

## COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT:

### Good progress to report but does it make a difference what you think?

The Government says it wants individual citizens and community groups to be directly involved in drawing up development plans and deciding on planning applications. Simply being "consulted" after schemes have been drawn up is no longer enough. Involvement must be from the very start of an idea for development; must give some choice between options; and must be continued until the development is decided. Government legislation requires all Local Planning Authorities to publish a "Statement of Community Involvement" (SCI) setting out exactly how these aims are to be achieved.



Bristol City Council first produced a Draft Statement in January 2006 with very little public involvement until the time of a Public Hearing by an independent Planning Inspector. The Society gave evidence. The BCC Draft Statement was rejected by the Inspector as not being fit for purpose. A new attempt was made in July 2007, this time following a series of meetings with a wide range of community group representatives, including the Civic Society, as members of the newly formed Bristol Neighbourhood Planning Network.

There is much to applaud in the new Draft SCI. There now appears to be a big shift in intent on the part of the Council in favour of community involvement; there is now a clear commitment to allocate the resources of money and manpower that are necessary; the role of local neighbourhood planning groups is embedded into the community involvement process. Special thanks and credit go to the City Council Corporate Communications Manager and the Citywide Planning Policy Project Manager for their concern for, and attention to, understanding the community view. This is good news.

At the core of the new Draft are ten rules that the Council, the community, developers and applicants for planning permission for major schemes, all have to follow in order to ensure that the community can make an informed choice whenever a development scheme is being drawn up. The big question is, as it seems to be with many of the policies produced by the City Council, will the rules be fully implemented in practice?

The City Council, Business West and the Bristol Property Agents Association have recently drawn

up a "protocol" agreement on how to deal with public involvement in development schemes and development planning applications in general. This promises public involvement will be carried out in accordance with the Statement of Community Involvement. That is also good news.

However, there is yet another document called a "Planning Delivery Agreement" drawn up between the City Council and each applicant for a major scheme. In practice, like the recent case of

Canons Marsh, there are still developers and development schemes – Redcliffe neighbourhood is a case in point - where the "Planning Delivery Agreements" do not ensure that the SCI and its basic ten rules for effective community involvement are followed. It still seems as possible as it ever was for schemes that do not effectively implement community views to get planning permission.

So, after some very hard work we now seem likely to get more involvement in the planning process in Bristol, but will that involvement have a tangible effect on the decisions that are made? Unless the City Council makes this clear in practice then the SCI may be only another glossy document to keep people quiet.

Come on City Council: give a straight answer to the questions. What major schemes have been significantly changed in order to follow community views?

Does it really make a difference what people think?

The Council will say: *of course*.

We say: *prove it*

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- The new July 2007 Draft SCI including the rules in Appendix E can be viewed on the Council website at [www.bristol.gov.uk](http://www.bristol.gov.uk) (and type SCI in the Search box) or hard copies obtained from the Enquiry desk at Brunel House.
- The Civic Society comments on the new Draft SCI of July 2007 can be viewed on the Civic Society website at: [www.bristolcivicsociety.cjb.net](http://www.bristolcivicsociety.cjb.net) or for copies please contact David Farnsworth