

SONNING COMMON PARISH COUNCIL PRE-APPLICATION COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT PROTOCOL

Any proposals must accord with the Sonning Common Neighbourhood Development Plan and with those of any higher level plans, notably those of South Oxfordshire District Council and Oxfordshire County Council, as well as all national policy. Because much of any engagement will be about overall and detailed design and character, particular attention is drawn to the Sonning Common Character Assessment and Design Statement because applicants will be required to demonstrate how their eventual proposals will add to the local distinctiveness of the village.

Use of this Protocol is without prejudice to the eventual judgement of Sonning Common Parish Council on the merits of any final application, even if a good involvement process has been agreed and followed.

Context

The National Planning Policy Framework states that:

“Applicants will be expected to work closely with those directly affected by their proposals to evolve designs that take account of the views of the community. Proposals that can demonstrate this in developing the design of the new development should be looked on more favourably.”

South Oxfordshire District Council’s “Statement of Community Involvement” also states that:

“We would like applicants and developers to discuss proposals with neighbours in all cases, before making a formal application and recommend that they consult more extensively with the community for applications that are likely to have a wider effect. Town and parish councils may be a useful contact point for developers at the pre-application stage. In this way issues and local concerns can be identified and alternatives considered. This early involvement of local people can save time by reducing objections later.”

The “10 Commitments for Effective Pre-application Engagement” published by a group representing planning, industry and community groups states that:

“Early, collaborative discussions between developers, public sector agencies and the communities affected by a new development can help to shape better quality, more accepted schemes and ensure improved outcomes for the community. These discussions also avoid wasted effort and costs.”

Sonning Common Parish Council fully support and endorse all of the above and will play their appropriate role in delivering high quality pre-application involvement with themselves and the wider Sonning Common community as proposals come forward.

Process

Drawing from the 10 Commitments and other guidance on best practice, we require potential applicants to work with us to fulfill the following principles:

- **‘Day One’ contact:** The best results for all emerge when contact is made with our Parish Council, and through us our local community, at the very start of any process; consulting people with

prepared schemes is not productive.

- **Agreed Process:** A key aim of this early contact is to discuss and agree the nature, scope, timing, information and so forth of the involvement – i.e. the process to be followed. (There is also considerable benefit for applicants in discussing any process with the District Council, as planning authority, and securing their agreement to it.)
- **Applicant Leadership but Shared Responsibility:** Although it is the applicant's role to lead and fund involvement, the Parish Council will offer as much support as possible – e.g. local information, advice on meeting places, access to newsletters etc.
- **Openness and Transparency:** Building trust between all and ensuring an agreed outcome depend heavily on having a process that is as open as possible on all sides, though the Parish Council will respect any issues of clear commercial confidentiality.
- **Agreed Community:** A project may have an impact on a limited number of people or on all of the parish. This will need to be discussed and agreed for any project, as will the potential ways to contact and engage them.
- **Agreed Scope:** There will also need to be agreement about the scope of the involvement, i.e. what is and is not open to change (e.g. layout, quantum of development, design etc.).
- **Proportionality:** The nature and scale of involvement will be balanced in appropriate proportion to the scale and likely impact of any proposals.
- **Final Reporting:** The applicant should submit, with any final application, a thorough report describing and summarising the outcomes of the involvement, showing how the proposals have (or have not) responded to results. (If they have not, a short note should be included to explain this.) If the process has been followed fully, the Parish Council will endorse this report; if not they may submit their own evaluation of it. (Endorsement of an involvement process and results does not necessarily mean support for the resulting proposals.)

Initial contact should be made with the Parish Council via the Clerk **at** The Parish Council commits to doing all possible to arrange an initial meeting as soon as possible following this contact.