

Semington Parish Council

PRE-APPLICATION COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT PROTOCOL ADOPTED JUNE 2023



Introduction

The aim of this Protocol is to do all possible to ensure that new development in Semington is done to a high standard which reflects local issues and aspirations. Its use will contribute to improved outcomes for the current and future communities, as well as assisting applicants to make applications that accord with the aims of the Parish Council, as community representatives, the Neighbourhood Plan (at the emerging stages and when 'made' following a positive referendum result) and with those of Wiltshire Council. It is crucial for success with these aims for the community engagement to start very early in the preparation of applications, working with the communities of Semington via the Parish Council.

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

Context

The revised **National Planning Policy Framework** (2021) highlights the considerable value of pre-application involvement, for example in paragraph 39:

"Early engagement has significant potential to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the planning application system for all parties. Good quality pre-application discussion enables better coordination between public and private resources and improved outcomes for the community."

and in support of this protocol, extract from paragraph 132:

"Applicants should work closely with those affected by their proposals to evolve designs that take account of the views of the community. Applications that can demonstrate early, proactive and effective engagement with the community should be looked on more favourably than those that cannot."

(All the relevant extracts from the revised NPPF are appended.)

The **"10 Commitments for Effective Pre-application Engagement"**¹ 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."

The Wiltshire Council **"Statement of Community Involvement"**² (SCI) 2020 states that it encourages:

"developers and applicants to engage with local people and communities including Town and Parish Councils and with neighbours, when appropriate, before submission of a planning application. ... The government have stated that such engagement is discretionary, but it is strongly encouraged by the Council prior to the submission of applications for ten or more houses, or other large developments on sites of 1 hectare or more."

It is the view of Semington Parish Council that, for their community, the above should also apply to smaller developments because these can have at least as much impact on small settlements such as those in Semington Parish, as on larger settlements.

The SCI outlines in detail how communities can be involved in planning applications. The Parish Council acknowledges that whilst in the early stages of considering a development proposal, applicants may wish for any discussions with Wiltshire

¹ <https://www.local.gov.uk/pas/pas-topics/planning-applications/10-commitments-effective-pre-application-engagement>

² <https://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/article/1088/Statement-of-Community-Involvement>

Council to be confidential, involvement of the local community can and should happen at the earliest possible stage.

Process

Drawing from the 10 Commitments and other guidance on best practice, potential applicants should work with Semington Parish Council to fulfil the following principles:

- **'Day One' contact:** By far the best results for all emerge when contact is made with our Parish Council, and through us with our local community, at the very start of any process; consulting people late with already prepared schemes is not productive.
- **Agreed Process:** A key aim of this early contact is to discuss and agree the nature, scope, timetable, information and so forth of the engagement – i.e. the process to be followed.³
- **Applicant Leadership but Shared Responsibility:** Although it is the applicant's role to lead and fund engagement, the Parish Council will offer as much support as possible to any agreed process; for example by providing local information, contact details for local groups, advice on meeting places, access to newsletters and so forth.
- **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. The details of those to be involved will need to be discussed and agreed for any project, as will the potential methods to contact and engage them. The methods should include traditional approaches such as exhibitions and leaflets but should also maximise contacts and responses through the use of social media.
- **Agreed Scope:** There will also need to be agreement about the scope of the engagement, i.e. what is and is not open to change (e.g. layout, quantum of development, design etc.).
- **Final Reporting:** The applicant should submit, with any final application, a thorough report – a full 'audit trail' - describing and summarising the outcomes of the engagement, 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.⁴

(The Wiltshire SCI suggests that "this should take the form of a statement of community involvement outlining what public consultation has been carried out and how the results of the exercise have been taken into account in the submitted application".)

Initial contact should be made at the very outset with the Parish Council's Clerk.⁵ The Parish Council commits to doing all possible to arrange an initial open meeting as soon as possible following this contact. The Parish Council may also request additional consultation if particularly significant local issues emerge from any list of reserved matters associated with an application.

Semington 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 Parish community as proposals come forward.

³ There is considerable benefit for applicants in also sharing any process with Wiltshire Council, as planning authority, and securing their agreement to it.

⁴ As per the opening proviso, endorsement of an engagement process and results does not necessarily mean support for the resulting proposals.

⁵ clerksemingtonparishcouncil@gmail.com

Appendix: NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY FRAMEWORK 2021 EXTRACTS

Para. 39: "Early engagement has significant potential to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the planning application system for all parties. Good quality pre-application discussion enables better coordination between public and private resources and improved outcomes for the community."

Para. 40: "Local planning authorities have a key role to play in encouraging other parties to take maximum advantage of the pre-application stage. They cannot require that a developer engages with them before submitting a planning application, but they should encourage take-up of any pre-application services they offer. They should also, where they think this would be beneficial, encourage any applicants who are not already required to do so by law to engage with the local community and, where relevant, with statutory and non-statutory consultees, before submitting their applications."

Para. 41: "The more issues that can be resolved at pre-application stage, including the need to deliver improvements in infrastructure and affordable housing, the greater the benefits. For their role in the planning system to be effective and positive, statutory planning consultees will need to take the same early, pro-active approach, and provide advice in a timely manner throughout the development process. This assists local planning authorities in issuing timely decisions, helping to ensure that applicants do not experience unnecessary delays and costs."

Para 132: "Design quality should be considered throughout the evolution and assessment of individual proposals. Early discussion between applicants, the local planning authority and local community about the design and style of emerging schemes is important for clarifying expectations and reconciling local and commercial interests. **Applicants should work closely with those affected by their proposals to evolve designs that take account of the views of the community. Applications that can demonstrate early, proactive and effective engagement with the community should be looked on more favourably than those that cannot.**"

Our emphasis in bold.