



How to... Comment on a planning application

You can comment on a planning application in two ways - during **pre-application consultation** carried out by the developer or their representative, and during the **statutory consultation** carried out by the Local Planning Authority (LPA) once the planning application has been submitted.

This paper is designed to help you present your views effectively to the right people, regardless of whether you support the proposal in its entirety or in part, or not.

If you have heard about a new development in your area, going along to public consultation events or public meetings, and reading the planning application once submitted is the best way to understand its potential impact.

Although there are many types of planning application, depending on the development or change proposed, there are two main consents - Full and Outline.

Full planning consent is for the detailed planning application for development, excluding householder developments. In this context, development includes building, engineering or other works, in, on, over or under land, or the making of any material change in the use of any buildings or other land.

Outline consent applications allow applications to submit fewer details, and are used to establish whether the scale and nature of a proposed development would be acceptable to the local planning authority before a fully detailed proposal is lodged. Once outline consent is granted, the details of the application - "reserved matters" - will need to be approved before work can start, and will be subject of a "reserved matters" application at a later stage.

Who decides planning applications?

Not all councils have powers to decide planning applications - Parish and Town councils, for example, are regarded as consultees within the planning process, and although they can seek the community's views about a proposal they cannot make a determination.

If you have a two or three-tier local authority system, consisting of a county and district council, in most

cases with a parish or town council as well, you'll find the majority of planning decisions are taken by your local district or borough council.

However, where a unitary authority is in place, it will act as the Local Planning Authority. Only the Local Planning Authority can determine planning applications.

Parish councils are entitled to receive copies of all planning applications and can invite developers to attend their meetings as part of the pre-application engagement process, and these presentations can be useful in helping you to understand the development proposal and form your views.

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How to respond to a planning application

1. Get involved early - and don't leave it to others to put your view across

Local Planning Authorities encourage developers to engage with communities ahead of submitting a planning application. Although guidance is available for applicants, this advice and activity required will depend on the nature of the development proposed.

Done properly, asking for and providing feedback and comment on planning applications can be an effective way to shape and influence a planning application.

Insight: If planning permission is granted you will not be able to appeal the decision.

Step 2: Look at the planning application

Local Planning Authorities are required by law to keep a public register of all planning applications, which should be easily accessible.

Many are available to view online via the council's website, although a hard copy, with supporting documents (maps, drawings, and reports) is usually kept at the Local Planning Authority's main office. If you cannot find the application you are looking for contact the planning department direct.

You should also make sure you know what the council's rules are about viewing documents in person - some require advance notice.

Insight: The law states that Local Planning Authorities should let you take copies of applications and associated documents. Some may charge for photocopying.

Step 3: Visit the site of the proposed development

Even if you think you know the site, or have been told about the site from friends, acquaintances or colleagues, visiting the site will allow you to view the site in the context of the proposal or planning application. You can build up a picture of what the development could look like, and its possible impacts. This will help you form your opinion, and develop questions or points to raise with the developer as part of the engagement and consultation process.

Insight: Remember that you could be trespassing if you go on the site without permission from the landowner.

Step 4: Decide your stance on the application

It's easy to be swayed by friends' or relatives' views, but if you are forming a view you are doing so based on your own criteria, concerns, interests and what improvements you feel your community needs.

Planning decisions made now will have impacts in the future so it is important that you think long-term, and whether the development will help to ensure the sustainability of your community in years to come.

Insight: Local knowledge is a useful and powerful tool, but bear in mind that anything you rely on as fact must be evidenced for it to hold weight under challenge by the applicant or later at appeal (see our *How to Comment on Planning Appeal* guide).

Step 5: Examine the Development Plan Planning decisions are made in accordance with your area's Development Plan.

Planning decisions are based on the Local Planning Authority's Development Plan, which sets out agreed planning policies for your area, along with any Neighbourhood Development Plans which are in force.

Planning applications must be determined in accordance with the development plan for the area, unless special circumstances - or material considerations) apply. Familiarise yourself with relevant policies and be prepared to quote them when putting your case forward - regardless of whether you support the proposal or not. If there are policies which contradict your views or position on the planning application you should be prepared to argue why they do not apply.

Insight: Development Plans which are 'formally adopted' will carry the most weight; where documents are over five years old or are in the process of being redrafted, or have been through consultation at least once, the draft plan will also have some force.

Step 6: Decide on your action

Will you support the application, ask for changes or oppose it? Your stance should be based on your own concerns, (also see Step 4), interests and what you think your community needs.

You can be against some elements of the proposal but still support it, and provide comment or question against the areas you are concerned about.

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Equally, you can support the proposal and express concern about one or several elements e.g. traffic management, access, noise etc.

Do you feel strongly enough that you want to seek out like-minded people, or do you want to provide comment only and make representation privately?

Insight: Your action does not need to be at campaigning level to have an impact; expressing a view or suggesting ways to amend the proposal can be as effective as other means of action.

Step 7: Put your comments in writing

Most Local Planning Authorities allow comment on planning applications via their website. Some only allow those who have an address within the local authority area to register and comment; others allow anyone to comment online. Comment can also be made in writing to the planning department.

When putting your comments in writing, refer to the Development Plan and any relevant policies. Consider the public interest and how the development may affect the whole community - positively or negatively depending on your stance - rather than just you. Be clear and concise - and avoid personal or emotional issues. Familiarise yourself with the requirements of comments - when is the deadline.

Insight: Make sure you include the planning application reference number, site address and your contact details including postal address (especially if you are sending an email).

Step 8: Speak at committee meetings

Speaking at the committee meeting where the application is considered could make all the difference when planning applications are being considered.

Contact your Local Planning Authority to find out what their procedures on speaking at planning committee meetings. Tell the planning department well in advance that you wish to speak, along with any special requirements you may have to do so.

Insight: Jot the points down you wish to speak on during the planning committee and rehearse beforehand to ensure you can fit what you want to say within any time limits.

Additional Guidance

Additional guidance about planning applications can be found at the [Planning Portal \(England and Wales\)](#) and at the [Planning Portal \(Northern Ireland\)](#).

Advice about planning permission and building regulations is also provided at [Gov.uk](#).