

22 April 2021

By email: planningpolicy@oxford.gov.uk

working locally and nationally to
protect and enhance a beautiful,
thriving countryside for everyone to
value and enjoy

Oxford City Council Statement of Community Involvement consultation: CPRE Oxfordshire response April 2021

1a) Have you ever been involved in any planning consultations on planning applications or policy documents?

A. Yes

If you responded 'yes' to this question where did you access the information needed?
Please type your answer in the text box below:

A. Planning Portal and other consultation sources

1b) Where or how would it be most useful to go to get involved in planning consultations in the future?

Online

In the city centre

At a 'community hub'

Elsewhere in the city

Other

A. Online

2. During the Covid-19 Pandemic it has been necessary to make greater use of online and 'virtual' means of holding meetings and workshops - do you have any experience of these?

Yes No

A. Yes

If you responded 'yes' to this question do you think they have been effective and what do you feel have been the key benefits or weaknesses?

A. We have had considerable experience of holding virtual meetings. Whilst taking advantage of the opportunities to engage with a wider section of the community who might otherwise, for a number of reasons, not engage with traditional communications, it is important that those not using digital communications are not left behind. The disadvantage of virtual meetings is that they can exclude the digitally uneducated in society and those whose financial situation precludes internet access and experience.

3. Is there anything you would like to see covered in this new revised version of the SCI?

Please enter your answer into the following text box

A. There appears to be no reference to the Climate Emergency. This is most surprising since Oxford City Council unanimously declared a Climate Emergency in January 2019. Because of the long lasting impact of developments, the principles of engagement must be defined in the context of sustainability and the climate emergency declared by the City.

4. Are there any methods of consultation that you have experienced which worked well or that you think would be worth considering?

Please enter your answer into the following text box

A. A much greater and more effective use of social media would benefit many people, but see the answer to Q2 above.

5. When the lockdown comes to an end do you think the revised SCI sets the right balance between in-person meetings and workshops and digital / online options?

Yes No

A. Overall we would say Yes, but see our other comments below.

Do you have any further comments on the revised Statement of Community Involvement (SCI)?

A. We welcome this statement of Community Involvement and the opportunity to comment. It is clear that Oxford City Council have worked hard to make this SCI as comprehensive as possible.

As already mentioned the complete lack of reference to the Climate Emergency is surprising.

The decisions made, and policies set, affect local residents, businesses and organisations now and in the future, so it is important that everyone is involved from the start.

There still appears to be strong emphasis on the more traditional forms of engagement and consultation. There is a place for these but times have changed and people now lead very busy lives which means they cannot always engage in the way they may have done in the past. Methods such as

public exhibitions and council meetings can be time consuming and intimidating for most, as well as being difficult to access. They are also poorly advertised resulting in poorly attended events with an under representation of portions of the community. Social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Nextdoor can all be used to spread the information and engage residents. Nextdoor is fast becoming very popular and many Councils are using it.

Site visits have generally been limited to Council officers and sometimes councillors. When Covid allows and these once again become part of evidence gathering, residents groups, amenity societies and other bodies should be included - they have a wealth of local knowledge.

Following on from the Oxford Citizens Assembly on Climate Change, the Council should consider the formation of citizens panels - groups of local residents. www.involve.org.uk has more information.

Looking at site notices, the City should consider adding Q codes so someone can quickly scan it and be taken straight through to the application details on the Council's website. Adding a visual of the proposed development would also help residents understand better the impact of the proposal on their lives.

About you

CPRE Oxfordshire campaigns for a better future for the countryside and our rural communities. We work to ensure the effective and efficient use of land, including in urban areas, and support communities to access, appreciate and care for their local countryside.