

Planning Forum Meetings:
Kyle Carrick Session – 20th May 2013
Carrick Session - 3rd June 2013

Thank you to all Forum members who took part in the discussions on “Understanding the planning system and how to influence planning decisions”.

The purpose of these sessions was to help the Forum by providing advice on how they could influence planning decisions.

We discussed how communities, especially Community Councils, could best engage in the planning system, particularly with regard to wind energy applications.

We looked at how and when to make comments on planning applications, how to work with developers and how Community Councils can best collect and represent the views of people in their communities.

There were opportunities for members to share their experiences, challenges they faced and best practice.

What we Discussed.....

1. Getting the views of the community

What you said:

- This was extremely difficult as people tended not to engage with the community council for the following reasons:
 1. Degree of apathy
 2. Lack of resources to engage through surveys, etc.
 3. People tend only to contact Community Councils if they are objecting to a proposal and want the CC to assist them.
 4. People only interested in engaging if proposals directly impact on them.

What we advised:

- Greater use of new communication mediums, e.g.

- Facebook/ Twitter
- E-mail
- Community Council e-letters

- Other methods:

- Special meetings –e.g. where a proposal directly affects community
- Training events
- Local radio
- Community notice boards and shop boards
- Ask developer to undertake community opinion survey at their cost but important that Community Council retain oversight of process to avoid any conflict in interests and ensure transparency.
- Surveys undertaken without the endorsement of the community should be treated with caution

2. Local Development Plan Process

What you said:

- Communities are more likely to comment on proposed development *sites* than *policies*.
- Frustration that sites remain allocated despite Community Council making objections

What we advised:

- LDP process takes into account many views from stakeholders and assesses the most suitable and sustainable sites to meet housing requirements for the area.
- Best opportunity to influence development in their area: pro-active rather than re-active

3. Pre –application discussions

What you said:

- Concerns over how Community Councils could engage with developers at pre-application, without committing to a particular stance on a proposal.

What we advised:

Community Councils are required to be consulted by developers on major applications through a pre-application consultation (PAC) process. Please see South Ayrshire Council's [guidance notes](#) for PAC.

DO

- ENGAGE at these stages:
 - I. Pre-app
 - Can express a view without prejudice
 - How to make proposal better
 - II. Application
 - III. Good Neighbour Agreement
- Always ensure separate planning vs. 'other considerations'
- Always ensure all community views collected are represented

DON'T

- Promise to support/object too early
- Lobby elected members – if likely to be involved
- Merge roles

4. The Planning Application

What you said

- A lack of clear guidance on how to engage appropriately with developers
- Community Councils feel they lack expertise to fully consider technical aspects of proposals (e.g. windfarms) and feel that they are at a disadvantage in understanding the potential impacts of proposals on the community and landscape.
- Concern that developers do not present complete or balanced information to community

- How can the CC ensure a good package of benefits for community without supporting proposals?

What we advised

Meeting with a developer

- To ensure **transparency** of decision making, all meetings should be recorded by minutes by the CC and signed off by appropriate persons to ensure they are an accurate record.
- To ensure **impartiality**, key response at the pre-application stage should ideally remain neutral. Be especially careful where the developer offers community benefits to demonstrate impartiality of the planning proposals
- To influence the **best development for the community**, highlight potential issues with development proposals and suggest improvements. You can negotiate community benefits whilst holding a neutral view on the development.
- Proposals must be acceptable in planning terms with, or without, the proposed community benefits.

Community Council commenting on a planning application

- Focus on planning applications of community interest
- State your views – **positives and negatives**. This could help us negotiate improvement.
- Say a little about how you came to this view and the range and numbers of responses from community
- The Planning Service will take into consideration any response a Community Council makes. However, this will form one consideration among many, including the position of planning policies and guidance and other relevant planning matters.

5. After the Planning Application is decided

What we advised

- You might be a key to continuing meaningful dialogue with the developer/ operator during implementation of windfarm developments especially.
- We encourage Good Neighbour Agreements between developers and the community on matters such as construction times and arrangements for accessing the site. We would encourage you to follow these up with the developer to get the best arrangement for your community.

Also what we discussed....

- Most Community Councils respond to significant planning applications in their area and try hard to engage local community
- However they face significant challenges in collecting local views and representing all opinions.
- You were interested in attending a future Planning Aid training event on renewables and will organise that over the next couple of months.