



Working together on nationally significant infrastructure projects

Advice note two: IPC outreach programme

Introduction

The new planning system for dealing with nationally significant infrastructure projects or 'NSIPs' provides the opportunity for people to have their say on a range of important proposals relating to energy, transport, water and waste.

The Infrastructure Planning Commission (IPC) is charged with managing the process end-to-end and we are fully committed to doing everything we can to make sure that applications received are of the highest quality. In each proposal the applicant will make every effort to consult with, and respond where possible to, the concerns of local communities and other interested parties.

We will work proactively to explain the process and the various roles of the different organisations involved. We will assist the parties to work collaboratively, particularly during the pre-application stage. One of the ways we will do this is through a programme of 'outreach work'. This advice note summarises the broad approach which we will adopt for projects. It also contains some practical tips for applicants, local authorities and others on how to work together more effectively.



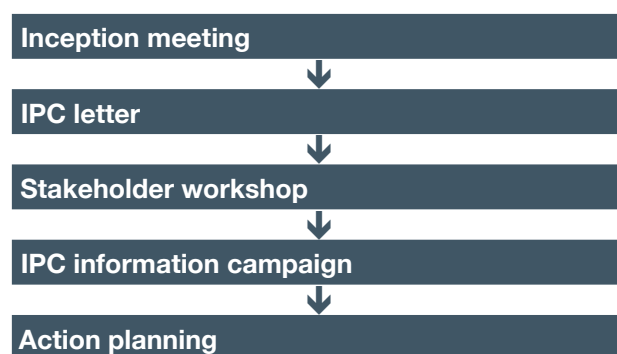
This is one of a series of advice notes which the IPC will publish on key elements of the process. As the system develops and we learn from good practice we may update this advice to include case studies.

The IPC's programme of outreach work

The IPC will adopt a flexible approach to outreach and undertake work only where it will be helpful and is necessary. Our intention is that activities will be carried out informally and aim to:

- Ensure that consultees, local authorities and the communities which they serve have a better understanding of the purpose and role of the IPC and the opportunities they have to engage in the planning process both at pre-application stage and following the submission of applications to the IPC
- Improve collaborative working between applicants, local authorities and statutory consultees.

Figure 1 Summary of the IPC Outreach Programme



Outreach does not form part of the statutory process and it may not be necessary for the IPC to undertake this work for every project. The NSIP will provide the context but we must remain impartial throughout, so the IPC will not be discussing the merits of the proposal itself. We will stick to explaining the procedural aspects in an open, transparent and inclusive way. The timing and nature of activities will be tailored to suit individual circumstances. For example, if a particular problem has arisen, the IPC may arrange for a special meeting to explain this part of the process. After each meeting or event we will evaluate what went well and what can be improved.

Inception meeting

Once we have received details about a project we will invite the applicant, senior officers from the relevant local authorities and, where necessary and appropriate, representatives of key statutory agencies, to an 'inception meeting'. Although we cannot become involved in discussing project specific issues, this will provide an early opportunity to explain some of the local authority's key tasks and responsibilities, including how to produce their 'Local Impact Report'.¹ The applicant may also wish to discuss their consents strategy and programme for submitting the application to the IPC, including key milestones for the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) process.

¹ Refer to IPC Advice note one for more information on Local Impact Reports



Setting aside specific time for an inception meeting will help the parties to forge a collaborative approach at the outset. In some cases, this meeting will build on earlier discussions between the applicant, consultees and local authorities. Project management arrangements can also be discussed at this point. For example, where more than one local authority is involved they may wish to work together. Further advice on this is provided below under 'Joint Working Across Local Authority Boundaries'.

In accordance with our policy on openness, a note of the meeting will be published on the IPC's website.

IPC letter

We will write to representatives of a range of local stakeholders to explain our role and invite them to a workshop where they can learn more about the process and how to become engaged. Through this letter we will also set out our expectations for stakeholder involvement in the process. This letter will not form part of any statutory publicity requirements, however we will ask local authorities and applicants to help us put together the list of participants. In particular, we will target representatives of groups and organisations who can then share information with other colleagues.

Stakeholder workshop

The workshop will be facilitated by the IPC. Here, we will explain our role, the new process and the opportunities for community engagement. Participants will be able to put questions to the IPC and learn more about the process. The timing of the workshop will be critical and we will work with the applicant and the local authorities to agree this on a case by case basis.

Information campaign

Soon after the workshop, we will publish more information about the IPC in local newspapers, libraries and community centres. We will also approach the relevant local authorities to make use of existing mailing lists and web based facilities.

Action planning

It may not be necessary for the IPC to participate in these meetings. However, we would encourage applicants and local authorities to form their project teams at the earliest possible stage. It will then be important for all parties to agree a detailed programme of work, based on key tasks and responsibilities, discussed during the inception meeting. It is recommended that this is set out in a table or worksheet which can then be used as a project management tool to guide the process going forward. The action planning meetings can be used to draw this together.



Benefits of joint working

Applicants, local authorities and statutory consultees will need to work together to fulfil their roles effectively. The IPC will encourage constructive dialogue and we recommend that all parties adopt the following five key principles:

- Work in partnership whereby responsibility for actions and decisions is shared
- Engage early and then continuously throughout the process
- Make sure that discussions are as open, transparent and inclusive as possible
- Commit to the process so that issues and potential solutions can be fully explored even though views about the project might differ
- Use robust project management tools and techniques to improve efficiency.

Adopting this approach will increase trust and confidence, reduce conflict and provide for good working relationships. For the IPC this is likely to result in higher quality applications, enabling us to deal with them more efficiently and effectively.

This approach will also result in the following specific benefits:


Benefits of collaborative working

- **For applicants:** Harness the expert knowledge held by local authorities on how to consult effectively with local communities
- **For local authorities and statutory agencies:** Manage their time and resources more efficiently
- **For local communities:** Improved arrangements for public consultation, thereby enabling communities to be better informed and engaged on schemes.

Making use of planning performance agreements and charters

Many local authorities are now using Planning Performance Agreements (PPAs), charters and Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) as a means of expressing their commitment to working closely with applicants on major development projects.

With regard to NSIPs, it is entirely a matter for local authorities how they choose to formalise working arrangements with applicants. However, the IPC believes that PPAs could be usefully applied to NSIPs, in appropriate circumstances. This could lead to higher quality applications being submitted and enable local authorities to produce Local Impact Reports in a timely and efficient manner.



A PPA is a framework agreed between a local authorities, the applicant and others, for taking development proposals through the planning process. PPAs were first introduced into the planning system in 2008 and since then their use has increased, particularly in relation to large scale and complex proposals.

A PPA is best used as a project management tool, allowing the parties to agree an overall vision, set of objectives, a project plan and programme. In some cases, PPAs have also been used by local authorities to secure appropriate resources from the applicant, which they have agreed are necessary for dealing with applications.

PPAs are about improving the quality of applications in an open, impartial and inclusive way. Their use has been supported by the Advisory Team for Large Applications (ATLAS). ATLAS has also published detailed guidance and a methodology for implementing PPAs, together with case study material on its website at: www.atlasplanning.com

In addition to PPAs, many local authorities have now published planning charters or protocols which set out their commitment to working proactively with applicants on projects.

Local authorities might consider adapting or improving their Charters to deal with NSIPs. Alternatively, elements of a charter could be used to frame a project specific MoU between the local authority, the applicant and others.

Joint working across local authority boundaries

Local authorities should explore and exploit opportunities for joint working when dealing with NSIPs. Every NSIP application will require the involvement of one or more local authorities. Local authorities could consider coordinating and streamlining their activities, as well as sharing knowledge, expertise and resources. For example, in some situations it may be appropriate for local authorities to jointly produce a Local Impact Report.

Many local authorities are already engaged in joint working (for example in the production of Local Development Frameworks) and it may be appropriate in these circumstances to adapt or improve structures and practices to deal with NSIPs.

Benefits of local authority joint working

- Save time and money by pooling resources
- Improved coordination and consistency of approach and response
- Easier for stakeholders to engage in the process.



Further information and support

The Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) has published guidance for local authorities on the Planning Act 2008. This guidance document is available from the CLG website at: www.communities.gov.uk

Planning Aid provides free, independent and professional town planning advice and support to communities and individuals who cannot afford to pay planning consultant fees. It complements the work of local authorities, but is wholly independent of them. Further information about the help, advice and information available from Planning Aid is available on their website at: www.planningaid.rtpi.org.uk

Ongoing research is being undertaken into the use of mediation in the planning system and the IPC is exploring how this might lend itself to the new nationally significant infrastructure planning regime. Details of this research are available from the CLG website at: www.communities.gov.uk

Further information

If you have any queries regarding the IPC's outreach programme, please contact the IPC on:
Email: ipcenquiries@infrastructure.gsi.gov.uk
Telephone: 0303 444 5000
Web: www.independent.gov.uk/infrastructure