

**Public
Key Decision - Yes**

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Title/Subject Matter: Statement of Community Involvement 2023

Meeting/Date: Overview & Scrutiny (Performance and Growth) – 4
January 2022
Cabinet – 24 January 2022

Executive Portfolio: Executive Councillor for Planning

Report by: Chief Planning Officer

Ward(s) affected: All Wards

Executive Summary:

A Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) sets out how local planning authorities will engage with the community on planning matters. This SCI covers planning matters such as involving the community in the production of planning policy documents, neighbourhood planning and involving the community in the planning application process.

The requirement to produce a Statement of Community Involvement is set out in section 18 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. Regulations require the SCI to be reviewed at least once every five years. Failure to meet the identified actions in the SCI could (on rare occasions) result in a legal challenge to planning related decisions.

The SCI has been reviewed and updated to reflect the Council's approach to the upcoming Local Plan preparation and consultation stages and reflects changes to the Council's planning application procedures, processes and decision-making.

The first stage of the Local Plan review includes a formal review of Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036 accompanied by a request to commence preparation of an update to the Plan as presented in a separate but inter-related report. This sits alongside the production of a Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report and Statement of Community Involvement which have been produced ready for public engagement. It is proposed that the first stage of public engagement will commence in February 2023 and run for 6 weeks.

Agreement is sought for to the contents of the SCI and for it to proceed to public engagement.

Recommendation(s):

The Cabinet is

RECOMMENDED

- To approve the contents of the Statement of Community Involvement 2023
- To agree that the Statement of Community Involvement can be published for public consultation commencing in February 2023 and running for 6 weeks.

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 This report sets out the purpose and content of the Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) and asks that Cabinet approve contents of the Statement of Community Involvement and agree that it can be published for public engagement commencing in February 2023.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The requirement to produce a Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) is set out in Regulation 18 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended) and also referred to in Regulation 14 of the Neighbourhood Planning Act 2017 (as amended). Further guidance for local authorities is also set out in National Planning Practice Guidance in the Plan-Making section.
- 2.2 The SCI must reflect the Council's commitment to consultation and engagement, equality and data protection whilst also focussing on how this is undertaken specifically in relation to planning matters.
- 2.3 The SCI must be reviewed at least once every five years as set out in Regulation 10a of The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012. This ensures that the procedures remain relevant and effectively address the needs of the local community.

3. OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 3.1 It is recommended that local planning authorities review and update their SCI at the same time as reviewing and updating a plan to reflect what action will be taken to involve the community in any changes to the Local Plan.
- 3.2 There is no requirement for local planning authorities to consult when reviewing and updating their Statement of Community Involvement. However, engaging with local communities on the SCI will enable residents, communities and businesses to be involved and informed of how they can contribute to the planning process. It will give the opportunity to suggest alternative views which could be taken on board and implemented subject to the availability of resources and implications for progress on preparation of documents and determination of planning applications.

4. STATEMENT OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

- 4.1 The Statement of Community Involvement covers the following planning matters:
- Involving the community in the production of planning policy documents
 - Neighbourhood planning
 - Involving the community in the planning application process
 - Brownfield Land Registers
 - Monitoring and Review

- 4.2 To provide a more comprehensive overview of the planning system a chapter has been introduced on 'What is Planning?' (Chapter 2, pages 2-3 of the SCI, Appendix 1). The planning system can be overly complex at times with multiple organisations having responsibility for different aspects of planning. This chapter is designed to provide a signposting service across the wider planning spectrum for members of the public.
- 4.3 Chapter 3 'Involving the Community in the Production of Planning Documents' (pages 4 to 15 of the SCI, Appendix 1), sets out the process of Local Plan preparation and consultation requirements. It sets out the Council's Statutory obligations, methodology and stages for consultation and public involvement in the development of planning policy documents such as the Local Plan and Supplementary Planning Documents. It also identifies how public comments are processed and taken into account in the development of documents.
- 4.4 Some engagement methods are specified as 'the Council may', these are not a statutory requirement, but provide a list of the methods that the Council may want to undertake allowing for an element of flexibility dependent on staff, time and financial resources at any particular point in time.
- 4.5 Chapter 4 covers 'Neighbourhood Planning' (pages 16 to 17 of the SCI, Appendix 1). Unlike other Development Plan Documents such as Local Plans, Neighbourhood Plans are not produced by Huntingdonshire District Council. Huntingdonshire District Council is however required to provide neighbourhood planning support and has a statutory requirement to undertake certain elements of consultation, provide guidance (on request) and facilitate the referendum and 'making' (adoption) of the Neighbourhood Plan. This chapter summarises the process and provides links to a more comprehensive Neighbourhood and Community Planning Guide which is specific to Huntingdonshire.
- 4.6 Chapter 5 (pages 18 to 24 of the SCI, Appendix 1) addresses the topic of 'Involving the Community in the Planning Application Process' and covers aspects such as planning application types, the Council's pre-application service, the planning application process and consultation. Specific focus is also given to decision-making, developer contributions and monitoring, planning appeals and enforcement.
- 4.7 Chapter 6 (pages 25 to 27 of the SCI, Appendix 1) addresses the Council's 'Brownfield Land Register'. This is register of land that the Council considers is appropriate for residential development. The requirement to produce a register was introduced by Government in April 2017 through The Town and Country Planning (Brownfield Land Register) Regulations 2017. This chapter includes any publicity and consultation procedures that may apply.
- 4.8 The final two chapters (pages 28 and 29 of the SCI, Appendix 1) provide additional information on 'the monitoring and review process and general complaints procedure.

5. COMMENTS OF OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY

- 5.1 The Panel discussed the Statement of Community Involvement Report at its meeting on 4th January 2023.
- 5.2 Councillor Harvey enquired whether any consideration would be given to extending the deadlines given that this had been done to accommodate the St Ives Masterplan. The Panel heard that whilst deadlines would be firm, communication would be ongoing with local Councils. It was also highlighted that these consultations go above the Council's obligations as the Council is not legally required to consult on this Statement.
- 5.3 Following a further question on parish communications from Councillor Cawley, the Panel heard that the team were grateful for Member's support in getting the message to parishes and that a relevant briefing would be shared in due course.
- 5.4 Councillor Grey observed that whilst the Plan was fairly future proof, it was important to engage with residents throughout the process.
- 5.5 Following the discussion, the Panel were in agreement that the Cabinet be encouraged to endorse the recommendations within the report.

6. TIMETABLE FOR IMPLEMENTATION

- 6.1 Public consultation on the SCI is proposed to commence in February 2023 and run for 6 weeks.
- 6.2 At the close of consultation, the comments made will be assessed and changes made where considered appropriate. A final version of the SCI will then be published on the Council's webpages.

7. LINK TO THE CORPORATE PLAN, STRATEGIC PRIORITIES AND/OR CORPORATE OBJECTIVES

- 7.1 The production of an SCI aligns with the objective 'improving housing provision' as set out in the Corporate Plan 2022/23, a key action of which is:

"Commence an update of the Local Plan. This should ensure that local planning policies include a focus on sustainability of new developments, achieving the right mix of housing sizes, types and tenures to meet the needs of residents, the quality of the built environment, creating healthy spaces and communities, public transport and digital connectivity."

- 7.2 It also aligns with the objective 'strengthening our communities' through the key action of:

"Support community planning by providing advice to Towns and Parish Councils seeking to develop or update Neighbourhood Plans".

8. CONSULTATION

- 8.1 Internal feedback was requested and received from the Development Management, Implementation and Enforcement Teams (in Planning Services) to ensure that the processes identified within the SCI are correct. Minor amendments were made to reflect changes to the Council's planning application procedures, processes and decision-making.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 The Statement of Community Involvement must be reviewed at least once every five years as set out in Regulation 10a of The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012. This ensures that the procedures remain relevant and effectively address the needs of the local community. Failure to meet the identified actions in the SCI could (on rare occasions) result in a legal challenge to planning related decisions

10. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDED DECISIONS

- 10.1 The Statement of Community Involvement must be reviewed at least once every five years as set out in Regulation 10a of The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012.
- 10.2 Consultation and publication of the SCI is considered essential to meeting the Council's Corporate Plan 2022/23 objective 'improving housing provision' Action 1 'Commence an update of the Local Plan'.

11. LIST OF APPENDICES INCLUDED

Appendix 1 – Statement of Community Involvement 2023

12. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- [Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004](#)
- [Neighbourhood Planning Act 2017](#)
- [The Town and Country Planning \(Local Planning\) \(England\) Regulations 2012](#)
- [National Planning Practice Guidance](#)
- [Huntingdonshire District Council Neighbourhood and Community Planning Guide](#)
- [The Town and Country Planning \(Brownfield Land Register\) Regulations 2017](#)

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