

**APPENDIX 1A – QUESTIONNAIRE TO VOLUNTARY ORGANISATIONS**

**Summary of findings**

**1 INTRODUCTION**

At the beginning of January 2005, just over 250 questionnaires were sent out to voluntary organisations covering the several broad areas of interest.

1.1 By the middle of February some 56 responses had been received as follows:

| <b>Type of Organisation</b>            | <b>No. sent out</b> | <b>No. Returned</b> |
|--|---------------------|---------------------|
| Arts & Education                       | 23                  | 5                   |
| Children & Youth                       | 34                  | 5                   |
| Civic & Amenity                        | 3                   | 3                   |
| Community                              | 27                  | 6                   |
| Disabilities                           | 22                  | 5                   |
| Environmental, Wildlife & Preservation | 20                  | 11                  |
| Residents                              | 41                  | 9                   |
| Rural                                  | 2                   | 2                   |
| Sports                                 | 31                  | 5                   |
| Voluntary Action & Social Support      | 50                  | 13*                 |

\* One returned as Clerk to Parish Council

- 1.2 The purposes of the questionnaire were fourfold. First, to ascertain the most up-to-date information possible about the organisations active in the Borough. This included contact details, the areas they draw their membership from, the number of members they had, and their interests. Second to find out whether they wished to be involved in the new plan-making process and consulted about planning applications. Thirdly, to help in the assessment of methods of involving people in plan making; and finally, to ask for possible suggestions for improving consultations on planning applications.
- 1.3 The contact details provided by the respondents has been used to update the Borough Council's mailing lists. The contact details for organisations not sent the questionnaire is currently being updated. These organisations are:
- The Specific Consultation Bodies;
  - The Other Consultation Bodies;
  - Organisations representing different race, ethnic and national groups; and
  - Organisations representing different faith groups.
- (See Appendix 2 for more detail.)
- 1.4 Organisations representing business interests have been contacted already about the preparation of an Economic Development Strategy for the Borough. Those contacted will be given the opportunity to engage in the preparation of the Local Development Framework and the work coming out of the preparation of the Economic Development Strategy will inform its preparation.

## 2 QUESTIONNAIRE FINDINGS – PLAN MAKING

- 2.1 Nearly all of the organisations responding (90.2%) wanted to be involved in preparing the Local Development Framework and four-fifths (81%) wanted to be consulted about planning applications. The organisations were asked whether they would be prepared to join with others to discuss common issues and develop ideas with Borough Council officers. Again, nearly all respondents (90.3%) were willing to do this, although concern was expressed by one supportive organisation that meetings might be held at short notice. Another stressed the need to ensure that organisations of disabled people are fully engaged by making all events inclusive and independently accessible by all. The reasons given by the organisations that were not supportive of the approach can be summarised as follows:
- Fear that one group might dominate debate;
  - Concern that should be able to maintain their independence; and
  - Concern that it could be difficult for some organisations to resource because of commitments.

- 2.2 A further question was asked about combining consultations. This was whether the organisations agreed that existing structures, such as Town and Parish Councils, and umbrella organisations, such as the Council for Voluntary Service, should be used for combined consultations on matters of common interest. The lack of a town council for the Royal Tunbridge Wells area was flagged up. Nonetheless, a substantial majority (86.8%) agreed with the suggested approach. The concerns raised by those who did not agree were as follows:

Particular specialist knowledge and views should be considered directly “by those determining the Local Development Framework”;

That they should only be used where appropriate;

That it might be an “indecisive talkshop” and less effective than “freestanding consultations”

Concern that it might be a barrier to the involvement of some organisations;

Were not aware of the structure and umbrella groups;

Would only agree to combine with other organisations of disabled people when discussing matters of access, service provision facilities and the built environment; and

That it could be difficult for some organisations to resource because of commitments.

- 2.3 The final question about plan making sought to assess how valuable organisations felt different methods of engagement would be for different types of Local Development Document. The findings are summarised in table A2.1 below. For each method and each subject the “very useful” and “useful” scores were added together, as were those for not very useful and useless. Where methods were scored 60% -70% as useful or very useful, they have been given one tick. Where the score is 70% or more, there are two ticks.
- 2.4 Making consultation drafts of documents available for viewing was consistently scored as being useful or very useful as a method of consultation. Presentations by planning staff with question and answer sessions also scored highly. These are both traditional methods of consultation. Many of the voluntary groups that responded to the questionnaire are used to being involved in planning matters and appear satisfied to continue to be involved in this way. Familiarity with the process is likely to be significant in the methods they chose to highlight. Certainly, these two methods are useful at later stages in the plan-making process.
- 2.5 One of the techniques referred to was Planning for Real ®. This was used to represent a range of techniques for involving the community in detailed plan-making. It scored relatively highly for developing a core strategy, land allocations and area action plans

as well as, amongst the Supplementary Planning Documents, planning briefs and conservation area appraisals. Practitioners see this technique as being most useful for detailed local work and less suited to developing a core strategy. However, there is some overlap with some of the techniques for facilitated workshops. This method scored relatively well for developing a core strategy.

- 2.6 Staffed exhibitions were seen as useful for land allocations and area action plans. However, overall, less scope was seen for alternatives to the more traditional methods of consultation for developing other Development Plan Documents, such as generic development control policies, and more theoretical Supplementary Planning Documents, although questionnaires and surveys were reasonably highly regarded for these subjects.
- 2.7 High profile events were least well-regarded overall. Generally, the preparation of land allocations and area action plans were seen to have most scope for alternative methods to the traditional consultation drafts and staffed exhibition approaches.

**Table A1.1: Methods of Engagement by Subject of Consultation**

| Subject of engagement<br>(see Glossary – Appendix 3)   | Method of Engagement          |                                       |  |   |  |                          |   |
|--|-------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--|---|--|--------------------------|---|
|  | Facilitated workshop sessions | Exhibitions staffed by planning staff | Planning for Real <sup>®</sup> exercises (see Glossary – Appendix 3) | Presentation by planning staff with questions & answers | Consultation drafts of documents available for viewing | Questionnaires & surveys | High profile events e.g., interactive exhibitions or other events |
| (1) Developing a vision or core policies (the Core Strategy)   | ✓                             |                                       | ✓  | ✓ ✓   | ✓ ✓  |                          |   |
| (2) Identifying issues and commenting on proposals to identify sites where specific uses should go (Land Allocations)  |                               | ✓                                     | ✓  | ✓ ✓   | ✓ ✓  | ✓ ✓                      |   |
| (3) Identifying issues and commenting on proposals and priorities for a specific area (Area Action Plans)  |                               | ✓                                     | ✓ ✓  | ✓ ✓   | ✓ ✓  | ✓ ✓                      |   |
| (4) Reviewing and agreeing policies against which proposals for development would be tested (Development Control Policies)   |                               |                                       |  | ✓ ✓   | ✓ ✓  |                          |   |
| Commenting on detailed proposals or advice about specific sites or areas, e.g., planning briefs or Conservation Area Appraisals (Supplementary Planning Documents) |                               |                                       | ✓  | ✓ ✓   | ✓ ✓  |                          |   |
| Commenting on detailed proposals or advice about specific types of development, e.g., affordable housing (Supplementary Planning Documents)                        |                               |                                       |  | ✓ ✓   | ✓ ✓  | ✓                        |   |

**Key:** ✓ Well-regarded method of engagement      ✓ ✓ Very well-regarded method of engagement

### 3 QUESTIONNAIRE FINDINGS – CONSULTATIONS ON PLANNING APPLICATIONS

- 3.1 The voluntary groups were asked how satisfied they were with the way the Borough Council consults on planning applications and provides advice and seeks feedback on planning services. They were also invited to advise the Borough Council of what it could do to improve consultations on planning applications.
- 3.2 The responses indicated that most of the organisations wanted to be involved in considering planning applications. However, there was generally limited knowledge of the various advice leaflets produced by the Borough Council and the Planning Services Charter. Over half were either fairly (50%) or very satisfied (9%) with consultation arrangements.
- 3.3 Comments were also sought on how the Borough Council might improve the way it consults on planning applications. The responses to this can be summarised as follows:
- The Weald of Kent Preservation Society’s “planning scrutineers” were generally pleased with recent improvements and decisions
  - Consultation should be early enough to make a difference
  - Consultations should be broader than at present
  - Consult a representative cross-section of parties likely to be affected by an application
  - The website facilities should be improved
  - There should be more well publicised [local] public meetings with good prior notice
  - Objectors should be advised when planning applications are to be considered
  - Objectors should be given more than 3 minutes to speak at Committee meetings
  - More weight should be given to consultations in committee reports
  - There should be feedback to those who have commented and reasons for granting permission given
  - Publish reasons for advertisement of applications
  - Publicity should be consistent
  - There should be more advisory leaflets and the media used to explain the planning process
  - There should be higher profile in the local press with more space dedicated to planning information with comment slips or easy ways of commenting
  - The information leaflets should be available on audio tapes
  - The Kent Reference Panel and Independence and Access Matters should be consulted on planning applications
  - As there is no Town Council for Royal Tunbridge Wells, the Civic Society should be used in a similar manner
  - Have evening meetings for Western Area Committee
  - Documentation should always be available at Cranbrook offices