



CHOBHAM PARISH COUNCIL

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Planning Policy
Surrey Heath Borough Council
Surrey Heath House
Knoll Road
Camberley
Surrey GU15 3HD

By email: policy.consult@surreyheath.gov.uk

Dear Sir/Madam

Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) Consultation Response

Thank you for inviting Chobham Parish Council's views on the above consultation. The Council very much believes in community engagement in the planning system and supports the aims of the statement.

After reviewing the draft document, the Council would like to make the following observations and comments:

1. As one of the principles of community involvement is identified as "increased focus on the priorities identified by the local community" (paragraph 1.5), the Parish Council wonders whether more could be done to ensure Surrey Heath Borough Council (SHBC) is aware of the priorities at a very local level in Chobham. The Parish Council would welcome any opportunity to explore this issue further.
2. Now that planning applications and planning policy documents are almost all published exclusively online, it is of great importance that there is no delay in their publication and that they are easily accessible 24/7, particularly during consultation periods. Online feedback forms should be user-friendly and not overly prescriptive or repetitive (e.g. not selecting from a set of pre-defined responses or forcing a response to every section of longer consultations).

3. As a key user of SHBC's online planning pages, the Parish Council feels it would have been appropriate to have been consulted at an early stage before the implementation of the new online system. It is felt that the lack of consultation was a missed opportunity to ensure that the new system would be set up to suit users' needs. The Council would appreciate being consulted on any future major changes which could affect its workflow.
4. While it is understood that the Planning Authority cannot require developers to involve the local community, SHBC is in a position to help developers recognise the value and benefits of genuine engagement with the community from an early stage. There remains a perception that public engagement is a "tick box exercise" for developers and recent experiences in Chobham have done nothing to change that view.
5. The Parish Council has previously written to the Borough Council regarding its concerns around changes to planning laws affecting High Streets. Since that letter, it appears there are even more widespread plans to extend permitted development rights. Community involvement cannot take place if changes are made at government level that remove the chance for occupiers, neighbours, local people and groups to have a say. The Parish Council urges the Borough Council to resist changes to legislation that undermine public involvement in the planning process.
6. It is noted that the topics of appeals and enforcement do not appear to be covered in the document. The Parish Council suggests that as these are planning matters where the community has an interest, it may be appropriate for the Planning Authority to detail how it will involve the community and stakeholders in these areas.
7. Chobham Parish Council previously discussed with SHBC the possibility of holding a public meeting regarding potential re-development of the Fair Oaks Airport site. SHBC advised that its preferred approach for such a meeting would be to listen to what the public have to say rather than give a prepared speech. The meeting did not end up taking place, but could have been a valuable way to involve the public at an early stage. The Planning Authority may wish to consider including a public meeting as part of its standard process when potential development is of a scale affecting large numbers of people within the Borough.
8. The SCI draft document mentions petitions in relation to how many signatories are required to trigger public speaking at a Planning Applications Committee meeting, but does not seem to cover or signpost how the Council will respond to planning-related petitions themselves and what action can be expected.
9. It is suggested that the "hard to reach" groups listed in paragraph 1.8 could include members of the public who are not online and/or not confident with technology.
10. On a general note, it is felt that public confidence and trust in the planning system is vital to encouraging engagement. Upholding planning conditions, swift action to deal with breaches, equality and consistency of planning decisions, evidence that views and comments have been taken into account,

and many other factors play an important part in maintaining or restoring such confidence.

I trust that the above feedback is useful and, as always, if the Council can provide any further information or clarification around the above points, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'CLC' or similar, written in a cursive style.

C L Cooper
Planning Administrator