



Bleadon Parish Council

Pre-application Discussion Protocol

BACKGROUND

The term pre-application discussions include any discussions which take place before a decision is taken on an application.

Bleadon Parish Council (the 'Council') acknowledge that developers may wish to present proposals at different planning application stages to the Council and that pre-application discussions play an important role in major developments. The Council welcomes the desire of developers to consult both the Council and the local community more widely. However, the Council is also aware of the importance of public perception in planning and the critical need to avoid any appearance that the Council is conducting secretive negotiations or, colluding with developers. In order to avoid improper lobbying by a developer or creating a perception that the Council have a predetermined position about a proposed development and will follow the policy guidance notes below.

The Council will not express any views at pre-application stage.

SCOPE

This document applies to all Councillors, Committees, Employees of the Council, contractual third parties and agents of the Council who work and act on behalf of the Council.

This document applies to all developers, landowners, their employees and agents that act on their behalf.

Pre-application meetings

In considering a request to meet with a developer prior to formal submission of a planning application, Bleadon Parish Council would expect that:

1. The meeting is open to the public to attend and has been reasonably advertised.
2. The developer meets all reasonable costs for the hosting of the public meeting including the provision of large scale paper plans for display purposes.
3. A public consultation or engagement event is either already scheduled, or firmly planned.

This may take place within a scheduled local council meeting rather than a separate event. Whilst for large developments an initial pre-app meeting and the community engagement event may be far apart in time, for smaller applications, these could effectively be undertaken at the same meeting.

Bleadon Parish Council will **not** normally hold private meetings with developers unless there is a necessary and compelling reason which could be justified to the public (for example a strong commercial sensitivity, where a developer wishes to receive an initial steer before deciding whether to progress).

Pre-application community engagement

Bleadon Parish Council will encourage developers to carry out engagement with the local community before submitting plans for significant or complex developments. Any Pre-application meeting must meet the following expectations:

1. The venue is convenient and accessible in the community.
2. Sufficient and timely publicity within the community and to all likely interested parties. The timing of the meeting should be appropriate to allow as wide a range of people as possible to attend.
3. That there is a genuinely open mind and willingness to adapt plans in response to community feedback.
4. The developer meets all reasonable costs for the hosting of the public meeting including the provision of large scale paper plans for display purposes.

Local Councillors are advised not to attend separate private briefings as part of public consultation, but instead to attend a public event.

Pre Application Process and the Code of Conduct for Local Councils

It is noted that Bleadon Parish Council are concerned about potential issues with encouraging early conversations with developers on pre-application proposals. These include requests for meetings with individual councillors and how feedback on a proposal could be viewed as pre-determination.

It is recommended:

Individual Councillor's discussions

- a. Councillors must be aware of their obligations under the Council's Code of Conduct.
- b. Individual Councillors must not enter into informal discussions of possible future applications with a developer; to do so may lead to a complaint for a potential breach of the Code.
- c. Where a site meeting is needed, the Council will nominate at least two representatives to attend.

A developer should not attempt to lobby individual members; if this occurs, the Local Council reserves the right to withdraw from any pre-application process.

Pre-Determination

Councillors should avoid expressing any detailed opinion or prior view which might be viewed as pre-determination. To this end, a formal meeting arranged by the Town/Parish Council could include the following suggested wording on the meeting agenda or invitation:

While I/Members may express an opinion for or against the proposal at this meeting, my/our mind(s) is/are not closed and I/we will only come to a conclusion on whether I/we should support the scheme or offer an objection after I/we have listened to the full debate.

A similar statement could also be read out and clearly stated at the start of an informal meeting, to make it clear that the members of the Parish Council attending are not pre-determining their position on a proposal. Local councillors could also include the words 'in principle' or 'subject to ..' when expressing their views to further emphasise that any opinions given at this stage are not pre-judging a proposal in advance of a formal planning application.