where all service leads will present their technical information to inform the further implementation of the programme. This will be preceded by a 'Set-Up' call to confirm and clarify all aspects of the process, what is required from each service lead and how the communications will be implemented.

The first stage in the process focuses on internal communication to both brief and engage the Leadership Team, Service Leads and Members in the charette process. The briefing cascade will be as follows: Senior Leadership Team and Service Leads; Lead Members; Wider Council Membership; Wider Council Staff. This will be implemented as follows:

Initial call/virtual workshop to clarify the parameters. This will be led by Snapdragon and will focus on:

- The logistics of the entire process
- Ensure that the focus of the exercise is clear and agreed by all
- Assign tasks to individuals to ensure the events run well and the invitees and communications strategy are well considered.
- Set the BIMBY workshop 1 online on a dedicated part of TBC's website (utilising Bang the Table), making this interactive with the purpose of both explaining the whole workshop planning process and associated timetable to residents across the Borough and collecting information on their place with questions and a dots exercise which highlights things that are good, poor and opportunities for improvement.

At this stage, Snapdragon anticipate taking the role in co-ordinating the process, putting in place protocols, timescales and developing FAQs, risk and mitigation schedules, stakeholder analysis and a detailed consultation strategy. Snapdragon will support the Council in drafting materials including advertising and information on the process, organizing the logistics, sending out invitations and coordinating responses other than press responses which will still be handled by the Council.

Following this, an online Members Briefing will take place to ensure all elected members are clear about the purpose and scope of the charrette process, how it feeds in to the Local Plan and the importance of this as part of the emerging Planning White Paper reforms.

Holding an internal technical charette session with sector and service leads to explore the themes of the broader public engagement, identify constraints and opportunities and develop a framework for the subsequent processes.

Recognising that many of the Council staff – in particular frontline and switchboard staff – are likely to be in a position of dealing with questions and queries relating to the charette process and the broader Local Plan process, a system will be put in place to equip all staff with accurate information and contact details to coordinate all engagement. This will include, but not be limited to:

- Briefing materials
- Crib sheet for switchboard staff
- Contact sheet to pass enquiries onto
- Process for logging contacts and enquiries
- FAQs

At this stage, all Service Leads will continually be engaged individually to discuss the best ways of engaging with their sector, any specific organisations, businesses or stakeholders and how to ensure effective communication.

Throughout the process, the Council Community Engagement Team will be closely involved in advising and supporting the implementation of the outreach programme.

The second stage in the process is to prepare for and implement external engagement, ensuring that information is accessible, legible and easy to engage with. This will involve engaging both with the public and with landowners who have a specific interest in the process; it is critical that landowners are involved at this early stage in order for the Local Plan team can get a clear understanding of which sites are likely to be promoted through the Local Plan. At the same time, the BIMBY* process enables the community views and aspirations to be viewed alongside landowners. This will include:

- Briefing local press

- Formally launching the consultation website and the BIMBY 1 process
- Holding landowner charettes

*BIMBY stands for 'Beauty in my Back Yard'. It is the toolkit designed and delivered by the Princes Foundation which enables communities, organisations and local authorities to develop a toolkit and manual which sets out collaborative design and development principles for a local area.

The process will be largely online with an emphasis on digital outreach and engagement with a broad audience. This will be advertised to the public through:

- Borough wide leaflet delivery
- Press adverts
- Information included in Council publications and newsletters
- Media briefings
- Digital marketing (particularly Facebook advertising)

The third stage is to take the feedback and analysis from the earlier processes and utilise this in the next phase of the engagement programme. This will include:

- Launching the BIMBY 2 & 3 processes
- Launching an education and schools engagement process

At this stage, there is a core role for students and teachers to play with the process supporting elements of the curriculum at the same time as engaging a demographic who will be significantly affected by the development which the Local Plan will facilitate and therefore have a central role to play in bringing this forward.

Throughout the process, Snapdragon at PLMR will work with the Council to ensure that communications are clear and consistent, in line with Council policy on plain English and accessibility of communications.

Methodology

The primary objective of the engagement process is to ascertain the views, and encourage the participation of, members of the community and stakeholders in the processes of developing the Local Plan.

With the ongoing COVID19 pandemic, traditional physical engagement methods are likely to be limited. Furthermore, a comprehensive digital engagement programme is likely to generate far greater engagement across a more diverse audience than traditional methods on their own. Whilst the preferred approach would be to combine both traditional and more innovative methods of engagement, requirements of social distancing and the potential for local lockdowns means that greater emphasis is likely to be placed on digital and virtual engagement methods. At the same time, we are conscious of the need to ensure that those who may not be digitally enabled for a variety of reasons are not excluded from the process.

Charettes and the BIMBY engagement process

This engagement strategy aims to undertake an exploratory exercise at the outset through a key stakeholder technical workshop and public feedback sessions using the Prince's Foundation's BIMBY (www.bimby.org.uk) toolkit. Rather than presenting pre-determined proposals, this process will allow

for the plans to gradually evolve in dialogue with key stakeholders and the community, with the aim being to gather views and ideas with interested parties and stakeholders that can 'shape' the proposals at an early stage as they evolve to incorporate local concerns and benefits

The methodology which will be utilised to undertake the engagement process will include, but not be limited to:

- Digital consultation through Bang the Table;
- A BIMBY 1 Survey held online and through workshops (physical and virtual);
- Local libraries to display information and physical surveys to enable a broader audience to engage;
- Working with the internal community engagement team to ensure direct physical outreach to communities across the borough;
- Utilisation of lamppost banners, posters and public displays of information;
- Bespoke newsletters to be distributed across the borough;
- Utilisation of existing community newsletters and information;
- Technical key stakeholder charettes;
- Formal consultation with landowners;
- Public exhibitions and workshops (virtual and physical where possible);
- Engagement with MPs, residents, businesses, third sector, schools and community groups.

The final results of the engagement programme will form a key part of the development of the Local Plan at the earliest stage of the process.