

**PLANNING SERVICES PROPOSED COMMUNITY
LIAISON AND ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY
REPORT BY HEAD OF PLANNING SERVICES, HEAD OF POLICY AND
HEAD OF IMD**

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek Cabinet's endorsement of :

- the Community Liaison and Engagement Strategy for Planning Services which describes how the Council can deliver best practice in community involvement and consultation through the implementation of a series of eight actions. (Appendix 1)

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 The Government is demanding better community consultation and community involvement in the planning process and the Council has produced its Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) on how it intends to consult the community during the preparation of Development Plan Documents, Supplementary Planning Documents and in the determination of planning applications.

2.2 Since the production of the SCI, The Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) has produced "Guidelines on Effective Community Involvement and Consultation" (Appendix 2). Planning Services in conjunction with the Council's Policy Division, intends to incorporate these best practice methods and standards into the way it consults with the local community via the Community Liaison and Engagement Strategy

2.3 The Community Liaison and Engagement Strategy also aims to increase the level of community involvement in the planning process and develop better links with neighbouring Authorities and organisations such as Planning Aid.

2.4 Planning Aid is a free service to qualifying individuals or groups and provides advice regarding planning matters to the local community. It is funded by the Government through the Planning Delivery Grant.

3. BEST PRACTICE CONSULTATION

3.1 The first three actions of the Strategy show how the Council can seek to improve its consultation standards and methods for Planning Services by incorporating the best practice advice contained within the RTPI Guidelines and by drawing on the experience and resources of the Council's Policy Division. This will help achieve a more corporate approach to consultation which would:

- support the Council's Communication and Consultation Strategy;
- ensure a consistent, high quality, corporate approach to the consultation;
- better utilise the consultation skills available within the Council;
- minimise the possibility of planning consultations being open to challenge under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and Race Relations Amendment Act 2000;
- ensure planning consultations are engaging hard to reach groups appropriately, including young people;
- help to avoid duplication, involvement overload and consultation fatigue in light of requirements for more community consultation;
- inform and help to deliver the environmental, economic and social objectives of the Community Strategy;
- inform and help to achieve the aims of Growing Success-the Council's Corporate Plan; and,
- enable the Council through co-ordinated feedback, to monitor and continually improve its systems and practices.

4 INCREASED COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

4.1 Actions Four, Five and Six of the Strategy show how the Council can seek to increase the level of community involvement in the planning process which should:

- strengthen the 'evidence base' for the Council's Local Development Framework, including the use and development of land;
- empower geographic and business communities, special interest and environmental groups, to influence decisions that have an impact on their everyday lives by working more closely with communities, neighbourhoods and parishes to help them understand how they can influence the planning process;
- enhance democratic credibility in the decision making process by providing an effective voice and clear routes of communication with the Council;
- support the role of local councillors in decision making as democratic representatives of the local community; and
- increase the transparency and understanding of the planning process within the community.

4.2 Action Five proposes the introduction of public speaking at Development Control Panel and will involve a change to the Council's Constitution, to be endorsed by Full Council. In addition, it is proposed that any planning application referred to Full Council will follow this new procedure for public speaking, further reinforcing the Council's commitment to improving the quality of public involvement with increased opportunities for public speaking.

5 BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

5.1 Action Seven and Eight of the Strategy indicate how the Council intends to build on existing relationships with community organisations and neighbouring authorities which should allow the Council to:

- exchange information with neighbouring authorities on consultation and community engagement and to offer the opportunity to Members of neighbouring Authorities to speak at the Council's Development Control Panel; and
- improve its links with Planning Aid, a free service to qualifying individuals or groups, that provides advice regarding planning matters to the local community, funded by the Government through the Planning Delivery Grant. The Government recently called on local authorities to appoint a Councillor or Officer to act as a champion to help individuals and groups play a greater role in shaping their communities.

6 IMPLEMENTATION

- 6.1 The Council intends to deliver these improvements through the implementation of the eight actions described in Appendix 1. These actions form the Planning Services Community Liaison and Engagement Strategy.
- 6.2 The Strategy will be a mechanism for co-ordinating consultation, improving community engagement and delivering high standards in community consultation and engagement, and will further enhance the integrity, visibility, accessibility and inclusiveness of the planning process in Huntingdonshire.

7 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The implementation of the Strategy can be achieved within existing financial budgets.

8. RECOMMENDATION

- 8.1.1 It is recommended that
- Members recognise the Royal Town Planning Institute's Guidelines on "Effective Community Involvement and Consultation", and
 - Members endorse the Community Liaison and Engagement Strategy for Planning Services.

REFERENCES AND BACKGROUND PAPERS:

HDC Statement of Community Involvement
HDC Community Strategy
Jones R. (2006), Managing Community Involvement. The Consultation Institute
Royal Town Planning Institute (2005) Guidelines on Effective Community Involvement and Consultation
TSO - The Stationary Office (2004) Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act.
TSO - The Stationary Office (2004) PPS12- Planning Policy Statement 12
TSO - The Stationary Office (2004) PPS1-Planning Policy Statement 1

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