

Scrutiny Committee



Report of Head of Planning

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Vale of White Horse Statement of Community Involvement (SCI)

Recommendation(s)

The committee is invited to:

- (a) Comment upon the revised draft Statement of Community Involvement (SCI).
- (b) Make recommendations to the Cabinet Member for Planning regarding any alterations to the draft SCI document prior to Cabinet.

Purpose of Report

1. To report to Scrutiny Committee on the key issues raised following a six-week public consultation of the Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) and to report on the changes proposed to the document. To seek any comments for the Cabinet Member for Planning to consider.

Strategic Objectives

2. The publication of the SCI supports the delivery of the council's strategic objectives set out in the current Corporate Plan by supporting the delivery of sustainable communities and wellbeing.

Background

3. The council is required to produce an SCI in accordance with Section 18 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. The purpose of the SCI is

to set out how the council will engage with communities who have an interest in matters relating to development in their area.

4. Section 10A of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) Regulations 2017 require an SCI to be reviewed every five years starting from the date of adoption of the SCI. The current SCI is divided into three documents and was adopted by Cabinet in December 2016. Since this time, Local Plan 2031 Part 2 was adopted, a revised National Planning Policy Framework was published, and the council has committed to preparing a new local plan. These changes need to be reflected within the SCI.

Summary of the Statement of Community Involvement

5. The revised SCI sets out how the council wish to engage with the community - who can influence new planning policy documents, as well as setting out the ways to comment upon planning applications for development.
6. Information is presented in a way that is clear and transparent for the wider audience and is aided alongside a series of flowcharts and diagrams to help illustrate the council's practices and procedures for consulting on new planning policy documents.
7. The SCI is now set out in one document but split into three sections:

Section 1 – Shaping our Future

8. Section 1 of the SCI provides a set of overarching principles that the council will be guided by when consulting on new planning documents. This section provides information on how the council wishes to involve the community when consulting on new planning documents and where these documents can be viewed once they are published. It also sets out the council's commitment to equalities and provides links to other useful planning services.
9. A key change to this section, from the current SCI, is that printed copies of documents will no longer be sent to libraries. Computer access is free at the libraries and available to all, including those, for example, with sight or hearing impairments. In line with our aim to reducing carbon emissions, under the climate change agenda, the council will therefore no longer send paper copies to the libraries and may charge if printed copies are requested. This approach will also help reduce our costs.

Section 2 – Community Involvement in the preparation of the Local Plan and Planning Policy

10. Section 2 of the SCI sets out how interested parties can get involved with and influence the council as it prepares its local plan and other planning policy documents.
11. The document includes a series of flowcharts that set out the process the council is required to follow when preparing different planning policy

documents. For example, it includes the council's approach when preparing any new Development Plan Documents (such as the Local Plan), Supplementary Planning Documents, Sustainability Appraisals and Strategic Environment Assessments in accordance with the relevant legislation and regulations.

12. This list is not exclusive, the document also covers a number of other planning policy documents.

Section 3 – Community Involvement in Planning Applications

13. Section 3 of the SCI sets out how the planning application process works for a variety of applications and how interested parties can become involved and engaged in this process.
14. The document also sets out the council's minimum neighbour notification for most applications, alongside a diagram showing how neighbours will be notified where the application boundary abuts a neighbouring property.
15. Publicity and consultation procedures for the types of planning applications that the council may receive are set out in Appendix 1 of the SCI.
16. Each section of the SCI covers a particular theme for community engagement and involvement. All of the sections together make up the SCI and once adopted, the council will use the document when preparing and consulting on new planning documents, and to assist the council with local engagement when deciding on planning applications for development.

Key Discussion Points Raised Following Public Consultation

17. Public consultation on the draft revised Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) was undertaken between Thursday 27 February and 9 April 2020. There is no requirement to consult on the Statement of Community Involvement, however, it is good practice to do so.
18. The SCI consultation document is available to view and access from the [council website](#).
19. Those on our consultation database, including town and parish councils and statutory bodies, were notified of the consultation. The council received several comments from various consultees, including the following:
 - Oxford City Council, the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority and Historic England, were supportive of the aims and approach of the document.
 - Cherwell District Council asked for clarification regarding the notification of adjacent districts regarding planning applications, where applicable.
 - Harcourt Hill Campus highlighted the role of education providers in the planning process.

- Other issues raised included suggestions for further consultation regarding Local Plans, the perception that public opinions are not always taken into account, involvement of the local community in strategic decisions, a request for the creation of focus groups, polls for major developments and further use of online media platforms to raise awareness of planning applications.
20. Consultees made a number of comments and raised issues that have helped to refine the SCI document. These included:
- Clarification regarding which planning applications are dealt with by the district and county council.
 - Updating definitions regarding floorspace.
 - Clarification regarding the notification of adjacent districts regarding planning applications, where applicable.
 - Refining and improving wording, as appropriate.
21. A summary document of the consultation responses received, along with the officer response, can be found at **Appendix 2**.

Refinements to the Statement of Community Involvement

22. The SCI has been refined, taking into account the comments made during the consultation, as summarised above. The SCI has also been amended to include necessary caveats regarding: availability of paper copies of documents; deposit points; and opening hours of council offices that are impacted due to the Covid-19 pandemic.
23. The revised draft version is presented at **Appendix 1**. This should be read alongside **Appendix 2**, which summarises the consultation responses received and the proposed changes as a result of the consultation responses.

Financial Implications

24. There will be costs associated with any printing or distribution of the SCI document. We will limit this to undertake it only where necessary. These costs, (unlikely to be no more than £2000) can be met from within the existing planning policy budget.

Legal Implications

25. The council is legally required, under section 18 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, to produce an SCI to set out how we will engage with our communities who have an interest in matters relating to development in their area.

Risks

26. The council would be at risk if it did not have an updated SCI in place: it is a legal requirement as per the implications listed above.

Other Implications and Timetable

27. It is anticipated that the final document, informed by all representations made, will be adopted by Cabinet in Autumn 2020.

Conclusion

28. The SCI will be a vital tool to assist the council in the preparation of planning policy documents and when deciding on planning applications for development. The changes made following public consultation will provide further clarity to the community, developers, development management team, town and parishes and councillors who may wish to be involved in the planning process.
29. Scrutiny Committee are asked to feedback any comments on the Statement of Community Involvement to the Cabinet Member for Planning.

Background Papers:

Appendix 1 – Revised Statement of Community Involvement

Appendix 2 – Summary of Consultation Responses