

Cabinet Report

Report of Head of Planning

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To: CABINET

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Statement of Community Involvement

Recommendations

- (a) To adopt the Statement of Community Involvement ('SCI'), as set out under Appendix 1 of this report.
- (b) Delegate to the Head of Planning in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Planning to make any minor changes, typographical corrections or non-material amendments to the SCI prior to adoption.

Purpose of Report

1. To report to Cabinet the key issues raised following the six week public consultation and the changes proposed to the Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) document.

Corporate 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.
5. The revised SCI sets out how the council wishes to engage with the community and how they can engage on 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 the preparation of the 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. 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

16. Public consultation on the draft revised SCI was undertaken between 27 February and 9 April 2020. There is no requirement to consult on the SCI, however, it is good practice to do so.
17. The SCI consultation document is available to view and access from the [council website](#).
18. Those on our consultation database, including town and parish councils and statutory bodies, were notified of the consultation. The council received 37 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.
19. A summary document of the consultation responses received, can be found at **Appendix 2**.
20. The draft SCI document was taken to Scrutiny Committee on 20 July 2020. The SCI was well received and commended by the Committee, particularly for its principles, definitions and helping the public to understand the planning process further.
21. Scrutiny Committee made a number of comments to help refine the SCI document. These included:
 - Further clarification regarding Sustainability Appraisal/Strategic Environmental Assessment in relation to Neighbourhood Plans and Development Plan Documents.
 - Further clarification regarding Area Action Plans and their purpose.

- Additional explanation regarding the potential to use development forums for strategic sites (over 200 dwellings) during the pre-application process.

22. Other minor comments were received and where appropriate, they have helped to refine the final track-change version. It was considered that the changes were necessary to provide further clarity and consistency for the wider audience.

Refinements to the Statement of Community Involvement

23. The draft SCI has been refined, taking into account the comments made during the consultation. 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.

24. 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.

25. The revised track-change draft version is presented at **Appendix 1**. This should be read alongside **Appendix 2**, which summarises the consultation responses received, and the proposed changes taken forward within the SCI as a result of the consultation responses. A final version of the SCI which presents the document with all track-changes taken into account can also be viewed at **Appendix 1a**.

26. The format and presentation of this document will be refined once a decision has been made regarding publication.

Options

27. Not applicable.

Financial Implications

28. 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 more than £2000) can be met from within the existing planning policy budget.

Legal Implications

29. 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

30. 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.

Conclusion

31. 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.

Background Papers

- **Appendix 1** - Revised Statement of Community Involvement
- **Appendix 1a** - Finalised Statement of Community Involvement
- **Appendix 2** - Summary of Consultation Responses