

4.0 Methods for community engagement at the planning application stage

4.1 A planning application is a means by which someone applies for permission from the Local Planning Authority to develop land. Cambridge City Council and South Cambridgeshire District Council are responsible for most planning decisions that are made in their respective areas, with some exceptions such as minerals and waste which is dealt with by the Council. We receive a wide range of planning applications for formal determination. The Local Planning Authorities assess and determine planning applications against national planning policies and local policies, including the local plan. Applications are determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

4.2 GCSP makes all applications and decisions available to view online through our [planning applications page](#) (see Figure 2) Public Access. On the same website, a [weekly list](#) of validated and determined planning applications is made available for parish Councils, neighbourhood forums and any other interested parties to be kept informed of planning decisions in their areas. There are four key stages to the planning application process set out in Table 3.

Figure 2: Layout of the Search Function on the Planning Applications Page

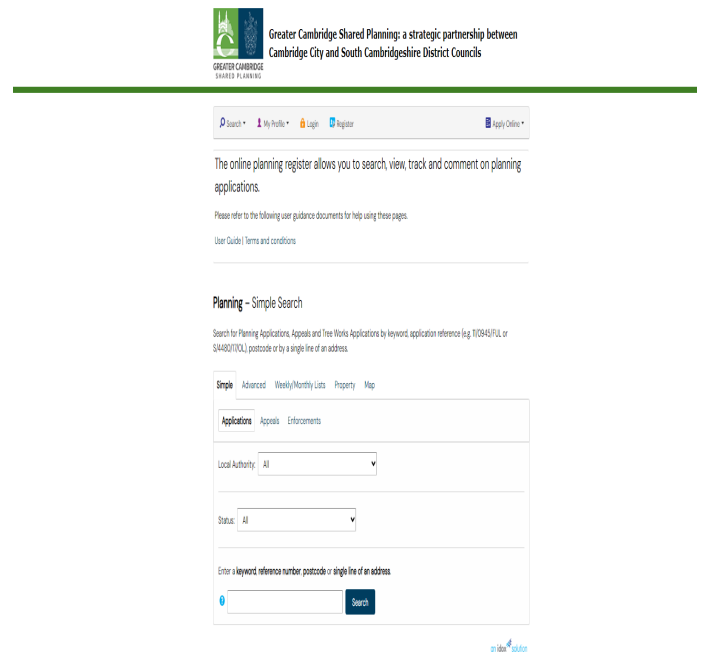


Table 3: Planning Application Process

| Stage of process | Explanation |
|----------------------|--|
| Pre-application | An applicant or developer prepares the development proposal. Early engagement with the Local Planning Authority, relevant stakeholders and the community is strongly encouraged, especially for larger and more complex proposals. |
| Planning application | An application is submitted to the Local Planning Authority who will consult on the planning application |
| Decision making | A decision is made by either a planning committee of elected Councillors or delegated to a Planning Officer |
| Appeals | The applicant has a right to appeal where they disagree with the decision of the Local Planning Authority to refuse permission |

4.3 The statutory requirements for consulting on planning applications are set out in Appendix 4.

Pre-application advice and consultation

4.4 Both Cambridge City and South Cambridgeshire District Council encourage applicants or developers to carry out early engagement with the Local Planning Authority and the local community before submitting a planning application. These discussions enable Planning Officers to provide advice to the applicant and in no way predetermine the outcome of the application. Early discussion of a proposal in the form of a pre-application with the Council verifies the information required to be submitted with the application and reduces the likelihood of submitting invalid applications. It provides an opportunity for Planning Officers to provide an initial view on a proposal, identifying issues and opportunities an early stage. This enables more efficient use of resources, as problems can be addressed earlier on in the process.

4.5 There are also significant benefits to involving communities and stakeholders at the pre-application stage, including:

- Helping the applicant to understand how planning policies and other requirements may affect their proposal
- Addressing issues early on is likely to result in higher quality proposals that reflect the aspirations of communities. This could lead to less objections, meaning the applications are likely to move through the application process more quickly.

4.6 Whilst some pre-application discussions can be confidential for commercial reasons, developers are strongly encouraged to undertake community engagement at this stage of the planning process, particularly where development is likely to have significant impacts on local communities or where the site is particularly sensitive.

4.7 An example of good engagement between developer and community at the pre-application stage occurred during a recent application for a mix of residential properties and commercial spaces in Devonshire Gardens, Cambridge.

Socius and Railpen were the developers for the scheme and held substantial consultation with the local community, with over 3,000 local residents responding to the proposals.

The final site will incorporate new public space and a community pavilion which will be shaped by a local design competition following planning permission. Similarly, the Hartree developers at North East Cambridge held a People City Planet Festival where over 400 people attended the two day event at Shirley Community Primary School to find out more about the proposals for the site, listen to talks and participate in interactive workshops, and provide feedback on the proposals.

4.8 The [Localism Act 2011](#) introduced a duty for developers to consult local communities before submitting planning applications for certain developments. For development proposals that fall outside of the requirements of the Localism Act, the Local Planning Authority encourage pre-application consultation with local communities and key stakeholders. This allows those likely to be affected by the development to raise potential issues and to make suggestions.

4.9 Further information about the pre-application process or how to request a Duty Planning Officer service where members of the public can obtain advice and guidance on householder applications, can be found on GCSP's [website](#).

Planning performance agreements

4.10 GCSP offers the opportunity for applicants or developers to enter into a planning performance agreement (PPA), which sits alongside the pre-application advice service. A PPA is a project management tool that allows all parties to agree timescales, actions and resources for handling planning applications.

PPAs are usually agreed at the pre-application stage and relate to the whole development process, from pre-application planning advice and community engagement to application progress meetings right through to the post decision stage, including the discharge of conditions and site monitoring. PPAs can be used for any type of application but are most effective for major and complex planning applications. You can find more information on PPAs on our [website](#).

Pre-application advice for Listed Buildings

4.11 GCSP offers separate pre-application advice to the owners of Listed Buildings and their agents. This advice enables the applicant to discuss their proposals with a Conservation Officer and to receive either verbal or written advice as to the suitability of what they hope to do.

For bigger schemes, owners of higher graded listed buildings, Grade II* and Grade I, are also recommended to contact Historic England who also offer a pre-application service.

Design panels

4.12 Design review panels are a well-established and effective way of offering multi-disciplinary, independent advice from a panel of experts who help to inform the planning process and give greater confidence in the decision making of innovative and quality design of the built environment. Panels involve a group of experts such as architects, heritage professionals, and urban designers, who meet to analyse prospective applications to improve the quality of Greater Cambridge's built environment. It is possible for applicants to book an appointment with design panels and a fee needs to be paid to obtain the expert's advice.

4.13 There are currently three design panels which are used at the pre-application stage to improve the quality and accessibility of proposals. The panels consist of members from different disciplines and offer critical design advice to applications. The [Cambridgeshire Quality Panel](#) is led by Cambridgeshire County Council for schemes that are going to the Joint Development Control Committee. The panel helps to raise the quality of development by identifying where designs can be improved to achieve the best possible outcomes, in accordance with the adopted Local Plans. The Disability Panel is led by GCSP and considers applications that go to the South Cambridgeshire District Council's Planning Committee and Cambridge City Council's Planning Committee. There is also the [Greater Cambridge Design Review Panel](#) which is led by GCSP and offers independent advice and considers applications that go to the same two committees. The panel reviews major or significant planning applications and pre-applications for sites within the Greater Cambridge area, that fall outside of the remit of the Cambridgeshire Quality Panel.

The Greater Cambridge Design Review Plan may also review any policies, guidance and documents that relate to these sites. The panel reviews major or significant planning and pre-applications for sites within the Greater Cambridge area, that fall outside of the remit of the Cambridgeshire Quality Panel. The Greater Cambridge Design Review Pan may also review any policies, guidance and documents that relate to these sites.

Other forms of pre-application engagement

4.17 The most effective way to achieve good planning outcomes is for early community engagement in the planning application process. The Local Planning Authorities therefore expect developers to engage with local people in a meaningful way that, so that proposals are refined as they progress through the planning process. The most effective timing for early developer led community engagement is before the pre-application stage, where local people and stakeholder ideas, concerns and aspirations for new development can inform a development proposal. There are a number of ways to do this, including innovative methods set out below. Developers are encouraged to use feedback loops to explain how they have incorporated community feedback.

- Urban Rooms: This is a [space](#) where members of the public are able to come together to discuss and engage with planning issues and are encouraged to express their views about proposed developments. They are sometimes transportable spaces, facilitating meaningful discussions with groups representing the local community. Urban Rooms and other such spaces should be well publicised and easily accessible to the community in order to enable effective community participation. The responses and dialogue at these events could be used to explore refinements to proposals to achieve wider community support.
- Co-design: This process involves developers identifying residents of the scheme and working with them to design their new homes. [Marmalade Lane](#) in Orchard Park, Cambridge was produced by residents, Cambridge City Council, and the developer TOWN, and is an example of community collaboration at the pre-application stage.

Youth engagement service

- 4.14 There are many under represented groups across Greater Cambridge that we aspire to engage with, including young people. Engagement with young people can ensure that the final design of developments considers the specific interests of children and young people who are often under represented in public consultations, particularly in relation to delivering play areas and public spaces that are child friendly and fit for purpose.
- 4.15 GCSP provides an award-winning [youth engagement service](#). It aims to address the long standing issue of young people being under represented in decision making about the built environment. The service aims to enhance planning outcomes by giving young people opportunities to be involved in our work whilst increasing diversity and inclusion.
- 4.16 The service does this by holding workshops in schools that involve Planning Officers and developers who together deliver activities to help young people learn more about their local built environment. Often, the workshops are shaped around a specific planning proposal, which is then used as a gateway to discuss broader issues, such as the history of development in their areas. The students often participate in activities such as designing play areas, public open spaces, and street furniture. In some instances, benches and art installations designed by the participants have been incorporated into the design of a planning proposal and been implemented in the development.

- Online tools: Developers could use innovative online [engagement tools](#) that enable local people to easily identify areas which are of social value, and spaces that need improvement. The information gathered could be used to inform the content of development proposals.

The Planning Application Process

4.18 The [Town and Country Planning \(Development Management Procedure\) Order 2015](#) (as amended) requires that at any time before a decision is made on a planning application, stakeholders and the local community should have the opportunity to comment on any aspect of the proposal. The level and extent of consultation will vary depending on the size, scale, location, and nature of the proposed development. Planning applications, supporting information and key dates are available for public inspection on the [GCSP website](#).

4.19 Comments, known as representations, that are received during the consultation period will be considered in decisions made by and on behalf of the Councils. Representations must be submitted in writing, electronically via email or through the [consultation system](#). Late representations may be considered up to the point of determination of the application, however it is highly recommended that they are received during the consultation period indicated. They can only be taken into account if they relate to material planning considerations. You can find more information on this on the [government's website](#) on the planning system. Representations will be added to the application file and made publicly available online alongside the planning application documents. These will be published in accordance with the Council's Privacy Notice.

4.20 When a planning application is registered by the Local Planning Authority, there is a statutory period during which anyone can comment on the proposal, as set out in Table 4. It is the Local Planning Authorities

responsibility to publicise planning applications. The approach to notification of planning applications will be to:

- Publish details of planning applications online on [Public Access](#), including which applications have been registered, digital copies of Plans and supporting information. Our websites include a search function to help find specific planning applications.
- Undertake appropriate notification as shown in Table 4. In some instances, the Local Planning Authority can go beyond the minimum statutory requirements where the development would potentially have a wider impact and may make use of additional methods of communication, for example through articles in the Councils magazines. Such wider consultation is carried out at the discretion of the Planning Officer.
- Parish Councils in South Cambridgeshire as well as neighbourhood forums in the city of Cambridge are consulted on all appropriate planning applications as statutory consultees.
- Consult with both statutory and non-statutory consultees. All consultees have 21 days (30 days for applications accompanied by an Environmental Statement) from the issue of the consultation notice to make representations (extended as appropriate where the period extends over public or bank holidays). It is highly recommended that representations are submitted prior to the published consultation deadline. The list of statutory and non-statutory consultees related to planning application consultations is set out in Appendix 5.

4.21 Where neighbour notification letters/ emails are sent out, Neighbour notification letters/emails are sent to directly adjoining properties of the application site. The Planning Officer may sometimes determine that neighbour notification letters and emails should be sent beyond this where a development could potentially have an impact on a wider area.

4.22 In addition, Cambridge City Council operates a [Development Control Forum](#) where petitioners to an application can present their views to Councillors, Planning Officers and the applicant before a planning application is determined. The aim of the Forum is to allow early discussion of the planning issues raised by petitioners and to seek to resolve concerns. The Forum does not determine the outcome of the planning application.

4.23 It is at the discretion of the Local Planning Authority whether further publicity and public consultation is necessary when an application has been amended. In deciding if it is necessary, the Local Planning Authority will consider the criteria set out in [Planning Practice Guidance \(PPG\)](#) published by the Government. In most cases a period of 14 days is considered an appropriate period to allow for further comment.

4.24 Table 4 sets out how the Councils will publicise planning applications made under planning legislation. Each type of planning application will be the subject of a different method of publicity which will broadly reflect the scale and impact of the proposal on its surroundings.

4.25 Where an application falls within a Conservation Area a site notice may be required and the Local Planning Authority will advise. Certain classes of permitted development will require a Prior Notification application. In these cases, an application must be made to the Local Planning Authority who has to make its determination within the statutory period set out in the GDPO from the date of receiving the application. The time period can vary depending on the type and complexity of the proposal and in some cases in agreement with the applicant and Local Planning Authority. Prior notification applications will be publicised online and may in some instances include a site notice and neighbour consultation letter, depending on the type and nature of the development proposal. Further details about prior notification can be found on the [Planning Portal](#).

4.26 There is no statutory requirement to consult on the following types of applications:

- Certificates of Lawfulness of proposed use or development
- Certificates of Lawfulness of existing use or development
- Approval of details/Discharge of Conditions
- Non material amendments.

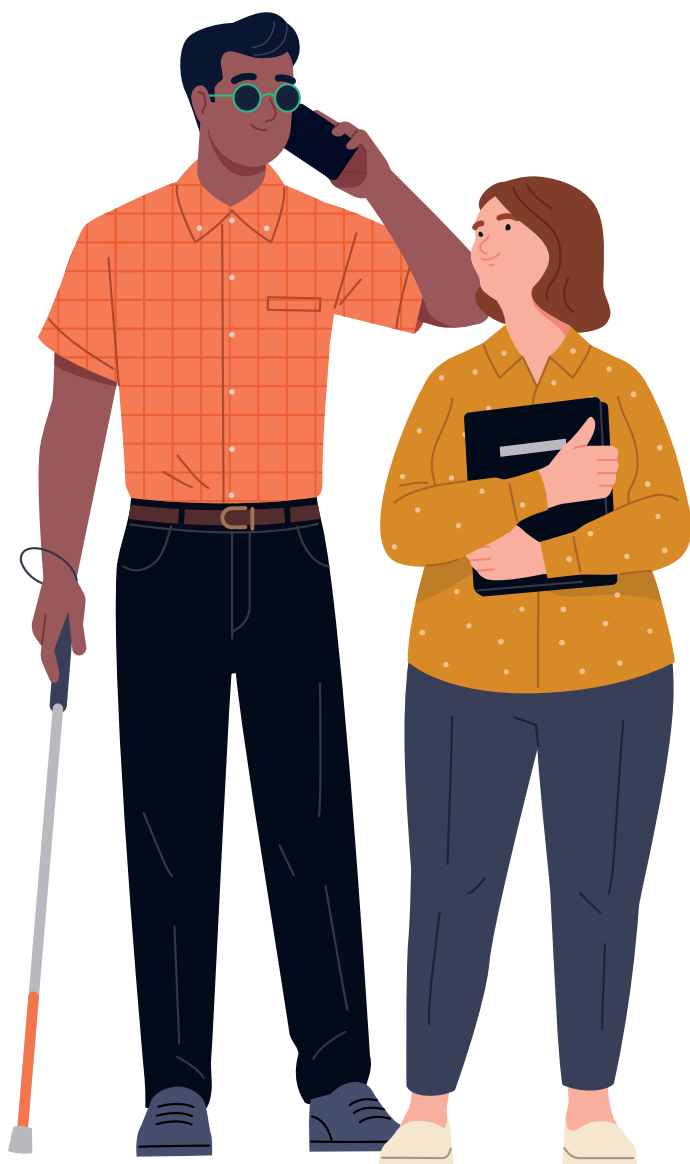


Table 4: Minimum publicity for planning applications

| Type of application required for | Minimum methods of publicity |
|--|--|
| Major Development | Site notice or neighbour notification letter/email, press notice in local newspaper, website, parish Council notification letter/email, neighbourhood forum letter/email notification. |
| Minor Development | Site notice or neighbour notification letter/email, website, parish Council notification letter/email, neighbourhood forum letter/email notification. |
| Householder Applications | Site notice or neighbour notification letter/email, website, parish Council notification letter/email, neighbourhood forum letter/email notification. |
| Applications subject to EIA which are accompanied by an Environmental Statement | Site notice or neighbour notification letter/email, press notice in local newspaper for a minimum of 30 days, website, parish Council notification letter/email, neighbourhood forum letter/email notification. |
| Applications which do not accord with the development plan for the area | Site notice, press notice in local newspaper for a minimum of 30 days, website, parish Council notification letter/email, neighbourhood forum letter/email notification. |
| Applications affecting a Public Right of Way | Site notice, press notice in local newspaper for a minimum of 30 days, website, parish Council notification letter/email, neighbourhood forum letter/email notification. |
| Listed Building applications and applications affecting the setting of a Listed Building | Site notice or neighbour notification letter/email, press notice in local newspaper, website, parish Council notification letter/email, neighbourhood forum letter/email notification. |
| Brownfield Land Register (Part 2) | Site notice, website, parish Council notification letter/email, neighbourhood forum letter/email notification. |
| Works to protected trees | Site notice responsible for by applicant, site notice or neighbour notification letter/email is discretionary (to be determined on a case by case basis by the Local Planning Authority) but the landowner must be notified, website, parish Council notification letter/email is discretionary (to be determined on a case by case basis by the Local Planning Authority) and neighbourhood forum letter/email notification is also discretionary (to be determined on a case by case basis by the Local Planning Authority). |
| Applications relating to an advertisement | Site notice and/or neighbour notification letter/email, website, parish Council notification letter/email, neighbourhood forum letter/email notification. |
| Hazardous Substances Consent | Site notice and/or neighbour notification letter/email, press notice in local newspaper, website, parish Council notification letter/email, neighbourhood forum letter/email notification. |

Decision Making process

- 4.27 Decisions on planning applications are made by Planning Committee and Planning Officers under delegated powers. Delegated powers enable Planning Officers to determine applications without needing a decision from the Planning Committee. This is set out in the [Schemes of Delegation](#). Applications that are likely to be considered by the Planning Committee include applications for Major developments and applications relating to the demolition of a listed building or a Building of Local Interest.
- 4.28 The Councils are involved in three planning committees. There are two separate Planning Committees for the respective Local Planning Authorities. There is also the Joint Development Control Committee which addresses specific areas on the edge of the city, which comprises members appointed by the city and district Council. This Committee considers planning applications for major and ancillary developments on the fringes of Cambridge.
- 4.29 Agendas and reports for Planning Committee are publicly available at least five working days before the meeting and are also published online. The committee meetings are minuted and published online. Members of the public may speak at a Planning Committee provided they have previously made written representations on the proposed development. Both Councils have further guidance and information regarding speaking at Committee Meetings and can be viewed on the City [website](#) and South Cambridgeshire [website](#), and on the joint committee [website](#).
- 4.30 Once an application has been determined, a copy of the planning decision notice will be sent to the applicant. As part of [The Town and Country Planning \(Development Management Procedure\) \(England\) Order 2015](#), Local Planning Authorities are required to send notification of the decision to all third parties who have made representations, in accordance with the Local Planning Authorities statutory

requirements. The Local Planning Authority will also make the decision available to view online through [Public Access](#) along with the reports that have been considered in the reaching of the decision. On the same website, a [weekly list](#) of validated and determined planning applications is made available for parish Councils, neighbourhood forums and any other interested parties to be kept informed of planning decisions in their areas.

Planning Appeals

- 4.31 An applicant may appeal to the Planning Inspectorate against a refusal or contest any of the conditions imposed to the granting of permissions or the non-determination of an application. Only the applicant has the right to appeal. The Local Planning Authority will support the appeals process by adding appeal documentation to the online planning file online on [Public Access](#). The Councils will inform all parties that were originally consulted on the application or made representations on the proposal of the appeal. A planning appeal will then be considered by the Planning Inspectorate, who will make the final decision on the proposal. The Local Planning Authority has no statutory requirement to notify neighbours or interested parties of the appeal decision. This will be made available on the Planning Inspectorate [website](#).
- 4.32 There are three procedures that an appeal can follow, written representations which usually relate to householder applications, advertisement consent and minor commercial (shop front) applications as well as a public hearing or a public inquiry. The Planning Inspectorate publish a [Planning appeals: procedural guide](#) where you can find more information about how appeals work and opportunities to participate.

Compliance

- 4.33 Planning compliance (formerly referred to as enforcement) describes the processes involved in ensuring that people comply with planning law and requirements of a planning permission.

The majority of cases arise through referrals from the public, Councillors and Planning Officers. Many investigations are confidential, so the process involves little public consultation. Where a breach of planning control is reported, an Officer will investigate and assess the complaint, gather evidence, and establish what, if any, the most appropriate course of action should be.

4.34 Many investigations result in the submission of a planning application in an attempt to regularise a breach. When this is the case, the community can become more involved in the same way as with any other planning application. If the breach cannot be regularised, the Local Planning Authority will consider formal enforcement action. The Local Planning Authority will ensure that the complainant is informed of the outcome of the Council's investigation. Further information about the compliance process can be found on the [Councils websites](#), including the [GCSP's Compliance Policy](#).

National Infrastructure Planning

4.35 Introduced by the Planning Act 2008 to streamline the decision making for major infrastructure projects, National Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs), are large scale infrastructure projects, which fall into one of the following categories:

- Energy Generation
- Transport Projects
- Water and Waste
- Pipelines

4.36 These projects can include new roads, railway lines, power stations, reservoirs and waste water treatment plants. NSIPs require a development consent order (DCO) and this process for granting planning permission is determined by the Planning Inspectorate. It is different from the usual planning application process. There are 6 stages to the process:

- Pre-application
- Acceptance
- Pre-examination
- Examination

- Recommendation and Decision
- Post Decision

4.37 Before submitting a major infrastructure project an applicant, for example, a developer or Government Department has a duty to carry out consultation on their proposals. The applicant must prepare a Statement of Community Consultation (SOCC) which sets out how the applicant proposes to consult the local community. It is a key opportunity for the Local Authority, using local knowledge, to inform how the consultation should be conducted. It is also at this stage the applicant will formally consult the statutory consultees, local authorities, affected parties and the local community of the proposal.

4.38 If you wish to participate in the examination of an application for development consent, you first need to register with the Planning Inspectorate by making a Relevant Representation about an application. More information can be found on the [Planning Inspectorate](#) website.

