



STROUD DISTRICT COUNCIL

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Question from Mr. David Haydock to Chair of Strategy and Resources Committee

In relation to the level of community engagement in respect of the Brimscombe Port Development, can the Councillors request a change in approach and attitude from the Council Officers regarding engagement with the community i.e. deliver a revised plan to ensure that community engagement is regarded as a key element of the project, is seen by the Project Team as an equal activity to the procurement process, and that solutions to apparent barriers to engagement are sought rather than simply defaulting to the procurement process usurping community engagement.

Reply

The council has undertaken a range of consultation and engagement with the local community and Parish Council over a number of years as a key part of delivering this project. Since the successful securing of Homes England in 2014/15 we have:

- Held quarterly liaison meetings with local residents, tenants on site and the Parish Council for 4 years until the pandemic began
- Engaged with key stakeholders, including the Parish Council to agree the Output Specification for the site. This was then published for comment on our website before being adopted and is the critical document which sets out the vision for the site
- A formal pre-app consultation (for the infrastructure works) took place in December 2018
- Held regular meetings with the Parish Council
- Held a virtual public meeting in August 2021
- Held a public drop-in session at the Ship Inn in November 2021
- Set up a mailing list in November 2021

The procurement stage is dictated by legislation and as a public body the council is required to follow the Public Contracts Regulations 2015. You have been given the reasons why the local community cannot be part of the competitive dialogue and these are also set out in the officer report to this committee. The process must adhere to the core principles of fairness, transparency, non-discrimination and proportionality and has to be as objective as possible.

The council chose this route as this is a very complex site with viability challenges. It was felt to be the most appropriate, as it enables engagement with different developers to come up with the optimum approach to meeting the output specification and allows for innovation. The council cannot change this approach without abandoning the current procurement process and risking the project collapsing.

Public participation will inevitably evolve throughout the life of the redevelopment. The next key phase for community involvement will be through the planning process once a developer is appointed; when the Parish Council and the public will be involved in pre-app discussions and also with the design and delivery of the community facilities on the site which will be community led.

We continue to welcome suggestions from the community and Parish Council on what shape ongoing community engagement should take.