

Fortune Green & West Hampstead Neighbourhood Development Forum

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT STRATEGY

The Fortune Green and West Hampstead Neighbourhood Development Forum believes local people should be at the heart of changes to their Neighbourhood. The newly established Neighbourhood Development Forum aims to empower and enable those living and working within the Forum boundaries, to develop a Neighbourhood Development Plan. This will be a shared vision which will help influence and shape:

- The design of local buildings and places
- Local planning policies and decisions
- Have a positive impact on local place-making

We aim to establish tools and mechanisms to effectively engage all those potentially affected by the proposed NDP, and increase awareness of how the interaction between various neighbourhood component parts - such as schools, community organisations, health centres, business & retail sector, local residents, council services, transport, environment and green spaces, etc - affects our everyday lives. The NDF hopes to build a Plan which is owned by the community at large. As an integral part of the process, communities will consequently develop a better understanding of how good design and planning leads to places that are better used, better connected, better managed and as a result, more sustainable. This will ultimately affect the way people feel about their homes, communities and neighbourhoods.

Our Community Involvement strategy has identified key elements to ensuring that the Fortune Green and West Hampstead Neighbourhood Development Forum builds community participation and involvement into the creation of a Plan by focussing on the following:

- Creating a live and multi-dimensional communications strategy which will reach as many sections of the community as possible
- Increasing a basic understanding and community awareness of the planning process, current national, regional (London) and local plans, and how local people can establish their own priorities and vision, to influence future design, management and sustainability of their neighbourhoods
- Creating meaningful opportunities for sustained participation in the formation of the Plan
- Create a desire, ability and aspiration to be involved in planning decisions and as a result build social capital to enhance social cohesion
- Developing a strong representative network of member partners which include local individual residents, community organisations and tenants/resident groups, members of the retail and business community, local councillors, planning officers, schools, health sector reps, faith and cultural organisations, green & environment focussed partnerships, and other relevant agencies.

Our Community Involvement Strategy should reflect the basic principles in any Statement of Community Involvement identified by Camden - as appropriate to the FGWH-NDP. It is also expected to incorporate or enhance certain key elements of the West Hampstead Place-Shaping Plan which is itself the result of reasonably wide community consultation from various individuals and sectors.

Equality Statement: the Fortune Green and West Hampstead Neighbourhood Development Forum must be underpinned by the principle of aiming to include as many sections of the community as possible in shaping the final Neighbourhood Development Plan. As with most Equality principles – the NDF aims to develop effective strategies and safeguards to in-build participation by the wider community regardless of race, ethnic origin, age, gender, ability, sexual orientation, faith and cultural backgrounds. These will need to demonstrate a depth of outreach and multi-dimensional involvement which will engage those in the community identified as not being currently or traditionally engaged in local decision-making processes. This will take time, resources, imagination and resolve, and we will need to draw upon the wider skills base within the community and beyond to achieve this.

Key Elements to the Strategy:

- 1) **Inform:** to develop an effective communications strategy which will include the more proven methods such as newsletters and bulletins, posters and leaflets, and established social media. Before the Forum was initiated, some of the front runner participants attended some Council-run workshops, to familiarise themselves with the process. Further Training and research must be part of the continuous process by those taking an active role, to help facilitate and better inform the whole process. The NDF has already set up a website to engage with the “online community” in the area. This will facilitate speedy, online communications and consultation, but can also send links to other active local blog sites and the Camden-wide “We are Camden”. However we must recognise there are many different communities within one larger neighbourhood. In West Hampstead and Fortune Green, there may be many young and active older “online” users who regularly engage with the “online community” but not necessarily participating in any online planning or community consultation “conversations”. There are also the less digitally active, hard-to-reach and less visible communities, who should be engaged and enabled to participate if they wish. All sets of communities have their challenges as to how to make the “planning process” seem meaningful and worth getting involved in. Some suggestions as to how to approach this are identified in sections 2 and 3. However, once the wider community is connected and engaged, active mailing lists and other mechanisms for “keeping communications live” will be gradually developed into what will hopefully become a neighbourhood-wide increased conscious about planning and environment.

2) Involve and Consult:

First Steps: – leaflets and bulletins, invitation to initial meetings using blogs and online communications (see above in 1.), contact with existing community groups and TRA’s, contacts from place-shaping exercise, and local councillor’s website/blog. A list of all community and TRA groups already involved is listed as an attachment, and they will be expected to be deployed as effective agents to “spread the word” and encourage attendance at forum meetings and events, as well as give relevant member feed-back to the Forum itself throughout the Development Plan Process.

Second steps: – using proven wider consultation methods – eg questionnaires and participation exercises at community events and Festivals, local press, one-off events, outreach, sub-groups and public meetings. Experts and advisors can be involved at some of these events, to build a better understanding of what an NDP requires and what is needed to shape it. Options can be flexible. Where appropriate these will be sensitive to cultural or other differences.

The results of any consultation exercises will be recorded and the findings published using our communications strategy as detailed above.

3) Build representative participation

Taking on board early stage comments about not “just using established groups”, it is important that the Forum retains a fresh and open image to encourage individual involvement as well as recognising the value of using groups as effective neighbourhood partners and connecting agents.

We can start to use more imaginative steps to engage those least likely to become involved in planning issues – eg children and young people, some minority ethnic communities, older people, people with learning difficulties and those with mental health issues, those who are not active “online users”, etc. An outreach programme, and involvement of key partners such as community centres, sheltered housing units, schools and PTA’s, TRA’s, faith groups, etc – can be instrumental in this and need to be brought on board. To increase outreach, Focus Groups can be organised: these should be fun, made appropriate and relevant to those attending, highly participative, stepping outside the boundaries of more traditional planning consultation. As the Development Plan develops, specific Working Groups may be set up to help achieve specific tasks or goals.

Strategies to reach particular sections of the community should be identified for targeted outreach due to identified low (planning) engagement levels. Strategies should include the following mix:

- 1) Targeted work with those various sections of the community who have been identified as being under-represented in planning consultation and other community**

consultation exercises generally. This should include a mix of focus groups, using key partners in the community, for example:

- to have focus groups in Sheltered Housing Units
 - approach schools and local youth groups and engage teachers and youth leaders and young people in jointly run exercises which are age appropriate
- 2) Re-design a visual and “social-media people friendly” presentation of the Plan:** this can use social-media friendly material which can use video material and interviews, to be more appealing to younger people and those who are don’t find community consultation exercises as being very accessible in format. This could be used on social media and more appropriate to engage, for instance, with young people
- 3) Work with Camden’s Equalities and Cohesion Unit** and local VCS hubs to help identify and reach specific BME communities within the neighbourhood who have lower levels of community engagement, and groups who may be disenfranchised through ability or general lower levels of accessibility
- 4) Harness the expertise and community contacts by using local and community hubs within the area, for example:**
- Local Community Centres, Residents and Tenants Associations, Park Friends and Environmental Groups, School Parent and Teacher’s Associations, local Safer Neighbourhood Teams - to reach residents who have particular interest and knowledge of community, housing, environment , family needs, and other local issues
- 5) Business and Hospitality Sector** – ensure engagement of the local Business Forum and make effective use of the business sector in “spreading the word” – eg leaflets at new market, in cafe’s, shops, etc.
- 6) Be creative** – use non-traditional methods which are simple but fun! (good example was stall at Jester Festival)

Community Engagement Action Plan: an action plan should be drawn up to enable the Forum to show evidence of a strong and varied consultation exercise, and sustainable contact methodology being in place ahead of the Plan being submitted for approval.

4) Governance and Sustainability

The success of strategies outlined in Sections (1), (2) and (3) will hopefully create a wide base of support and engagement to sustain the momentum of the Development Plan through to successful completion. A greater knowledge of the Planning Process, and what a good Neighbourhood Plan can realistically achieve, should help build sustained participation, not just in the FGWH-NDP but also other local place-shaping and environment initiatives.

Whilst the early-stage Forum opted for membership on an individual basis, the involvement of as many local community groups as possible is encouraged and it will be an aim to ensure all identified local groups are contacted and engaged from as early as possible. Working Groups can practically involve group reps as an appropriate but effective way of harnessing local skills and knowledge.

Sustainability: The Neighbourhood Plan should attempt to in-build a review process for assessing long-term participation, highlighting any weaker areas of engagement which could be further developed. Some meaningful and identifiable “successes” which evidence influence of the Plan will certainly impact upon local residents’ belief and inclination for long-term involvement. The proposed action plan for Community Engagement should contribute towards this.

As West Hampstead is in the middle of a London and Local (Camden) Plan redevelopment hot-spot – with several large and contentious planning applications recently passed – local interest is certainly growing. This will inevitably increase as the new buildings around the Interchange start to take shape and new opportunities like the Farmers' Market appears. The FGWH-NDP will therefore coincide with local residents and businesses starting to become more aware of the impact of Planning. If carefully managed, the FGWH-NDF should enable those who work and live in the area to become more empowered to take decisions about their immediate neighbourhood and help realise commonly asserted priorities to the benefit of all. Certainly, the interest shown by a general selection of the local population at the recent Jester Festival indicates a higher than expected interest in local development – the challenge will be to harness this in a practical and creative way to get as many people as possible on board. This will create a longer-term stakeholder relationship between local communities and the planning process.

5) Help and Assistance: the FGWH-NDF recognises that in order to finalise the Neighbourhood Plan, assistance will be expected from:

- Local planning officers
- Community Groups
- Some input from agencies offering expert advice on planning, design, community involvement (VAC, Glass House, other “front-runner” NDP’s)
- Local Businesses
- Ward councillors

This will pool local knowledge with planning expertise, to ensure the final FGWH-NDP reflects a genuine expression of local priorities combined with informed planning realism. This should also contribute to longer-term sustainability as the plan inevitably morphs over the years to come.

It is also recognised that in order to fully achieve this, some funding support or other substantial in-kind resourcing will be needed at key stages.

Appendix:

Extract from Camden's Revised Statement of Community Involvement (July 2011)

Ways of involving the community in preparing planning policies

Method of Involving the Community	Explanation
Website	All and planning policy documents, consultations and supporting information will be available on our website. We may also use the website for online comment forms, questionnaires and feedback
Email	We will use emails as our main method of communication. Emails may include information on consultations, responses, the stage of preparation reached, adoption and general updates.
Letter	Letters will only be used where electronic communication is not possible.
Local press	We are required to advertise certain consultations and stages of plan preparation in the local press. The adverts will contain a short summary and let you know where you can find more information.
Meetings	We may meet with groups and organisations relevant to the document being prepared. We may also hold public meetings where individuals can contribute their thoughts.
Attending group meetings	We may offer to attend meetings which are held by existing groups to discuss, clarify or explain issues or documents.
Workshops	Workshops and facilitated events may be appropriate to discuss issues in detail and ensure that a range of people have a chance to express their concerns.
Exhibitions	Exhibitions may be used to explain specific proposals and, when staffed, are useful for clarifying our approach and generating feedback.
Citizens' panel	The Council's citizens' panel includes a cross-section of Camden residents. This can be used to provide views on a planning policy document or topic using various methods, e.g. online and postal surveys, focus groups or online discussions. You can find out more about our citizens' panel at - Camden Talks
Targeted meetings	It may be necessary to arrange meetings with groups who do not normally respond to planning consultations to make sure their views are heard.
Local publicity	Where appropriate, additional publicity measures may be taken at a local level.