

Statement Of Community Involvement - Development Management

Public Consultations/Notifications on Planning Applications

The Council's Regulatory Committee on the 20th October 2010 agreed the following recommendation:

“The Committee support a programme to introduce display of site notices as an alternative to neighbour notification letters on planning and related applications, and that officers incorporate this into the current public consultation on the Statement of Community Involvement (part of Local Development Framework).”

Background

As part of the statutory requirements for processing planning applications, public consultation is carried out. Ealing Council currently implements this by despatch of neighbour notification letters. The number of letters despatched to neighbours each year ranges from 80,000 – 100,000. Legislation requires that local planning authorities notify by letter or by site notice, except in circumstances where site notices and advertisement in local press is required. This additional requirement applies to major applications and listed buildings/conservation area applications, and the number posted ranges from 2,000 – over 3,000 each year. However, for most applications there is no legislative requirement to notify by letter.

Reason for Change

It has come to the Council's attention on a number of occasions that members of the public advise that they have not received the notification letters that have been despatched from the Council offices. This despatch relies on Post Office delivery. Officers have looked at other options for distributing letters, using private suppliers, but the end stage generally relies on Post Office delivery, and these would not prove any more reliable.

Officers have therefore looked at the initial feasibility of the posting of site notices as an alternative to letter despatch. It is clear from the initial review that posting of site notices is likely to be a more economic option.

Review of Options

The current process involves identification of properties in the vicinity of each application site, using the GIS mapping system, printing individually addressed letters in Planning Services, and dispatch of letters from the Council's Greenford Business Service Centre.

Where advertisement and a Site Notice are required, the notice is processed and laminated for display. Site notices are placed outside/near the development site on a Thursday/Friday in line with the notice in press, currently undertaken by a Planning Services support officer outside working hours, incurring the costs

associated with the use of their own vehicle and parking. Site Notices are removed from site after required by the Council's Street Care Area Teams.

With an option concentrating on display of site notices, the process would include preparation of site notices, with at least one per application where neighbour consultation would have been undertaken, placement outside and/or near the application site by a support officer, and removal of notices after expiry date. Monitoring that notices remain in place within the required expiry period could be carried out on a sample basis.

One-off costs would include publicity to notify the public of the changes to processes, use of acrylic holders & fixings, membership of City Car Club. Ongoing costs would include car parking tickets for CPZ areas, fixings for Acrylic holders, and City Car Club costs. However, the benefits of the site notice option would include reduced printing and mailing costs, reduction in planning front-end processing times and making staff efficiencies. This would be more cost effective, not relying on an external supplier (the Post Office) and would be more sustainable, with less use of paper. The initial feasibility indicates an anticipated saving of £46,000 per year.

Should a new approach to consultation be introduced, the aim would be to enhance the current site notice procedures, by publicising any new approach, ensuring robust plastic display holders that could be re-used, ensuring prominent display for instance on two sides of roads, and making sample checks to ensure that the display boards have not been removed. Further review of this option would also include an equalities impact assessment.

Consultation on the Option and the Statement of Community Consultation

The existing consultation/notification process has been agreed as part of the Council's Statement of Community Involvement, and this would have to be altered to incorporate any change. A Revised Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) has just been published for consultation as part of the Local Development Framework (LDF), and responses will be monitored. The overall LDF Public & Stakeholder Consultation programme runs from 17th September-30th November 2010. This revised SCI focuses on current practice and includes a requirement for neighbour notification, rather than allowing for a choice between neighbour notification and site notices to publicise planning applications.

Officers are now taking the recommendation by Regulatory Committee forward as part of discussions on the SCI during the consultation period, albeit introduced after the consultation began. This would be in conjunction with other updates to the SCI to incorporate the most recent legislation and guidance, and other Council documents.