
Introduction

The Council's Community Strategy sets out its vision for the future of the County. This vision requires that all development is of the highest quality and is founded on the principles of economic, social, environmental and physical sustainability. The evolving LDF Core Strategy states that new development must contribute to the well-being of existing and future communities.

This Charter sets out how the Council will work with developers, the community and other key stakeholders to ensure that all large and complex development proposals are carefully considered in a constructive, collaborative and open manner. Such an approach is the best way of developing proposals to see if they can meet the vision and objectives of the Council.

Where major development proposals are deemed to be in accordance with the Development Plan for the Area or, if a departure, have the potential to meet the Council's Corporate Objectives, the Council will instigate a Project Team approach and seek to manage the project through a Planning Performance Agreement.

The Council Structure

An approach to the Council about a large-scale development project will initially be through the Planning Service. However, when a project is defined it is likely that it will involve officers from other departments and the Council is committed to co-ordinated cross-departmental working.

The make up of the Project Team will be determined according to the needs of the project by the Regeneration Directorate Management Team. For large strategic projects an officer Steering Group will be established, which the Council's Head of Planning Services or the Development Control Manager will chair. The Chair of the Steering Group will be responsible for corporate delivery, progressing the project and communication to Council Members and the Public. In addition, a Project Manager will be identified. The Project Manager will be responsible for the co-ordination of the project team and the primary interface with the developer's Project Team; ensuring tasks are delivered to agreed timescales, regular reporting and liaison with the other stakeholders. In most cases the project manager will become the case officer.

All members of the project teams will work on behalf of the council in the wider public interest and to secure the best quality scheme delivering the objectives of the Unitary Development Plan/Local Development Framework and relevant policy documents. Officers will express their own professional opinions that will form guidance for the applicant.

The guidance will not bind officers to final recommendation nor override the requirement for a formal planning application to be determined without prejudice and within the statutory requirements of current planning legislation.

Partner Organisation Commitment

The Council is committed to co-ordinated inter-departmental working. However for large complex schemes other stakeholders from partner organisations are likely to be required to provide a timely, proactive response to each project. Other stakeholders including the Statutory Agencies (Highways Agency, Environment Agency and Natural England) and the Herefordshire Primary Care Trust have all committed to pre-application involvement. In respect of the latter the Council and the Trust now share a joint management structure.

The local planning authority and Partner organisations are committed to sharing existing information with the development interests.

Community Engagement

As set out in the Statement of Community Involvement (March 2007) the Council is committed to open and constructive community engagement. In all projects within the scope of this Charter, community engagement will be established in liaison with the Local Strategic Partnership. As a minimum this will include the relevant Parish or Community Council(s) and any established resident groups. For large strategic projects the Council is likely to seek the developer's commitment to an independently facilitated Enquiry by Design process.

Notwithstanding the above, the Council will also undertake separate consultation as part of the formal planning application process as a statutory procedure, in accordance with the Council's Statement of Community Involvement.

Member Involvement

The Council believes that Members should be appropriately and openly engaged with the development of the project, whilst ensuring that their decision making function is not compromised. The Council's normal procedure would be to ensure regular information is reported to members at the open Development Control Committee meetings in the form of 'Issues Report' at least once before the application is submitted. This will allow Members to develop an understanding of issues and raise their own issues and concerns that may wish to be addressed. Members will not express views about the overall planning merits of any case and will not engage privately with the developer interest.

Expectations from Applicant

The Council will expect the developer interest to approach any proposal in an open, collaborative and creative manner. The developer interest will be expected to employ high quality staff/consultants with sound expertise in delivering sustainable communities. All projects will be delivered through a robust project management process and as with the Council, applicants will be expected to meet agreed timetables.

Where there are multiple developer interests the Council will seek a single steering group member and separate project manager empowered to represent the collective developer interest.

Funding

The Council will have an expectation that the applicant will fund the preparation of the application material, production of technical reports, and community engagement activity. Prior to the commencement of individual tasks the Council and the Applicant will agree a brief to define the scope of work.

In establishing an individual PPA, consideration will be given to how the authority can service the project programme. If the cost is likely to exceed the subsequent planning application fee then the authority will expect the applicant to fund the additional cost.

Process Requirements

The Council will expect the promoters of schemes covered by this Charter to engage in and sign a PPA. The process will involve the following key elements:

- Meet and review the project proposal at an early stage;
- Agree vision and development objectives;
- Form a Project Steering Group with key decision makers and the Project Manager (Council lead). Technical working groups may be required when technical tasks are identified (which will be co-ordinated by the Project Manager). The Steering Group should deal with any issues/conflicts arising, not the mechanics of the project;
- Produce a Project Plan based on identification of project issues and subsequent tasks; and
- Produce a Programme directly linked to the Project Plan and agree with the applicant to deliver key milestones.

The Project Plan and Programme will be updated regularly to reflect the ongoing work of the project. The Programme can be reviewed accordingly, in agreement with both applicant and the Council.

Key Thresholds

The Council recognises that it is impractical to establish very precise criteria for proposals that would be appropriate for PPAs. A degree of flexibility will be expected.

Nonetheless the Council will press for and encourage developers to enter into PPAs on the following proposals:

- a) Proposals for strategic housing and/or employment sites as defined either in the existing UDP or the forthcoming LDF; or
- b) Proposals requiring an Environmental Impact Assessment; or

- c) Proposals that would have a significant impact on existing communities and therefore require extensive consultations or involvement from many different interests.

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