

Environment & Housing Scrutiny Panel

Community Engagement and Planning Services

Survey Analysis

March 2014

1. Introduction

1.1 As part of the work programme for 20-13/14, the Environment & Housing Scrutiny Panel (EHSP) agreed to look at how the Haringey Planning Service engages and involves local residents and community groups in planning processes.

1.2 The overarching aim of this work was agreed as follows:

'To assess whether local residents and community groups have appropriate opportunities to engage meaningfully in planning processes through the community engagement and involvement strategies of the Local Planning Authority.'

1.3 Within this, the EHSP agreed to address a number of specific objectives including:

- To assess the nature and scope of community consultation and involvement in planning processes (including local standards, how these are measured, monitored and published);
- To assess the Haringey Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) and make recommendations for development / improvement;
- To assess whether there is appropriate education and training for local community groups to support engagement and involvement in local planning processes;
- Identify opportunities for the further development of digital, new technology and social media within community engagement and involvement strategies;
- To evaluate community perceptions of local engagement and involvement within the planning process;
- To assess the impact of recent legislative and policy changes for community engagement and involvement in the planning sector and how these are reflected in local arrangements.

1.4 To support this work, the EHSP held a number of dedicated evidence gathering sessions as set out below:

1. Local Policy and Practice (November 2013)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ AD Planning,▪ Planning Policy Officers,▪ Development Management Officers
2. Comparative Policy and Practice (January 2014)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Planning Aid For London▪ Planning Advisory Service▪ Islington / Hackney
3. Community stakeholders (February 2014)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Consultation with community groups

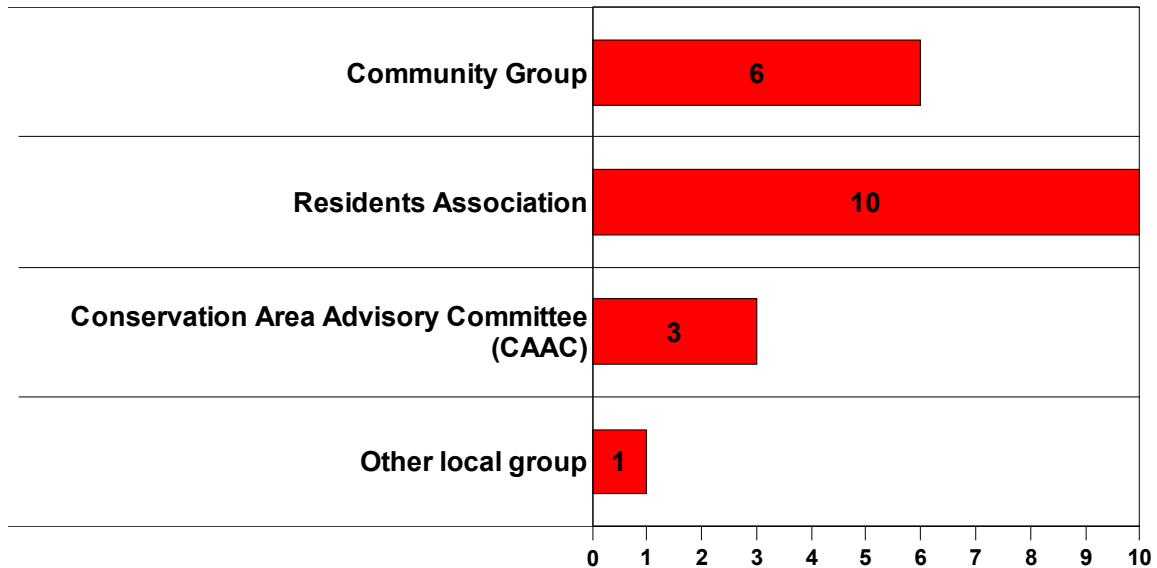
1.5 A dedicated evidence gathering session was held with local community groups on 18th February 2014 at which representatives from 24 community groups and residents associations attended. The purpose of this meeting was to enable local groups to feedback on their experiences of involvement within local planning consultations and to identify priorities for improvement.

1.6 To support its involvement of local community groups in this work, a short on-line survey was created and distributed to those groups on the Planning Service Consultation database and all local residents associations. This report provides a summary of the quantitative and qualitative analysis of the 21 responses received.

2.0 Survey analysis

2.1 The on-line survey was distributed to 42 community groups contained on the planning consultation database. In total, 20 responses were received by the deadline date to be included within this analysis. Responses were received from a variety of local groups including residents associations, community groups and Conservation Area Advisory Committees (Figure 1).

Figure 1 - Source of survey response (n=20)



Statement of Community Involvement (SCI)

2.2 The SCI sets out a framework of minimum standards for community engagement and involvement that the Local Planning Authority will comply with in local planning processes. The survey sought to assess community groups awareness of this document, whether they had read or used it and if so, how useful it was.

2.3 In total, 11 of the 20 (55%) community groups that responded indicated that they were aware of the SCI (Figure 2). Analysis of qualitative data would suggest that this document is not publicised widely enough and is difficult to locate on the Council website:

‘Not publicised widely enough. Many residents are not aware of the statement or its implications.’

‘Not publicised.’

‘..... we were unable to find the Statement of Community Involvement on the website.’

2.4 Of those nine respondents who were aware of SCI, seven (78%) had read or used the document (Figure 3). Analysis of qualitative comments would suggest that some community groups found the SCI difficult to access, and that it would be of benefit if summarised version was available:

‘The content is also fairly dense and needs to be simplified with summary to help guide readers through the processes.’

Figure 2 - Respondents aware of Statement of Community Involvement (n=20)?

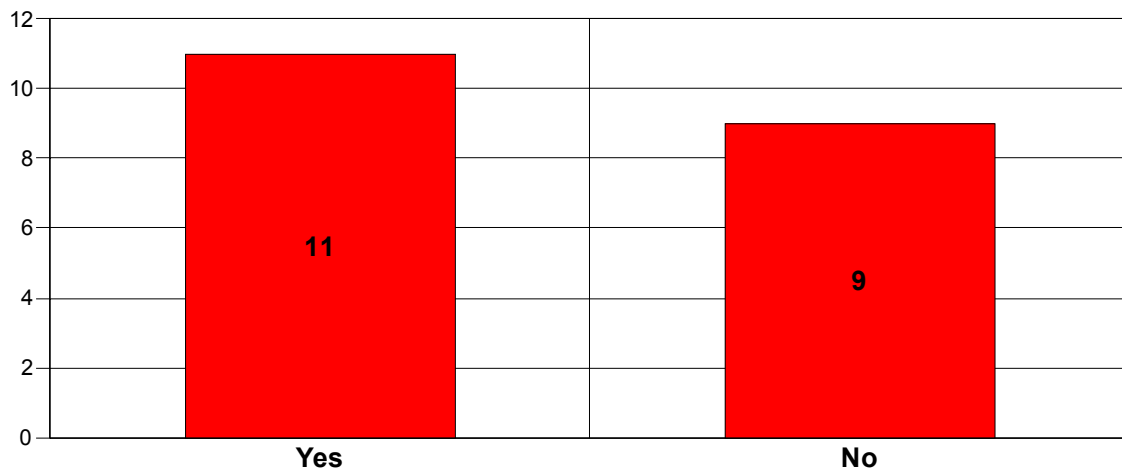
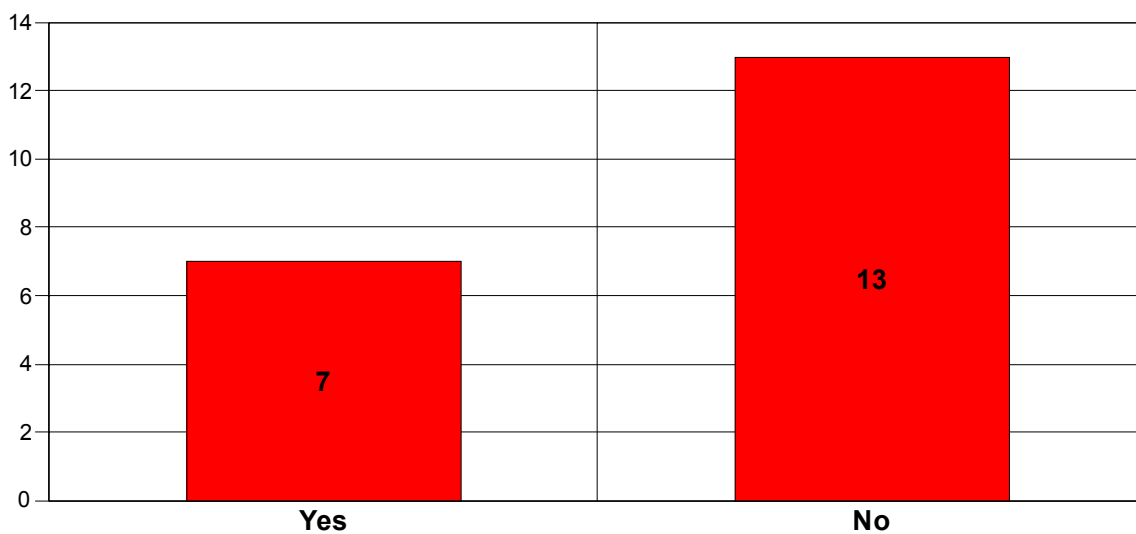


Figure 3 - Respondents indicating that they had read or used Haringey Statement of Community Involvement (N=20)



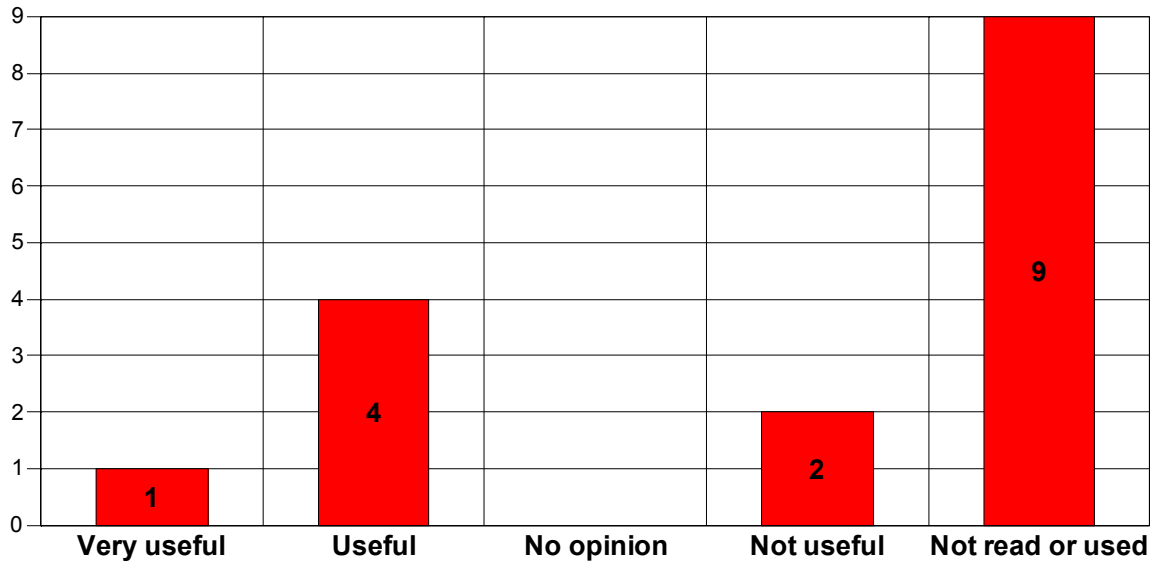
2.5 Of those seven respondents who had read the SCI, five (71%) found it either 'very useful' or 'useful' (Figure 4). Analysis of qualitative responses would suggest that there is some scepticism as whether the community engagement or involvement processes described in the document are followed through in practice:

'Have just looked at it.. and good in theory but in practice?'

'... more a statement of intentions than a recipe for action.'

'Haringey planners need to read it and it should do what it says on the tin.'

Figure 4 - How useful was the Statement of Community Involvement (n=16)?

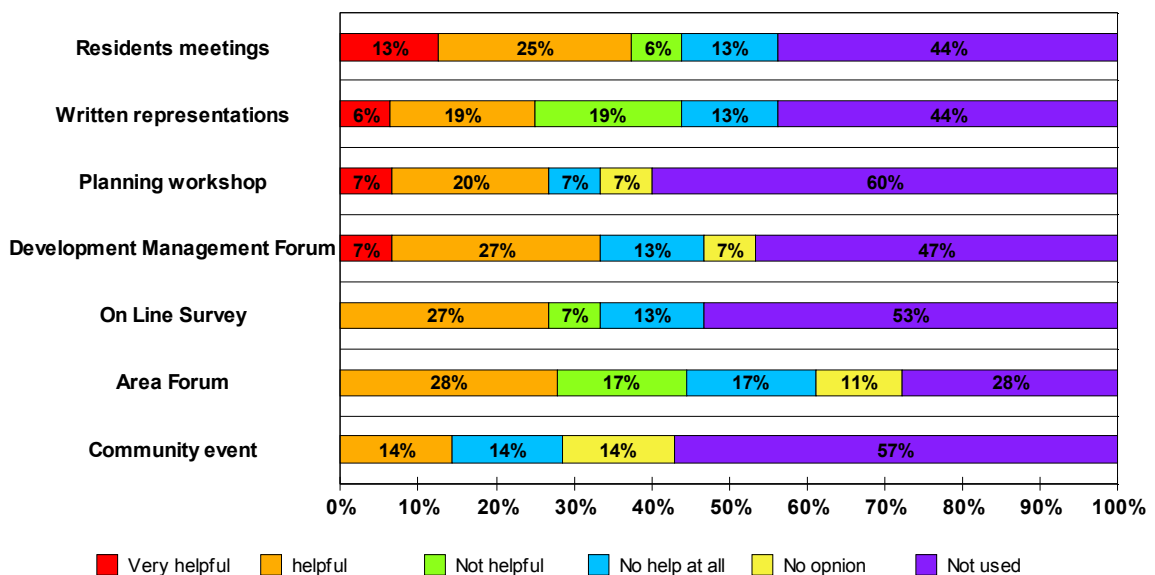


Consultation methods

2.6 The survey sought to assess the consultation methods in which local community groups had been involved and perceptions of how helpful these were to planning processes. Almost ¾ (73%) of respondents had participated in a planning consultation at a local Area Forum though on the whole the survey would appear to suggest low levels of engagement with a range of consultation methods (Figure 5).

2.7 The consultation methods that respondents indicated were most helpful included residents meetings (38% agreed these were very helpful or helpful) Development Management Forums (34%) and Planning Workshops (27%) (Figure 5).

Figure 5 - Use and perception of local consultation methods (n=20).



2.8 Further analysis of qualitative responses give a more detailed assessment of some of the consultation methods used within the planning service. Quantitatively, 17% respondents indicated that it was unhelpful to use **Area Forums** as a medium through which to conduct planning consultations and this was substantiated in qualitative comments provided within the survey:

'The Area Forum is not an appropriate forum to gather consultation opinions due to the shortage of time and need to follow a set agenda which means residents are unable to speak freely. It should be used to publicise proposed developments instead and events.'

'The Area Forums are a good idea in principle... must be a total waste of public money and time. There are always more officers and Councillors than members of the public. Those few who attend are the same as make their voices heard anyway. The local publicity for these is also very poor – i.e. emailed posters not sent till almost last minute.'

2.9 Contrastingly, respondents were more satisfied with dedicated planning forums such as **Development Management Forums** which are operated to support large scale developments.

'Development forums are very helpful.'

'The Local Development Forums can be extremely useful and we hope that these will continue.'

2.10 There was a perception however among some respondents, that Development Management Forums could be held more frequently:

'... DMFs held which are also not frequent enough.'

2.11 Further analysis of responses, would suggest that there is too greater reliance on **digital and on-line** response for planning consultations which may exclude those who are not digitally connected and disconnects people from the areas and proposals on which they are commenting:

'Web-based material is useful, but not readily accessible to many residents.'

'The effect of on line surveys is very hard to gauge.'

'Consultations tend to rely far too much on internet access. As noted at the meeting, not everyone has access nor do they wish to participate in this form.'

2.12 On the whole, respondents would appear to demonstrate a preference for more **participative methods of consultation** in which local communities could physically meet and discuss planning proposals with planning officers:

'More, localised, Public Meetings would be an advantage... .'

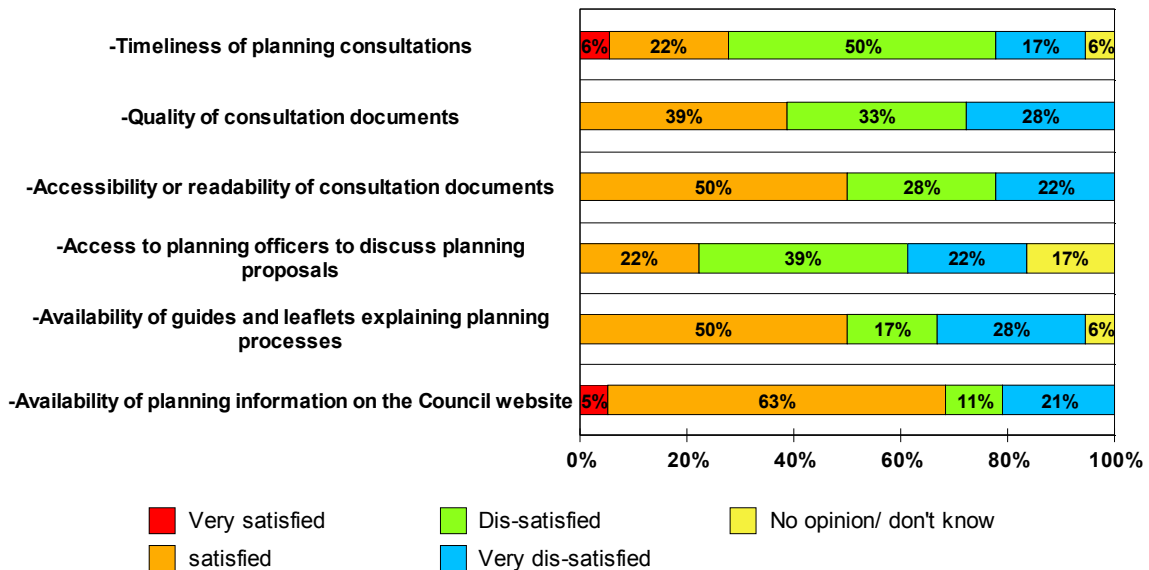
'Residents have strong views about planning issues and welcome opportunities to discuss planning matters, rather than simply responding in writing.'

'Meetings and personal contact with genuine discussions.... .'

Overall satisfaction with planning consultations

2.12 Respondents were asked to indicate how satisfied they were with aspects of the planning consultation process such as the timeliness of consultations, quality of consultation documentation and access to planning officers. These responses are summarised in Figure 6.

Figure 6 - Overall satisfaction with aspects of plannign consultations (n=16)



2.13 Over 2/3 (68%) of respondents indicated that they found planning information on the **council website** useful (Figure 6). Whilst some respondents indicated that there were some technical difficulties in accessing certain planning documents on the website, overall there appeared to be a general satisfaction with information available on the website:

'... some documents are not easy to use on line, there can be problems for Mac users.'

'I think information on council website is very good, Very pleased that CAAC minutes and annual reports are on council website. Thanks.'

2.14 One suggested improvement that could improve the accessibility of planning documentation on the website was better **labelling of consultation submissions** or comments received for individual applications:

'With regard to the planning applications on the website, there could be better labelling of the pdfs. Sometimes there is no labelling at all... and it can take a long time to find the relevant one. It would also be useful if the pdfs containing comments from the statutory consultees or the design officer could be marked accordingly.'

2.15 Analysis of quantitative responses also indicated that two-thirds of respondents were dissatisfied (67%) with the **timeliness of planning consultations** (Figure 6). This was verified in qualitative responses where respondents indicated that there was insufficient time to respond to development notifications:

'If [we] do get a letter then the deadline for responding is almost up. We are notified too late.'

'21 days is not long enough for comment to be made.'

'If you are on holiday or away, you may be too late to provide input.'

2.16 There was also a perception that there was insufficient time given to respond to major development proposals:

'An example of a current method is the Site Allocations DPD which I was told about on 20 Jan for consultation until 7 March. This is a very short time for such a central policy proposal.'

2.17 Survey analysis indicated that just 39% of respondents were satisfied with the **quality of documentation** for planning consultations (Figure 6). Analysis of qualitative comments would suggest that the main concerns that potential contributors to planning consultations found was that documentation did not give enough detail or that information submitted was incomplete:

'Documentation supplied by applicants often contain insufficient detail with poorly drawn or no plans.'

'There are often examples where the description of the proposed development is incomplete and quite important aspects of the development are just left out entirely. The planning officers should check the description against the submitted drawings and not just the information provided in the application form.'

2.18 Whilst 50% of respondents indicated that they were satisfied with the accessibility or readability of planning consultation documentation (Figure 6). Qualitative analysis would suggest however there was too great an **emphasis placed on digital distribution** of planning documentation and that physical access to hard copies of planning documentation improved:

'Applications are not sufficiently well publicised. Too much reliance is placed on online dissemination and merely having the documentation at libraries is insufficient.'

'More active information so that we don't have to search out.'

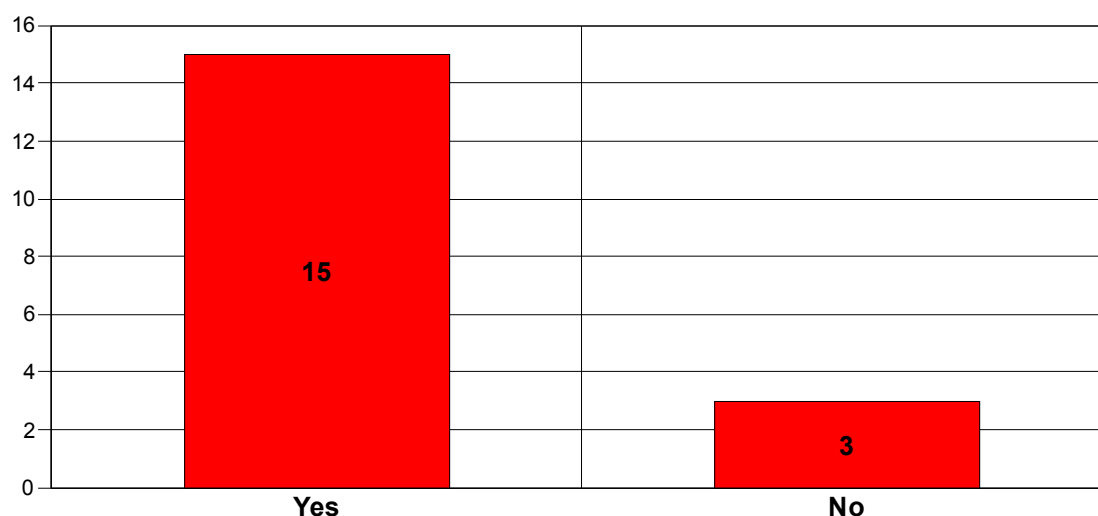
'..... it is essential that any supporting documentation should be made available in 'hard copy'.'

More involvement in Planning Consultations

2.19 Quantitative analysis indicated that 15 out of 18 respondents (83%) would like to be more involved in local planning consultations (Figure 7). Analysis of qualitative data would indicate that local community groups and residents associations contain many informed individuals who are familiar with planning systems and wanting to play a more active role. Of particular note, analysis suggested that the community should be seen as a resource and that local residents could help to provide key local information to support planning officers and planning processes:

'We can easily supply specific information re an application because of our local knowledge; context of proposals not easy for officers to understand on occasion.'

Figure 7 - Would your community group like to be more involved in planning consultations (n=18)?



2.20 Respondents also indicated that it would be useful if **planning officers** could attend local meetings to discuss consultations for local planning applications or planning policies, particularly as group members may not have the confidence to attend official planning meetings:

'Discussion with officers at our meetings.'

'Planning Officers to be available to attend group meetings.'

'... planning officers coming to our meetings. Many people are too nervous to go to official meetings.'

Factors to help improve community engagement and involvement

2.21 Respondents were asked to indicate what practical steps could be taken to improve community engagement within planning consultations. Quantitative analysis indicated that the most favoured way to improve community engagement for planning consultations was earlier notification of planning application proposals where 84% of respondents indicated that this would be helpful (Figure 8).

2.22 Analysis of qualitative comments would suggest that **earlier engagement** with the local community, particularly in relation to new development would be most beneficial as this would allow more timely input into proposed development which may avoid later problems in the planning application process:

'Early notification of proposed plans or changes is essential if people are to have time to respond.'

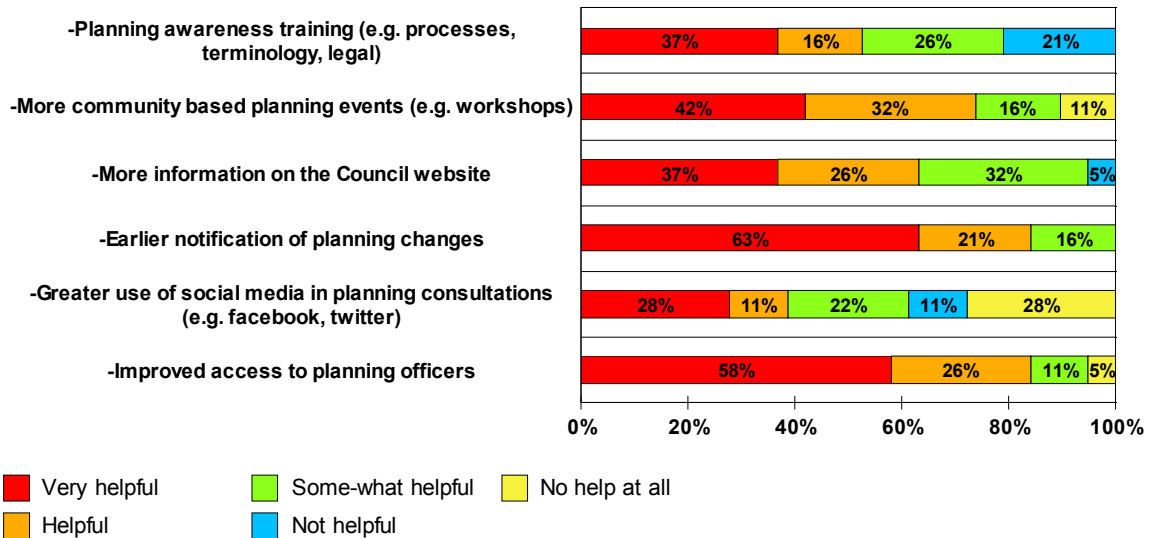
'Engage with applicant at pre-application stage.'

'Representatives of local community groups could be invited to attend pre-application advice meetings. We might then avoid having unsuitable designs inflicted on us, and address contentious issues at an early stage.'

2.23 Qualitative analysis was also suggested that earlier consultation in the development of local planning policy would be helpful:

'To be consulted about new policies at an early stage and not just to find out about things when they are published as happened recently with the policy on basement extensions.'

Figure 8 - Factors that would assist further community engagement in planning consultations (n=16).



2.24 Earlier sections of this report have highlighted that residents would like planning officers to attend local group meetings and events as a further way to encourage participation. This was also verified in quantitative responses here, where most respondents (84%) indicated that improved access to planning officers would also support further engagement and involvement in local planning consultations (Figure 8).

2.25 In general, qualitative analysis would suggest that improvement to planning notification systems would also help to develop community engagement and involvement. Firstly, there was a concern that the **weekly notification list** of new planning applications was about to be discontinued. Respondents evidently found this weekly notification very helpful and suggested that it be retained:

'We regret that it is proposed to discontinue the weekly list of planning application which is a valuable method of community involvement.'

'You should not stop sending the planning app lists to people currently on the distribution list. I learn that this is the intention.'

'It's a shame the weekly/monthly email of current applications to interested parties by ward is ending. This is very useful.'

'The present system of the weekly distribution of Planning Applications by email must be continued.'

2.26 A number of respondents indicated that the community group of which they were a member was not routinely included in local notifications or consultation processes. As a consequence, this required members to be **proactive in researching proposed new development** or policies that may impact on the local area in order for them to respond or be involved:

'In order to respond, our group needs to be proactive, by scanning the application lists and website to see what is coming up. We receive neither written nor electronic notification of proposed developments.'

'The only way to find out what is happening is to continually check the planning website.'

2.27 Qualitative analysis would also suggest that respondents had concerns around the efficacy of notifications systems to inform residents of proposed development within the local area.

'Very few residents get notification of development plans in the immediate vicinity.'

'Community groups, residents associations and residents should be sent letters of notification of proposals.'

2.28 In the context of the above, respondents underlined the importance of other traditional methods of distributing planning notifications such as advertising in **Haringey People** and the placement of **posters** displayed in local areas affected:

'Local newspapers are not delivered so the Council must advertise in Haringey People also.'

'I know it sounds odd in the present age, but the practice of sticking a notice on or near the application premises is still a very useful way of alerting residents to an application.'

2.29 What is apparent from qualitative analysis is that where possible the Planning Service should support a **multi-faceted approach**, where the diversity of methods deployed can further ensure that planning notifications (for new development or new policies) reach the target residents and communities:

'I would like people whose lives will be profoundly affected by plans and decisions to be informed by all possible methods.'

2.30 Qualitative responses provided elsewhere in this survey indicated that local communities found it difficult to access planning consultations due to the complex nature of planning processes. Further evidence of this concern is provided here where just over 1/2 (53%) of respondents suggested that further **training on local planning issues** would be helpful to support community engagement (Figure 8):

'More training for Community groups.'

'There is little information for the public as to how the planning system works, its implications and how residents should be participating.'

'It would also be useful to have something similar on generic subjects rather than individual applications. For example on shop-fronts, basement extensions or front garden parking. The idea being for the officers to describe policy and what powers the Council has and for residents to get a better understanding of the issue and raise any questions or concerns.'

2.31 Further analysis of qualitative data revealed one important further issue which would help to support further engagement and involvement by the community in local planning consultations. Many respondents indicated that at present, little **feedback** is

provided to contributors to planning consultations which makes it difficult to determine the usefulness of submissions and how this has impacted on final plans:

'Often the designated planning officer does not mention comments in her/his report.... .'

'Lots of good intentions at consultation meetings and such.... but then? Often disappear without trace or the agreed actions don't happen etc.'

'Consultation should directly involve residents and the results need to be made transparent.... .'

'Community Engagement would be improved if the Council were to publish and explain the reasons for their decisions when they are contrary to the views expressed through this process.'

2.32 With little feedback as to how contributions have informed consultations and impacted on final plans, there was a perception that planning consultations were not a **two way process**, which left participants feeling frustrated:

'... if you call it a consultation it must be one. It is a 2 way process or don't bother.'

'Prove that you have listened to what we say.'

'Planning Officers must be open to listening to the public's view.'

'The consultation process is a charade. While it is easy to comment online on planning applications, local residents' opinions seem to be totally ignored. One questions whether the planning officers read them.'

2.33 Respondents suggested that if it was apparent that consultation contributions had been assessed and recorded where these had influenced planning decisions, this would encourage further participation:

'[Our community group would be more involved] if they felt that their comments were taken more seriously. It is often the case that the comments submitted by this CAAC for example are not mentioned at all in a planning officer's report.....'

9.0 Other issues identified within the survey

9.1 To conclude, respondents were invited to provide any further information on any related issues to those covered within the survey. Analysis of these responses highlighted a number of areas for possible follow up.

Role of local Councillors

9.2 It was suggested that in recognition of the important role that local councillors play in supporting community engagement with planning processes, further training may help to promote greater understanding within the community

'The Planning Process is complex and difficult to understand. Not only should residents be given clear, readable information but local ward councillors must be trained in the Planning system.'

Planning Enforcement

9.3 Although not the focus of this survey, but clearly linked to how the community engages with the planning, planning enforcement was raised as a concern. It was suggested

that arrangement for reporting planning infringements are not operating as effectively as it could:

'The survey should also include community engagement with Planning Enforcement, an area which desperately needs to be addressed and which Noel Park has been badly let down on.'

'Enforcement is a real problem. We notify Haringey of infringements and then very little happens; this is discouraging to say the least.'

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