

Approach to Consultation

Whenever the Council makes a decision about a major and long lasting development in the town centre, we need to be confident the decision is properly informed by public opinion. It is vital that on such a major development as William Hunter Way, the Council consult and engage with the people of Brentwood.

All Councils consult on controversial issues and whilst we can't guarantee residents are always going to agree with proposals and policy changes, the Council aim is to improve the way we carry out public consultations, involve residents in decision-making and respond to resident views.

What is consultation?

Consultation is a process of dialogue with citizens and stakeholders, which has a defined start and end date, and informs a decision about a new proposal, policy, service change – this includes major developments (William Hunter Way).

Through effective consultation will aim to achieve:

- The encouragement of greater public involvement and interest in local democracy.
- Stronger community leadership.
- The planning of services and policies based on the needs / views of people.
- The Identification of priorities and improvement of strategies.
- The improvement of the take-up of those services.
- The monitoring of the performance of services over time.

Consultation and the democratic process

Members and Council Officers will always need to weigh the views expressed through consultation against a wide range of other factors: such as legislation and government guidance; demographic data; financial costs and environmental impacts.

Consultation rarely throws up a single opinion – Members and Officers will often have to make their own judgement about the weight to be given to one or other of the views expressed. They may also have to consider carefully whether the aspirations and needs of future generations - who will perhaps be most affected by any change - might differ significantly from those of today's population.

In other words, the results of consultation are never a substitute for the democratic process – and do not replace the legitimate role of elected representatives in decision-making.

However, effective and consistent consultation can certainly help inform good and responsible decision-making and ensure that, as far as possible, those decisions - and the actions that flow from them - properly reflect and respond to the needs of our town and its people.

Main Consultation Principles

1. Time consultations well and allow sufficient time to respond.
2. Clearly present relevant information and encourage informed opinion.
3. Be well targeted and reach out to seldom heard groups.
4. Offer genuine options and ask objective questions.
5. Be well planned, managed and co-ordinated.
6. Be well communicated.
7. Provide fair, accessible feedback.

We will use these principles whenever we run public consultations.

1. Time consultations well and allow sufficient time to respond.

1. Consultations should be timed to allow the results to influence policy / proposal development.
2. Wide scale public consultations, such as boroughwide or large parts of it, should run for a minimum period of six weeks.
3. The timing of consultations should consider the availability of target groups. Consultations that are primarily focussed on the voluntary and community sector (VCS) should run for a minimum period of 12 weeks.
4. In relation to William Hunter Way we will engage with key groups – particularly the views of the disabled.

2. Clearly present relevant information and encourage informed opinion.

1. The consultation will clearly state: the proposal, why we are consulting, and how we will use the findings.
2. The consultation should provide enough information to enable consultees to give an informed opinion and not simply an instant reaction.

3. Be well targeted and reach out to seldom heard groups.

1. The views of those people / areas most affected by the proposal should be sought.
2. Attempts will be made to listen to the views of non-users.
3. Attempts will be made to include the views of groups frequently excluded or overlooked.
4. Consultations will consider the needs of people with impaired sight or hearing or people whose first language is not English.

4. Offer genuine options and ask objective questions.

1. Where options are offered, they should be realistic and deliverable.
2. Surveys and questions should be written in an objective way allowing people to express their views.

5. Be well planned, managed and coordinated.

1. The Council's consultation should contain a step-by-step instruction to enable managers to effectively manage consultations and avoid unnecessary duplication.

6. Be easily located and be well communicated.

1. The Council will publicise consultations and make attempts to let people know they are happening.
2. Major consultations e.g. boroughwide or affecting a large number of people - will be publicised by press release and we will use other media (such as Twitter and Facebook and our main Internet site)

7. Provide fair, accessible feedback.

1. The Council will publish the findings of consultations and later how they have been used.
2. The findings will be reported in a balanced way.