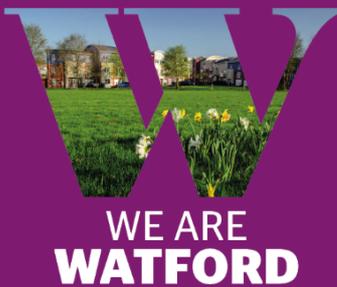


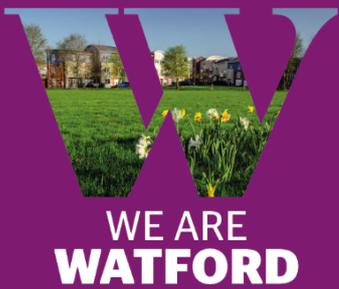
Watford Borough Council Statement of Community Involvement

November 2019



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BOROUGH
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What is the Statement of Community Involvement?

Planning affects us all. It helps to shape the places we live, work and play in.

As the local planning authority, Watford Borough Council has the responsibility of planning for the needs of a changing population, providing sustainable locations for housing, employment and recreational activities, whilst protecting the environment and those parts of the town with heritage value.

Agreeing the best way to do this can be difficult, requiring tough decisions about priorities. The [National Planning Policy Framework \(NPPF\) 2019](#)¹ states that the purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development. This is within the context of managing development at a time where we face unique challenges, such as ambitious housing targets and the need to address the negative impacts of climate change. Planning is essentially about people and action at the local level can be effective in meeting these challenges. Today, planning is a process where everyone should have the chance to be involved in shaping the town's future, according with the council's vision of a bold and progressive future for Watford.

In this context, the Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) sets out Watford Borough Council's commitments to involving communities, local businesses and other organisations and stakeholders in the planning process. The statement will guide how we consult in the future and provide a benchmark against which community engagement will be measured.

All local planning authorities are required under Section 18 of the [Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004](#)², as amended, to prepare and maintain a Statement of Community Involvement. Watford's first Statement of Community Involvement was adopted in 2006 and has been subsequently revised.

This Statement of Community Involvement accounts for updates in legislation and changes in the way that we wish to engage with the community. This includes the greater use of technology and social media as a way of reaching out to more residents, groups and organisations that have a stake in Watford's growth. The document will continue to be revised in the future as the most effective ways to consult evolves.

The Statement of Community Involvement covers both strands of planning (planning policy and development management) and sets out how both sections will seek to engage the

¹https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/810197/NPPF_Feb_2019_revised.pdf

² <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2004/5/contents>

community. A wider overview of their work will be provided in Sections 2 and 4. The process of creating a neighbourhood plan is covered in Section 3.

Planning Policy

What is Planning Policy?

Planning activity at local government level is split into two functions: policy and development management.

Planning policy relates to long term plans and strategies that guide future development and protect particular sites or areas. This is mainly through the writing of a **Local Plan** (this process is further explained in Section 2.6).

However, there are limited issues that planning policies and the Local Plan have influence over. Some of the issues that planning policies can shape are:-

- The level of affordable housing in a new development
- The type of housing and the housing mix
- Cycle and car parking provision in new developments
- The protection of land for employment, retail, community or leisure uses
- Protection of parks and open space
- Allocating land for residential or commercial development
- Establishing policies for air quality, noise and contaminated land
- Flooding and energy efficiency policies

Issues regarding the road network, highways, public transport, schools and health facilities are not within the remit of Watford Borough Council as they are the responsibility of other administrative stakeholders. However, issues associated with these topics are regularly discussed through liaisons with the relevant providers and authorities.

The council's planning policies are required to follow the national guidance set out by the Government in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

What Does a Local Planning Authority Produce?

Local planning authorities produce a wide range of plans and documents to guide development in their administrative area. Some of the documents produced are shown in Figure 1. Some of the documents prepared are mandatory, while others are optional.

Figure 1: Planning Policy Documents



As shown in Figure 1, the local authority is required to produce a Local Plan. The Local Plan consists of statutory Local Plan documents and optional Local Plan documents (formally referred to as local development documents). These documents consist of:

- Core Strategy (strategic policies)
- Development Management policies
- Site allocations
- Proposals map
- Sustainability appraisal
- Area Action Plans (optional)

The **Local Development Scheme** sets out the timeframe for producing the Local Plan.

Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) are prepared to help implement policies in the Local Plan. They explain key parts of a policy, how it is to be interpreted and how applicants can ensure they submit applications that are compliant with the Local Plan. For example, the Watford Borough Council Residential Design Guide sets out how to formulate design proposals for new development to ensure high quality design.

Why Consult?

Inviting people and organisations to have a say in the decisions that affect them has a number of benefits, including:-

- The ability to gather local and specialist knowledge on specific sites and issues
- The opportunity to ensure that development is representative of the community and their aspirations for Watford
- Fostering a greater sense of community ownership in the planning process
- Ensuring an open and transparent system
- Improving understanding of the planning process

Consulting on planning decisions is an important theme of the National Planning Policy Framework which emphasises that early, proportionate and effective engagement between plan-makers and communities, local organisations, businesses, infrastructure providers and operators and statutory consultees is essential.

In some instances, local authorities are required to consult particular stakeholders. These organisations are called **specific consultation bodies** and are set out in [The Town and Country Planning \(Local Planning\) \(England\) Regulations 2012](#)³, as amended. Other stakeholders the planning authority may choose to consult with, such as voluntary organisations, are called **general consultation bodies**. A list of these bodies is provided in Appendix A.

For cross boundary issues, the [Localism Act \(2011\)](#)⁴, as amended, places a '**duty to co-operate**' on local planning authorities and neighbouring boroughs, and various public bodies to work collaboratively on strategic issues. A list of these bodies is set out in Appendix A.

The planning authority welcomes public involvement in the planning process and encourages people and organisations to participate in public consultations. The council maintains a database of contact details of all those who wish to be updated on the progress of the Local

³ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2012/767/contents/made>

⁴ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2011/20/contents/enacted>

Plan. Any person or organisation who would like to be involved in the Watford planning process, including the Local Plan, can request to be added to the consultee list by contacting:

Post: Planning Policy, Watford Borough Council, Town Hall, Watford, WD17 3EX

Telephone: 01923 278263

Email: strategy@watford.gov.uk

Where we have your details on our databases for consultation purposes, we will not give them out to anyone else, and only use them to contact you regarding planning policy matters. Your data is protected by the [General Data Protection Regulations](#) (2018)⁵. The [council's data protection policy](#) is available on our website.

The Principles of Consultation

To encourage public participation in consultations there are some overarching principles that will guide the council's approach. These principles have been developed to support a planning process that is inclusive of everyone's views and reflective of Watford's diverse community.

Consultation in Watford regularly attracts active participation from those with professional interest, such as planning consultancy firms and developers, and those of retired age. Whilst all opinions are valuable, the council recognises the need to widen participation and engage 'harder to reach' groups.

To maximise participation, we will:

- Use targeted means to enable participation from 'hard to reach' groups
- Make every effort to meet the requirements of the [Equality Act 2010](#)⁶
- Only use accessible venues for meetings and exhibitions
- Hold meetings and exhibitions in different venues around Watford and on different dates/times to make attendance convenient for all
- Write in plain English and avoid planning jargon
- Make alternative versions of any consultation document, such as large print, braille or translations, available on request
- Use a variety of consultation methods and media to make sure that all those who want to participate are able to be involved
- Make sure consultation material is accessible, engaging and interactive

⁵ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukdsi/2018/9780111165782/contents>

⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/equality-act-2010-guidance>

- Ensure prior notification is given of all consultation dates
- Provide clear deadlines for consultation responses
- Provide a Freepost envelope for all written consultation
- Provide a consultation statement (although the nature of this may vary) which summarises the feedback received
- Consider and include the results of consultation, as appropriate, into our documents

How Will We Consult?

There are lots of different ways we can communicate with you. These may vary depending on what we are consulting on. We will try to use a diverse range of methods to get people involved, which are underlined below:

Webpage

As well as using the council's website, we will also use our own webpage to publicise some consultations.

The Planning Policy team have their own website to publicise issues related to the Local Plan, found at:

www.watfordlocalplan.co.uk

Any online surveys we may use to gather information will be found via either our website, or the council's website.



Public Notices and Press Releases

Depending on what we are consulting on, there may be requirements to publish public notices. This will often be done through site notices in visible locations and a public notice in the local newspaper (the Watford Observer). Other press releases may include:

- Interviews on local radio stations
- Press releases on the council's website
- Articles in local magazines, such as About Watford (sent to every household in the borough)



Staffed Exhibitions

We will sometimes hold staffed exhibitions as a way for you to meet the council's town planners and discuss the issues that are important to you.

Exhibitions are a useful way to share plans and proposals in an informal way, as well as to answer any questions you may have.

Workshops may also be used where appropriate.



Document Viewings

We will make any documents we are consulting on available to view in accessible locations. During periods of consultation, the documents will be available to view in the Town Hall and Watford's two libraries (Watford Central Library and North Watford Library).

We may also leave documents in venues where we are holding staffed exhibitions.



Social Media

Social media is a useful tool to engage with people of all ages from the comfort of their own home. Where possible, we will publicise consultations using:

- Facebook
- Twitter
- YouTube videos
- Other interactive web based applications



Other

Other ways we may choose to involve you are:

- Leaflet or letter drops to households
- Posters placed in visible locations such as notice boards in parks and open spaces, in bus shelters and town centre locations
- Emails/letters to those on our consultation database
- Officers attending meetings and forums (where resources allow)



The Watford Local Plan

How to Get Involved: The Local Plan

Local planning authorities must consult when preparing a **Local Plan**. The process of producing a Local Plan has many stages and involves consultation at different stages. The process of producing a Local Plan and the relevant regulations of the [Town and Country Planning \(Local Planning\) \(England\) Regulations 2012](#)⁷, as amended, are set out below. This section sets out how we will involve you at each stage. The preparation of a local plan takes about three years. The timetable for Watford’s New Local Plan is set out in the council’s [Local Development Scheme](#)⁸.

Pre-Production & Evidence Gathering

This stage is about collecting information to inform the plan, and identifying the “Issues and Options” for future growth in the borough.

⁷ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2012/767/contents/made>

⁸ https://www.watford.gov.uk/info/20168/planning_policy/861/watford_local_plan/6

What the council is required to do (Regulation 18):

- Send letters/emails to specific and general consultation bodies, alongside other non-statutory consultees regarding what the Local Plan should contain
- Invite representations on cross-boundary issues and strategic matters
- Consult on the Scoping Report for Sustainability Appraisal for a minimum of 5 weeks
- Publish a public notice

What the council will also do:

- Use the dedicated Local Plan website to host an online survey to gather information
- Host staffed exhibitions in different, accessible locations throughout the borough
- Publicise the consultation through use of social media, leaflet drops, posters, press releases, articles, interviews and public notices, as appropriate
- An “Issues and Options” document and the Sustainability Appraisal will be available to view in the Town Hall, the two libraries and other potential locations.

Draft Local Plan

The information gathered through the “Issues and Options” consultation is considered alongside other evidence bases that identify issues and opportunities in the borough, and in some cases the wider area. This might include an economic study, for example, which would inform the council about how much employment land we need to plan for. A local housing need assessment can tell the council what type of new homes are required in Watford.

Both sets of information are then used to shape the first draft Local Plan that includes emerging policies and site allocations. Consultation on the first draft Local Plan is informally referred to as “Preferred Options”.

What the council is required to do (Regulation 18):

The council is only required to consult once before the Plan is submitted as part of Regulation 18. However, to increase engagement we have chosen to consult on this stage to make sure that the process of making the Local Plan is as inclusive as possible.

What the council will also do:

The Preferred Options consultation will take a similar form to that of the consultation on Issues and Options. We will:-

- Send emails/letters to specific and general consultation bodies, alongside residents, business owners and other people on the consultation list to notify them of the first draft of the Plan
- Publish a survey or questionnaire on the Local Plan website to gather comments on the first draft Local Plan
- Host staffed exhibitions in different, accessible locations throughout the borough
- Publicise the consultation through use of social media, leaflet drops, posters, press releases, articles, interviews and public notices as appropriate
- Make a copy of the first draft Local Plan available to view in the Town Hall, the two libraries and other suitable locations

Publication of the Proposed Submission

At this stage, the Local Plan documents proposed for submission to the Secretary of State for examination are published. Any comments at this stage can only be related to the soundness of the Plan. This means whether the Local Plan has been **positively prepared**, and whether it is **justified, effective** and **consistent with national policy** (these terms are defined below in Table 2). This is the final draft and any changes to the Local Plan can now only be made through examination.

Table 2: Definitions of soundness (National Planning Policy Framework 2019)

Positively prepared	<i>‘Providing a strategy which, as a minimum, seeks to meet the area’s objectively assessed needs; and is informed by agreements with other authorities, so that unmet need from neighbouring areas is accommodated where it is practical to do so and is consistent with achieving sustainable development’</i>
Justified	<i>‘An appropriate strategy, taking into account the reasonable alternatives, and based on proportionate evidence’</i>
Effective	<i>‘Deliverable over the plan period, and based on effective joint working on cross-boundary strategic matters that have been dealt with rather than deferred, as evidenced by the statement of common ground’</i>
Consistent with national policy	<i>Enabling the delivery of sustainable development in accordance with the policies in the National Planning Policy Framework</i>

What the council is required to do (Regulation 19):

- Publish the final draft Local Plan and supporting documents for a minimum of 6 weeks
- Make hard copies of the Draft Local Plan available to view, with a copy also available online
- Send copies of the final draft Local Plan to general and specific consultation bodies and invite representations

What the council will also do:

- Publish the Plan on the dedicated Local Plan website, alongside a targeted online survey/questionnaire to invite representations on the soundness of the Plan
- Publicise the consultation through use of social media, press releases, articles, interviews and public notices, as appropriate
- Those on the consultation list will be notified by their preferred method

Submission

The Draft Local Plan and the representations received as part of the last stage of consultation are submitted to the Secretary of State. A planning inspector is then appointed.

What the council is required to do (Regulation 22):

- Make hard copies of the Plan and supporting documents available for inspection at the Town Hall
- Publish copies of all the appropriate documents online
- Notify those who have requested to be informed of submission by their preferred method (letter/email). Statutory consultation bodies must be notified.

What the council will also do:

- Provide notification of the submission through social media posts and advertisements in local press
- Add information on the Local Plan website and the council's website
- Make hard copies of the Plan available at other accessible locations in the borough

Independent Examination

The examination will be conducted by a planning inspector, who will consider whether the submitted Draft Local Plan is sound. The inspector may recommend modifications to the Plan to ensure its soundness and legal compliance.

What the council is required to do (Regulations 23 & 24):

- At least 6 weeks before the examination starts, publish on the council's website details of the date, time and venue of the examination, alongside the name of the appointed planning inspector
- Those on the consultation list, as well as those who have indicated that they wish to speak at the hearing, will also be notified of the relevant information via their preferred point of contact

Adoption and Publication of the Local Plan

The Draft Local Plan is amended to reflect the modifications recommended during the public examination and in the Inspector's Report. The Local Plan will then be adopted by a full council meeting.

What the council is required to do (Regulations 25 & 26):

- Produce an Adoption Statement to formally note the adoption of the Local Plan
- Publish the Local Plan, Inspector's Report and Adoption Statement and make it available to view online and at the Town Hall
- Send a notification of the adoption of the Local Plan to people who submitted representations during the preparation of the Local Plan or those who requested to be notified
- Make a copy of the adopted Local Plan and Sustainability Appraisal available for six weeks

What the council will also do:

- Publicise information regarding the adoption on the council's social media sites, as well as in local press
- Keep the Local Plan and council website up to date with the relevant information and documentation.

Supplementary Planning Documents

How We Will Involve You: Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs)

Preparing a Draft Supplementary Planning Document

Although consultation plays an important role in the drafting of Supplementary Planning Documents, they are not subject to the same level of process as Local Plan documents. For example, there is no independent examination. The process of producing a Supplementary Planning Document and the relevant regulations of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 are set out below. Supplementary Planning Documents normally take 6 months to 1 year to produce.

What the council is required to do:

- There are no specific legislative requirements for this stage

What the council will also do:

- The level of engagement will vary depending on the subject and scope of the Supplementary Planning Document. However, the council may choose to engage with relevant stakeholders on the topic. Members of the public may also be involved in preliminary discussions on the Supplementary Planning Document.

Publication of the Draft Supplementary Planning Document

What the council is required to do (Regulations 11, 12 & 13):

- Publish the Draft Supplementary Planning Document for consultation for a minimum of 4 weeks
- Make the Supplementary Planning Document available to view online and have hard copies available in the Town Hall
- Copies of the document should be sent to statutory consultees who may be affected by the publication of the Supplementary Planning Document

What the council will also do:

- Publicise the consultation on social media, the council website and in local press where possible and notify those on the consultation list
- Extend the consultation period past 4 weeks where appropriate

Adoption of the Supplementary Planning Document

A list of the council's current [Supplementary Planning Documents](#)⁹ can be found on the council's website (www.watford.gov.uk).

What the council is required to do (Regulations 12 & 14):

- Produce a statement summarising the representations made during consultation, the main issues, and how they have been addressed
- Publish the Supplementary Planning Document alongside an Adoption Statement. These are to be made available on the council's website and for inspection in the Town Hall
- Notify those on the consultation list of the adoption of the Supplementary Planning Document's

What the council will also do:

- Publicise the adoption of the Supplementary Planning Document on social media, the council's website and in local press where possible

Neighbourhood Plans

This section sets out Watford Borough Council's approach for providing advice and assistance to bodies who wish to produce neighbourhood development plans, neighbourhood development orders and modifications to neighbourhood development plans.

Neighbourhood planning provides communities with opportunities to shape the area in which they live. Watford has a responsibility to support groups preparing neighbourhood plans. The council recommends that any organisation wishing to set up a neighbourhood plan group should contact the Planning Policy team at strategy@watford.gov.uk for further advice.

Consulting on a Neighbourhood Plan

The council's Planning Policy team can provide guidance and advice throughout the plan making process. This is to ensure the neighbourhood plan is in line with the legislative requirements and that it conforms to planning policies set out in the Watford Local Plan. Table

⁹ https://www.watford.gov.uk/info/20168/planning_policy/860/supplementary_planning_documents

2 sets out the different stages of preparing a neighbourhood plan and how the council can support a neighbourhood group with the consultation process.

Table 2: Steps of consulting when preparing a neighbourhood plan

Regulation ¹⁰	Stage	What We Will Do
Regulations 6 and 9	Publicising a Neighbourhood Plan or Forum Application	<p>When applying to designate an area for a neighbourhood plan or forum a neighbourhood plan group will need to submit a map which identifies the area to be covered by the plan, a statement explaining why this area is considered to be appropriate, and a statement stating that the body submitting the application is a relevant body for the neighbourhood plan.</p> <p>We will assist in publicising the draft plan through posts on our website and social media accounts, alongside a public notice in the local press.</p> <p>We can also notify those on our consultation list.</p> <p>Copies of the plan will be made available for viewing at accessible locations, including the Town Hall.</p>
Regulations 7 and 10	Publicising the Designation of a Neighbourhood Plan or Forum Area	<p>Once designated, the local authority is required to publish details of the plan area.</p> <p>The same approach to publicity will be followed as set out for Regulations 6 and 9.</p>
Regulation 14	Publishing the Draft Neighbourhood Plan	<p>When the neighbourhood plan group have prepared a draft plan, it should be published for a minimum of 6 weeks. During this time, representations can be made on the content of the plan. We will publish the plan on our website.</p> <p>The council recommends submitting a copy of the draft plan to us before publication so that we are able to check its compliance with national and local policy.</p>

¹⁰ As per the [Neighbourhood Planning \(General\) Regulations 2012](#), as amended

		<p>We will assist in publicising the draft plan through posts on our website and social media accounts, alongside notices and articles in the local press (where possible).</p> <p>We can also notify those on our consultation list. Copies of the plan will be made available for viewing at accessible locations, including the Town Hall.</p> <p>It is the duty of the neighbourhood plan group to contact everyone on their database, including statutory consultees.</p>
Regulation 16	Submission of the final Neighbourhood Plan	<p>The final neighbourhood plan should be submitted to the Planning Policy team. The plan will then be published for a minimum 6 week consultation period. We will publish the plan on our website and provide copies for viewing at accessible locations, including the Town Hall.</p> <p>The council will then carry out the same consultation process as for Regulation 14, to publicise the Neighbourhood Plan.</p> <p>Following the consultation, the council will make a recommendation on whether the Plan should be submitted for examination or not.</p>
Regulation 17	Independent examination	<p>The council will assist in organising an independent examination of the neighbourhood development plan.</p> <p>The appointed Planning Inspector will either recommend that:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) The plan should move to a referendum 2) Following some minor amendments, the plan should move to a referendum 3) The plan should be refused <p>The council will publish the results of the examination on its website and social media accounts and arrange a public notice in a local newspaper.</p>

<p>Regulation 18</p>	<p>Referendum</p>	<p>In accordance with the Inspector’s recommendation, a referendum will then be held to decide on the future of the plan.</p> <p>Those eligible to vote include all those on the electoral roll within the neighbourhood plan area. Residents from adjacent neighbourhoods may also be invited to attend if the examiner has concluded that the Plan would directly affect them.</p> <p>The council will support a referendum by organising the vote in the same way that Watford Borough Council conduct local elections. We will also make further information on the referendum available online and in accessible public buildings within the neighbourhood plan area.</p> <p><i>If 50% or more of those present vote in favour of the plan, it will move forward to adoption.</i></p>
<p>Regulations 19 & 20</p>	<p>Adoption</p>	<p>Recommendation will be made to Watford Borough Council’s cabinet to adopt the plan. The plan can then be used to guide development and determine planning applications, alongside other statutory planning documents (such as the National Planning Policy Framework and Local Plan).</p> <p>Adopted plans will be published on the council website and made available for viewing at relevant public locations</p>

Joint Strategic Plan

A joint strategic plan can be undertaken collaboratively by two or more local authorities. Its objective is to identify key strategic issues in the defined area and set out a framework for these to be addressed.

South West Hertfordshire Joint Strategic Plan

The district councils of Dacorum, Hertsmere, Three Rivers, St Albans and Watford are working together to prepare the South West Hertfordshire Joint Strategic Plan. The Plan is likely to cover the period to 2050. This Plan will have its own Statement of Community Involvement setting out how people can be involved in the preparation of the document.

What the council will do:

- When the South West Hertfordshire Joint Strategic Plan is to be consulted upon, the council will advertise the consultation on its website and direct users to the webpage.

Development Management and Planning Applications

What is Development Management?

The Development Management team at Watford Borough Council are responsible for assessing planning applications against the strategies and policies set out in the Local Plan and the Supplementary Planning Documents. They provide advice on development proposals, determine a variety of applications for new development and provide advice to the Development Management committee (which consists of elected members).

Planning permission is required for certain types of development, some of which are subject to public consultation.

Types of application that are subject to public consultation are:

- Major cases (development of 10 dwellings or more)
- Minor cases (development of less than 10 dwellings)
- Householder applications
- Advertisement consent
- Listed building consent
- Material amendments to an application
- Changes of use
- Outline planning permission
- Removal of conditions attached to a previous permission

Certain types of application, however, are not subject to public consultation. These include:

- Works to trees in a conservation area
- Works to trees protected by a Tree Preservation Order
- Discharging conditions attached to planning permissions
- Non-material amendments to a planning permission

Applying for Planning Permission¹¹

If you have a planning proposal and wish to [apply for planning permission](#), this can be submitted online using the council's planning website (www.watford.gov.uk)

The process for submitting a planning application is set out in Figure 2.

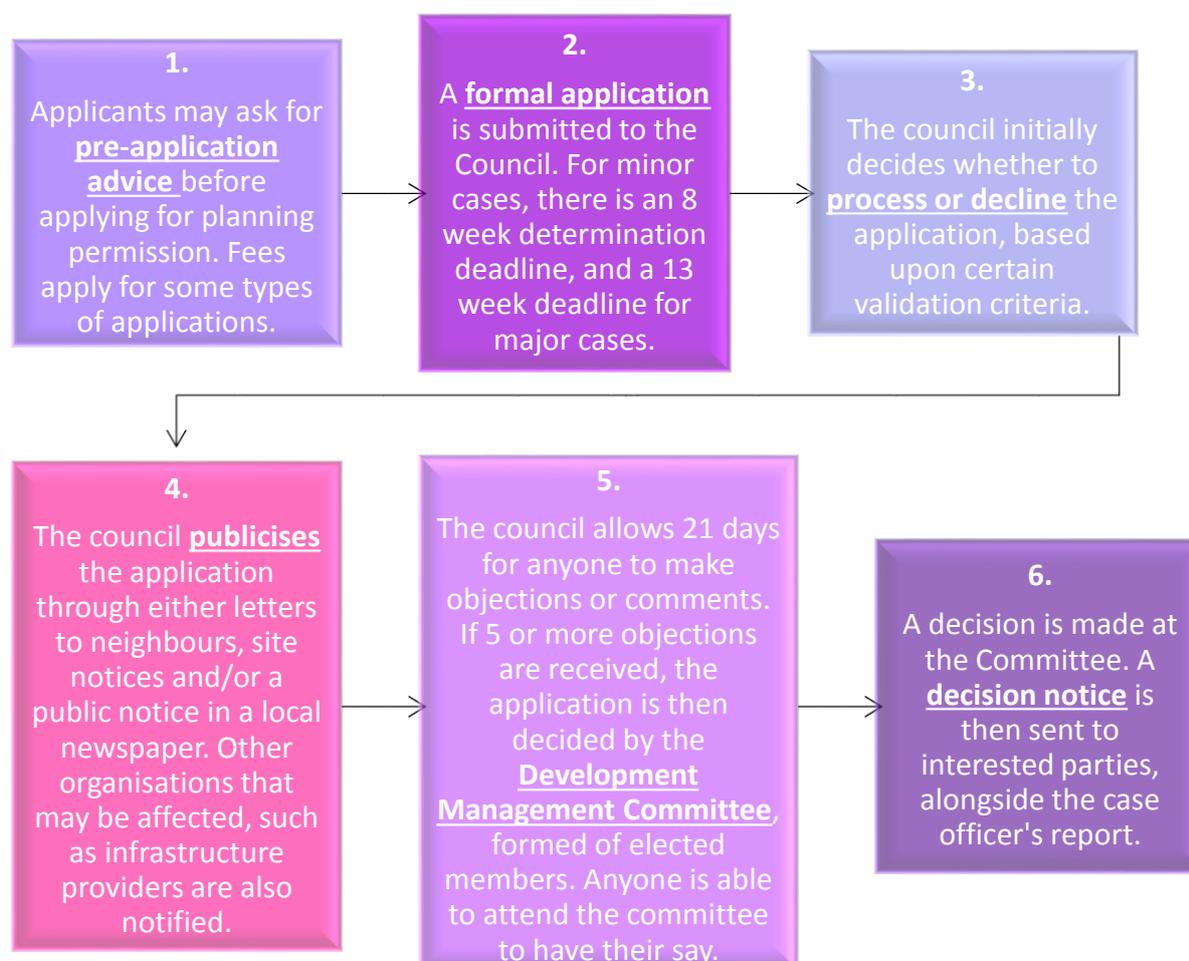


Figure 2: Process of applying for planning permission

¹¹ <https://1app.planningportal.co.uk/Form/StartPlanningApplication>

Pre-Application Advice and the Duty Planning System

Applicants may ask the council for pre-application advice prior to the submission of a formal planning application. This is more relevant for major applications. This approach is encouraged to provide early feedback about a policy to help improve its quality, ensure its compliance with planning policies and reduce the risk of delays once an application has been submitted. Meetings can also be arranged. [Forms to apply for pre-application advice](#)¹² are available on the council's website.

Fees apply and the council aims to respond to these enquiries within four weeks advising whether proposal requires permission, whether it is likely to be granted and, if necessary, how the design could be improved. A written summary of the advice will be provided as part of this service.

Any advice given by the Council in relation to pre-application enquires will be based on the case officer's professional judgement and will not constitute a formal response or decision of the council with regard to future planning applications. Although the pre-application advice may indicate the likely outcome of a formal application, no guarantees can or will be given about the decision that will be made on any such application, as applications are subject to wider consultation and publicity.

A pre-application enquiry is private correspondence, rather than being a formal application. Therefore, it will not be publicised nor will the public be consulted about it.

The council encourages developers to inform Councillors and members of the public of any major applications before a formal planning application is submitted. When planning applications are being prepared early engagement between applicants, the planning authority and local community about the emerging scheme is encouraged. The National Planning Policy Framework states that applications that can demonstrate early, proactive and effective engagement with the community should be looked on more favourably than those that have not.

Once a formal application has been made, the fact that there have been pre-application discussions also becomes a matter of public record. The Planning Officer's report at the formal application stage may refer to any pre-application advice received.

[Forms for pre-application advice](#) can be found on council's planning webpage (www.watford.gov.uk)

¹² https://www.watford.gov.uk/downloads/file/1674/preapplication_advice_application_form

For householder extensions and small scale changes to premises, advice from a **duty planning officer** may be more appropriate. The duty planner offers pre-booked 15 minute long appointments every Monday between 10am and 12.20pm. Appointments are available over a rolling 2 week period and can be booked by contacting our Customer Service Centre on [01923 226400](tel:01923226400).

How to Get Involved: Planning Applications

Planning applications will be publicised through site notices, an advertisement in a local newspaper and through letters to nearby residents.

Any member of the public may [make a representation on an application](#)¹³ by writing a letter, an email, or by commenting online via our planning application search on the Council website (www.watford.gov.uk).

Members of the public can search for current and historic planning applications using the [Public Access portal](#) on the council's website (www.watford.gov.uk)

A representation can be submitted to object to an application, support it or offer comments on it. Representations should normally be in writing, unless a disability makes this difficult in which case alternative arrangements may be made, such as by taking dictations.

Any comments received are part of a public record. This means that that comments will be made available to anyone who wants to read them. The Planning Officer's report will contain a summary of the objections or other comments received. If an application is refused, and an appeal is lodged with the Planning Inspectorate, the council will send copies of all the representations that were received to the Inspectorate. We will inform those people who responded to the consultation that the appeal has been lodged and that they can make further representations directly to the Inspectorate if they so wish.

As noted above, comments can be sent to the Council on planning applications. However, only 'material considerations' can be considered. These include:

- ✓ Government guidance and planning policies
- ✓ Comments from statutory consultees
- ✓ Amenity e.g. privacy, outlook, daylight, noise/light pollution
- ✓ Highway safety
- ✓ Nature, conversation and biodiversity
- ✓ Impact on adjacent land use
- ✓ Design

¹³ <http://pa.watford.gov.uk/publicaccess/>

- ✓ Human Rights Act
- ✓ History e.g. previous decisions and appeals

Matters that are not material to the application cannot be considered, as they are outside the powers of the planning system. These include:

- ✗ Loss of value
- ✗ Loss of view
- ✗ Viability
- ✗ Land ownership
- ✗ Competition
- ✗ Moral issues
- ✗ Restrictive covenants
- ✗ A change from a previous scheme
- ✗ History of the applicant

How to Get Involved: Development Management Committee

If a case receives 5 objections or more, it is reported to the Development Management Committee. A committee meeting will then be held one evening. This meeting is open for the members of the public to attend. The applicant, or their agent, may address the Councillors in support of the application. One representative of the objectors may also address them. This must be arranged in advance of the meeting with the council's Committee Officer. The Committee will make a decision after reading the Planning Officers' reports and listening to the speakers. They may agree with the recommendations made or not. If an application is refused, then the applicant or their agent has the right to appeal to the Planning Inspectorate. There is no right of appeal for members of the public. [Guidance on speaking at the meeting](#) is available on the council's website.¹⁴

The Committee Office is contactable at: legalanddemocratic@watford.gov.uk

Planning Appeals

The council will notify all people who made comments on the planning application if it is refused and an appeal is lodged.

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https://www.watford.gov.uk/info/20017/councillors_and_decision_making/166/can_i_speak_at_meetings/3

Appendix A

General Consultation Bodies

- Voluntary bodies, some or all of whose activities benefit the Borough
- Bodies which represent the interests of different racial, ethnic or national groups in the Borough
- Bodies which represent the interests of different religious groups in the Borough
- Bodies which represent the interests of disabled persons in the Borough
- Bodies which represent the interests of persons carrying out business in the Borough

Specific Consultation Bodies

- Adjoining (and nearby) Local Planning Authorities (Dacorum Borough Council, Hertsmere Borough Council, St Albans City & District Council and Three Rivers District Council)
- The Coal Authority
- Electronic communication companies who own or control apparatus in the Borough
- Environment Agency
- Hertfordshire County Council
- Hertfordshire Valleys Clinical Commissioning Group
- Highways Agency
- Historic England
- Homes and Communities Agency
- Marine Management Organisation
- Natural England
- Network Rail
- Town and Parish Councils adjoining the Borough
- Utilities and service providers

Duty to Co-Operate

- Civil Aviation Authority
- Environment Agency
- Hertfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership
- Historic England
- Homes and Communities Agency

- Highways Authority
- Integrated Transport Authorities
- Marine Management Organisation
- Mayor of London
- Natural England
- Neighbouring Local Authorities and County Councils (Dacorum Borough Council, Hertsmere Borough Council, St Albans City and District Council, Three Rivers District Council and Hertfordshire County Council)
- Office of Rail Regulation
- Primary Care Trusts (Herts Valley Clinical Commissioning Group)
- Thames Water
- Transport for London