



MINISTERIAL ADVISORY GROUP
FOR ARCHITECTURE AND THE BUILT
ENVIRONMENT FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council Consultation

Draft Statement of Community Involvement

MAG Response

22 | 12 | 15

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Ministerial Advisory Group (MAG) Response**

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By email to:

planning@lisburncastlereagh.gov.uk

1.00 General

- 1.01 MAG was established in 2007 to advise the Minister for Culture, Arts and Leisure on the implementation of the Architecture and Built Environment Policy.
- 1.02 MAG welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Draft Statement of Community Involvement, and would advise as follows.

2.00 Consultation Response

- 2.01 MAG congratulates the Council on including the extensive list of groups and organisations in Annex 4 who will be recognised for their potential involvement. MAG would define many of these as “local communities” – *neighbours* of places – and others as “passionate communities of interest” who may be thought of as *friends* of places.
- 2.02 MAG further congratulates the Council on the overall excellent quality of the Statement of Community Involvement. It is impressive, extensive and readable, explaining a complex process very effectively and efficiently. MAG believes that community involvement can be further encouraged and can be most helpful to Council if the Statement of Community Involvement makes it clear that there are several opportunities for involvement that can bring changes quickly and facilitate preparations for the Local Development Plan. These opportunities do not have to wait for a Local Development Plan – indeed they can feed into it. They can be initiated by groups and individuals in the community and presented directly or through elected representatives. The opportunities include:

- Visioning in each Ward. Wards are clearly mapped places of a size and population where people themselves can make a positive difference in just a few weeks and provide useful information for the Local Development Plan process;
- Preparation of new supplementary planning guidance, specific to the Council area or part of it;
- Designations or changes in Conservation Areas;
- Local listing of buildings of community importance.

Such involvement can provide results quickly, producing real positive change and encouraging further creative involvement of the wide range of local communities and communities of interest as well as the elected representatives themselves. The proposals can be tested and

consulted upon early in the programme of work, in tandem with and informing the preparation of the Preferred Options Papers.

2.03 MAG would also encourage the Council to promote Civic and Urban Stewardship as part of the Statement of Community Involvement. Stewardship is now embedded in the reformed planning system through the “Living Places” guide and the Strategic Planning Policy Statement. Stewardship is an ideal way to improve places quickly while learning about them and is highly involving of local people in their own Wards. MAG can assist the Council with training and mentoring to involve people in developing and improving stewardship for public places – both external (public realm, parks, etc.) and internal (schools, hospitals, administrative buildings, etc.)

2.04 MAG’s report “Civic Stewardship.....doing more with what we've got” published in 2013, results from innovative work with 22 Councils in Northern Ireland. It gives over thirty examples of civic stewardship techniques and puts these in the context of HM Treasury Green Book’s binding guidance for evaluating all public projects. The report is freely available on the DCAL website at:

<https://www.dcalni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/dcal/mag-civic-stewardship-interim-report.pdf>

MAG published a Final Report and Recommendations on Civic Stewardship 2014, which is available on the DCAL website at:

<https://www.dcalni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/dcal/mag-civic-stewardship-final-report.pdf>

2.05 MAG wishes the Council well with its endeavours for a shared vision in participation in decision making and perceives an opportunity to further develop creative consultation as an experiential methodology, demonstrated in the DCAL / MAG /SIB Creative Consultation Toolkit which is online at

<http://toolkit.creativityni.org/>

and which can include additional creative consultation case studies as they emerge.

3.00 Comments on specific paragraphs

3.01 Suggestions are given following specific paragraphs from the SCI, which are excerpted below in italics.

3.02 Some changes are also made within the excerpted paragraphs, and have been highlighted for convenience.

2.2 Anyone who wishes to get involved in the preparation of this local development plan will be encouraged to do so at the opportunities provided. In particular the views of the following groups of people will be sought:

- *People living within the area / neighbourhood;*
- *Elected representatives;*
- *Voluntary groups;*
- *Community forums / groups / umbrella organisations;*
- *Environmental groups;*
- *Residents groups;*
- *Business interests; and*
- *Developers / landowners*

3.03 'All individuals and groups with an interest in the area' could be added to this list of bullet points.

Pre-Application Discussions (PADs)

3.3 Pre-application discussions are encouraged for a range of types of applications, both major and local. The objective of pre-application discussions should be to confirm whether the principle of development is acceptable and to clarify the format, type and level of detail required to enable the Council to determine an application. For major applications, this process will enable the applicant to discuss with the Council details of how the community should be involved in the decision-making process.

3.04 In the interests of efficient front loading, the council should consider notifying notifiable neighbours* that a Pre-Application Discussion is to take place and invite the notifiable neighbours to be present or represented at the Discussion. This would potentially identify aspects of neighbourliness of which planning officers and the developer may not have been aware, enabling them to be taken into consideration at the earliest possible stage, when the issues are easiest and cheapest to

deal with and before large amounts of money have been spent on professional fees.

- 3.05 *Notifiable neighbours are defined in 3.12: "Under the Council's Neighbour Notification Scheme, the Council will ensure that planning applications are brought to the individual attention of the occupiers of buildings on neighbouring land which are within 90m of the boundary of the application site.

5.0 COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING GUIDANCE

5.1 The Council will also prepare non-statutory planning guidance to support its development plan. Supplementary planning guidance includes for example design guides and advice notes. These will be published for public consultation and comment prior to the publication of the final draft, there will however be no opportunity for formal objection to this type of document. Comments received will be published on the Council web site.

- 3.06 Supplementary planning guidance is a very important determinant of placemaking but is perhaps less well known and understood by local people who are not normally directly involved in planning. Its influence on a place should not be underestimated and this section should be expanded to explain this, preferably with examples or reference to such examples. The paragraph at present understates the need for public involvement in supplementary planning guidance, particularly when the guidance may be specific to certain places or activities rather than generic across the entire council area. There should be opportunities stated for groups and individuals to initiate as well as participate in preparing supplementary planning guidance.

6.0 COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN CONSERVATION AREA DESIGNATION

6.1 A Conservation Area is an area of special architectural or historic interest, the character of which it is desirable to preserve and enhance. The Council considers that consultation with, and the involvement of local people is important when undertaking work associated with Conservation Areas. This will help encourage greater ownership of the concept and greater co-operation and commitment to achieving the aims of the designation. The Council will involve the community in the designation, variation or cancellation of a Conservation Area. This will entail formal consultation with the Historic Buildings Council and Department for Regional Development, advertising by way of a public notice in the local press and public meetings to discuss and present proposals. Upon formal designation the Council will publish a public notice in the local press and hold a public launch and exhibition.

- 3.07 The council should consider inviting proposals at any time from the public for new Conservation Areas or for changes to Conservation Area boundaries or status. There have been instances in the past where residents have successfully advocated for Conservation Area and Area of Townscape Character status and other cases where residents' lobbying has not been successful, to the longer term detriment of an area.

Annex 3 - Consultees Development Plan

The following consultation bodies are statutory consultees for the Local Development Plan process.

1. Northern Ireland Government departments;

- 3.08 Whilst it is noted that Government departments are to be consulted along with Executive colleagues, it may be helpful if the Ministerial Advisory Group is added to the list, making the link more direct between MAG and the council and speeding up communications. MAG can, however, be considered as a non-statutory consultee and offers the multi-disciplinary expertise of some 30 members and expert advisors, all experienced in briefing and design review.
- 3.09 Subject to resources, MAG can offer reviews at no cost to the Council for strategic proposals and projects and at cost to the Council if non-strategic proposals are to be considered. MAG's research on over 50 design reviews shows that the sooner a project or proposal is brought for review, the greater the benefit and the lower the cost.

3.10 Leaving projects until they become pre-application discussions or have already been submitted as planning applications gives commissioning bodies, project and design teams little room to consider the wider context which MAG always reviews. MAG agrees with government's advice that "the million pound mistake is made on day one". "Day one" is often before a design team has even been appointed – hence the offer of briefing review as well as design review.

Nicola Waddington

MAG Member, Chair of Lisburn & Castlereagh area Subgroup of MAG

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