

STATEMENT OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT – DRAFT FOR CONSULTATION

Cabinet – 6 February 2014

Report of	Chief Planning Officer
Status:	For decision
Key Decision:	No
Also considered by:	This was also due to be by the Local Planning & Environment Advisory Committee on 22 January 2014 but the meeting was inquorate

Executive Summary:

This report outlines the contents of the Council's draft Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) in Planning. The document details how we propose to engage local people and organisations in the development planning process, both in planning policy and development management.

An SCI was first adopted by the Council in 2006 and this version refreshes that document, to bring it up to date with current consultation methods, particularly in relation to electronic communication.

This is a consultation document and once the draft is agreed, it is proposed that public consultation will take place for six weeks in spring 2014.

This report supports the Key Aims of the Community Plan

Portfolio Holder Cllr. Ian Bosley

Contact Officer(s) Hannah Gooden ext. 7178

Recommendation to Cabinet:

To agree to publish the draft Statement of Community Involvement for consultation.

Reason for recommendation:

To update the previously adopted Statement of Community Involvement to provide a current code of practice for community involvement in planning.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) has been produced to make sure we can involve our community effectively in the development of local planning policy and decisions on planning applications. Please see Appendix A.
- 1.2 The Council's first SCI was adopted in 2006. Since then there have been significant changes to the planning system and this new version of the SCI has been revised to reflect the most up to date legislation and regulation changes.
- 1.3 We understand that in order to try to reach agreement within communities, people need to be involved from the early stages of the planning process. The SCI is therefore a public statement that lets communities and stakeholders know when and how they can be involved.

2. Background

- 2.1 It is a key objective of the town and country planning system to strengthen community and stakeholder involvement in the planning and development process. Planning affects all communities, so it is important that local people understand the process and are given the opportunity to get involved.
- 2.2 All local authorities are required to produce a SCI, which sets out their vision and strategy for effective community participation.
- 2.3 Greater community participation and empowerment is also on the national agenda, as outlined in the Localism Act 2011 and the National Planning Policy Framework 2012 which states that one of the core principles of planning is to 'empower local people to shape their surroundings' (paragraph 17).
- 2.4 Engaging communities early in the plan-making and planning application processes should ensure that plans and developments reflect the views of local people, and will allow for communities to fully understand the process from start to finish.

3. Links to other Council Policy and Strategy

- 3.1 The Council's Corporate Plan sets out that we are committed to cultivating:

'pride in the District of Sevenoaks by working with the Community as a whole, to sustain and develop a fair, safe and thriving local economy.'

- 3.2 The Corporate Plan makes a specific commitment to:

'review our Statement of Community Involvement and clarify how people can get involved in shaping local planning policy.'

- 3.3 The Council, as a whole, also has its own policies and aims relating to community engagement and places a great deal of emphasis on ensuring the community has the opportunity to get involved in all areas of council work.
- 3.4 The Sevenoaks District Community Plan 'Making it happen together' was adopted in 2013 and sets out residents' priorities for the next 15 years to 2028. The Plan has been informed by comprehensive engagement and consultation so that the final document reflects the issues local people care about. The Community Plan contains a number of themes and priorities for action that are required to successfully deliver the vision for the District. Our local development documents will build upon these objectives and will be the principal mechanism for delivering the land use and spatial elements of the Community Plan.
- 3.5 The SCI has been produced in accordance with these corporate policies, and our consultation activities will aim to meet their objectives. We will work with other departments to ensure that a consistent approach is taken to consultation.

4. Community Involvement

- 4.1 There are two main areas of town planning in which the community can participate:
- Planning Policy (Local Plans) – setting the policy framework against which planning applications will be judged.
 - Development Management (Planning Applications) – most types of development require a planning application to be submitted and approved, and anyone can comment on a planning applications.
- 4.2 The Statement of Community Involvement sets out the stages at which the community can be involved in these areas of planning. It notes the minimum standards of consultation required by Regulations and states that we are committed to going further than these minimum requirements to ensure community involvement can be more effective for Sevenoaks.
- 4.3 The SCI provides further detail on the various channels of communication and consultation that are used in planning, including our website, emails, letters, the local media, libraries, presentations, workshops and forums.
- 4.4 Since the publication of the last SCI in 2006 the ways in which the Council engages with the community have developed and improved. One of the main changes has developed through the use of increased information technology. Over the past year the Council has increased its use of social networking sites, such as Facebook and Twitter, to communicate with residents. Approximately 1,500 now receive regular updates from the Council through these sites, and our consultation events will be advertised on our Corporate Facebook and Twitter pages.

5. Consultation

5.1 The draft SCI will be subject to six weeks public consultation in spring 2014. The Council will consider the responses to this consultation and make any necessary amendments to the document before adoption. The document will be formatted before publication, to ensure that it is a user-friendly document, but the content will remain the same.

6. Conclusion

6.1 This report outlines the proposed updates to the previously adopted Statement of Community Involvement to provide a current code of practice for community involvement in planning. It is recommended that this draft document is published for public consultation.

Other Options Considered and/or Rejected

The Council could continue to rely on the existing Statement of Community Involvement from 2006, but this is out of date, and therefore this option is not recommended.

Key Implications

Financial

Consultation on this document will be funded out of existing planning policy budgets. No additional costs to the Council arise from the adoption of the SCI.

Legal Implications and Risk Assessment Statement.

All local authorities are required to produce an SCI to set out their vision and strategy for effective community participation.

Equality Impacts

Consideration of impacts under the Public Sector Equality Duty:		
Question	Answer	Explanation / Evidence
a. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper have potential to disadvantage or discriminate against different groups in the community?	No	The SCI is designed to ensure that Sevenoaks District Council effectively involves the community in the development of all documents, SPDs and DPDs that make up the Local Plan (also known as the LDF). The SCI also details how the Council consult on planning applications. The SCI aims to consider the needs and priorities of the whole community, and attempts to overcome any barriers which may prevent groups or individuals within the community from being involved in the planning process.
b. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper have the potential to promote equality of opportunity?	Yes	

Consideration of impacts under the Public Sector Equality Duty:		
Question	Answer	Explanation / Evidence
c. What steps can be taken to mitigate, reduce, avoid or minimise the impacts identified above?	N/A	

Appendices

Appendix A – Statement of Community Involvement, 2014

Background Papers:

None

Mr Richard Morris
Chief Planning Officer