



The Civic Society For Milton Keynes

Development Plans
Milton Keynes Council
Civic Offices
1 Saxon Gate East
Milton Keynes
MK9 3EJ

By email to development.plans@milton-keynes.gov.uk

7 March 2019

Dear Sir

DRAFT STATEMENT OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

As the Civic Society for Milton Keynes we welcome the opportunity to comment upon this matter and have the following points to make:

1. We are concerned that, despite the fine words within the current Statement of Community Involvement, the reality does not bear out the Council's intentions. We assume that we are classed as a "Voluntary body whose activities benefit the area" and therefore, we consider that we should be consulted as a matter of course upon all planning documents because either a) they will affect the Borough as a whole (for policy reasons) or b) they will relate to matters of interest to our members. However, this does not happen as a matter of course, particularly regarding Development Briefs, and we only tend to find out about such consultations by word of mouth or reading the Council's meeting agendas. This is clearly unsatisfactory as it reduces the time that we have to make comments.
2. This was demonstrated in the way that the consultation was handled for Plan:MK - for example, we only received late notification about the Open Space Assessment and were not informed at all about the Green Infrastructure Strategy and, although we were given an extended deadline for the latter, we were not told about, or involved with, any of the prior meetings and nor was there a response to our suggestion that we meet with officers. Our comments were partially acknowledged because, in both cases, they led to some welcome changes to

Milton Keynes Forum, City Discovery Centre, Bradwell Abbey,
Milton Keynes MK13 9AP
MK Forum is registered with Civic Voice

wording in Plan:MK: had we had a greater, and earlier involvement, we feel that we could have contributed further.

3. As a general comment we feel that we tend to be "consulted at" rather than "consulted with". We spend a long time preparing our comments (which, we feel, are well considered) and which then seem to disappear into a void. We are not informed as a matter of course about how they have been received, when they are to be presented to committee etc.
4. We also feel that there are occasions in which our comments have not been understood and the way in which they have been interpreted in public documents is incorrect.
5. As a consequence we get the general feeling that consultation seems to be a "box ticking" exercise rather than something in which comments from the public are genuinely welcomed.
6. What can be done to improve the matter?
 - a. The Forum should be an automatic consultee upon all planning related matters across the Borough.
 - b. Once all comments have been received and assessed, a meeting should be arranged so that the appropriate Council Officer can meet respondents to discuss the comments made and how it is intended to deal with them. The Officer should then send a draft of his/her response to all those who have made comments to allow for any errors of interpretation to be corrected.
 - c. All respondents should be informed in advance of the date that the results of the consultation are to be formally considered by the Council (Cabinet, Delegated Decisions etc) so that they can attend the meetings and make further comments if appropriate.
 - d. There should be a regular report (every six months?) detailing the consultations that the Council has undertaken that fall within the scope of the Statement of Community Involvement and the nature of the bodies that have been consulted.

Public consultation is an important part of the development process. We do not think our proposals onerous and feel that they would be a genuine help in improving local democracy: we would welcome the opportunity to discuss them further in person.

Yours faithfully

TIM SKELTON
CHAIR