

**COMT
OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY (Environmental Wellbeing)
DM PANEL
CABINET**

**26th March 2012
10th April 2012
16th April 2012
19th April 2012**

**STATEMENT OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT
(Report by Head of Planning Services)**

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 This report recommends that a new Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) is approved to replace the existing 2006 SCI. A draft new SCI has been prepared and was consulted on between 3 February and 16 March 2012. Some 23 comments from 13 organisations and individuals have been received. Taking into account comments received, and any additional comments from the Overview and Scrutiny (Environmental Wellbeing) Panel, and the Development Management Panel, the document can be approved with any necessary amendments.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 Preparation of a Statement of Community Involvement is a requirement on Council arising from the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. Initially, Councils were required to prepare a draft SCI and have it independently examined by a Planning Inspector. This Council duly prepared such an SCI which was examined and then adopted in October 2006. The requirement for independent examination was removed in 2009. However, it is still necessary to have an approved SCI.

2.2 In an Equality Impact Assessment prepared in 2009 it was noted that the 2006 SCI was becoming dated and an action was identified to update it by 2012. Given the new Local Plan process agreed by Cabinet in December 2011, now is an opportune time. The Inspector who examines the Local Plan will consider whether the plan has been prepared in accordance with the SCI.

2.3 The SCI's fundamental purpose is to set out how planning matters are consulted on. The focus of the draft SCI is on the new Local Plan process, although the procedures for other policy documents and consulting on planning applications are also covered.

2.4 The SCI fits with the Council's Corporate Consultation and Engagement Strategy. That document was approved by Cabinet in February 2008 and is at a higher level such that the two do not conflict.

2.5 The draft SCI states that the Council will encourage public participation within the context of available resources and the potential for 'consultation fatigue'. The Local Plan will be prepared with consultation stages on the Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report (which has already occurred), key principles and evidence, draft proposals and then publication. At the publication stage comments can only be made on the issues of soundness as the plan will be ready for examination. The timetable for these is set out separately in the

Local Development Scheme, approved by Cabinet in February 2012 and now on our website.

2.6 In respect of other planning documents such as Supplementary Planning Documents and Urban Design Frameworks, it is noted that there will be at least one period of public consultation prior to approval by Cabinet.

2.7 The procedures for planning applications follow relevant legislation and the series of advice notes available on our website.

2.8 A consultation summary will be prepared for publication with the final SCI.

3. ISSUES RAISED IN COMMENTS

3.1 Appendix A summarises observations and objections received and the officer response in respect of them. In addition to those in the appendix, several respondents noted general support for the draft SCI.

3.2 In respect of policy issues, comments show an interest in the way that Council will engage on strategic issues and the methods of consultation. The support that Council can give for neighbourhood planning is also noted.

3.3 Comments on the process for considering planning applications mostly relate to how applications can be viewed online and how objectors can be heard. The Council has comprehensive systems in place which are continually being reviewed and improved where appropriate.

3.4 Overall it is considered that the draft SCI is fit for purpose and no amendments are required as a result of the consultation. Subject to comments from the Development Management Panel, Overview and Scrutiny and Cabinet, the procedures and processes can be finalised to guide consultation on planning issues.

4. RECOMMENDATION

4.1 It is recommended that Cabinet authorises the Executive Councillor for Strategic Planning and Housing, in conjunction with the Chairman of the Development Management Panel and the Head of Planning Services, to finalise and approve the Statement of Community Involvement.

Appendix A: Consultation Summary

Background Information

The consultation document and full comments are available on the Council's consultation portal: <http://consult.huntingdonshire.gov.uk/portal>

The Local Development Scheme is on the Council's website:

<http://www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk/Planning/Planning%20Policy/Pages/Local%20Development%20Scheme.aspx>

CONTACT OFFICER - enquiries about this report to Paul Bland, Planning Services Manager (Policy) on 01480 388 430

**APPENDIX A
CONSULTATION SUMMARY**

Summary of Comments	District Council Response
<u>Policy Issues</u>	
<p>Strategic scale proposals should be subject to public consultation before being included in a draft Local Plan.</p> <p>Council should publish a diary of meetings with developers and presentations on strategic scale issues.</p>	<p>Strategic scale proposals such as that at Alconbury Airfield will be outlined at the key principles and evidence stage prior to inclusion in the draft Local Plan. A diary of all meetings would not be practical.</p>
<p>Cooperation with neighbouring councils, including the County Council, is supported.</p> <p>The impact of neighbouring developments such as the proposed Great Haddon will need to be taken into account in the Local Plan.</p>	<p>Draft paragraph 4.2 recognises the need for cooperation. The duty to cooperate is a legal requirement under the Localism Act and the impact of neighbouring proposals will be considered in producing the Local Plan.</p>
<p>An Appendix should be included listing all the groups included on the policy consultation database. The process for being added to the list should be noted.</p>	<p>There is an example of another Council listing groups on their website (Mid Sussex) but most other Councils have not. The list would quickly become out of date so the website would need to be updated regularly. The list would have to be limited to key contacts rather than all individuals, but there could be issues of Data Protection. The SCI indicates how people can put themselves on the consultation database. It is not considered necessary to also have a public list of who is on it.</p>
<p>Cambridgeshire Local Access Forum should be added to the list of those consulted with for all policies that have implications for access, recreation and rights of way.</p>	<p>A relevant email address has been added by the consultee to the consultation database and therefore the Cambridgeshire Local Access Forum will receive automatic notifications of policy consultations.</p>
<p>Engagement other than through the online portal is to be encouraged. The Federation of Small Businesses would be happy to support the authority in business engagement, for example by facilitating business focus groups where local plan activities have a significant impact on the business environment i.e. town centre or major employment sites.</p>	<p>The SCI supports additional means of engagement. The support of the Federation of Small Businesses is welcomed.</p>
<p>Neighbourhood Plans may be difficult to produce. Guidance and support may be needed.</p>	<p>Draft paragraph 5.3 recognises that Council will need to provide guidance and support.</p>

Summary of Comments	District Council Response
Planning Application Issues	
<p>Consultation with neighbours should be required prior to applications.</p> <p>Pre-application consultation for small applications as well as large can save time and money. Are applicants already being encouraged to consult with neighbours and the local town or parish councils as early as possible?</p> <p>Written materials exchanged under preliminary enquiries relevant to a later application should be publicly available.</p>	<p>The Localism Act only requires consultation on very large scale developments at the pre-application stage. The Council cannot require consultation with neighbours for all applications, although it is encouraged. The Council's Pre-Application Advice Notes specifically encourage prospective applicants to consult with any neighbours and the local Town/Parish Council. Routinely making enquiries public would discourage some early pre-application discussions. Many people, for many reasons, would rather their enquiry is not revealed in advance of the submission of an application and particularly during the early stages of a prospective proposal. Many enquiries are indeed not followed by applications.</p>
<p>Applications should be available to view online within 2 days of validation.</p>	<p>Since the recent introduction of the Electronic Document Management (EDM), applications are available to view within 2 days of the consultation/notification letters being sent out.</p>
<p>Viewing planning application files has recently been made slower by replacement of the 'interface'. This should be improved.</p>	<p>It is understood that the replacement of concern on the Public Access system was made last year when the system was upgraded. Although this makes some viewing slower, other aspects have been improved. The Public Access software is bought as a package.</p>
<p>Discharge of condition applications should be given a different type of reference number to distinguish them on the planning portal.</p>	<p>Recent improvements to ensure that all documents displayed on the website are clearly described will ensure that it is easy to distinguish each conditions discharge submission from other documents.</p>
<p>It would be useful to have all 'consultee' responses to planning applications showing as is being done in Kings Lynn and West Norfolk.</p>	<p>All comments received have been displayed on Public Access on the Council's website since the beginning of this year. A specific system for statutory consultees may be possible at some time in the future as the Council is continually working to improve the experience for those viewing and responding to applications.</p>
<p>Stakeholders should be notified whenever there are significant changes to application plans that have already been consulted on.</p>	<p>Reconsultation/renotification is carried out if significant changes to a proposal are to be considered.</p>
<p>Consultation should be thoroughly carried out. More</p>	<p>The views of local residents are given very careful consideration and are</p>

<p>attention should be given to the views of local residents. Comments should not be readily overruled. Objectors should be made aware of their right to be heard at Development Management Panel. Guidance on rights to be heard could be included in District Wide or sent out with the annual Council tax bill.</p>	<p>summarised and considered in the officer report published on the website for all applications. When an application is referred to the Development Management Panel, objectors are sent a letter advising them of their right to address the Panel. The 'Your Right to Speak at Development Management Panel on planning applications' leaflet is available on the Planning Applications page on the Council's website. The Council no longer produces a District Wide magazine and it is not considered appropriate to include advice on this detailed matter with the annual Council tax bill.</p>
<p>Summary of Comments</p>	<p>District Council Response</p>
<p><u>Monitoring and Review Issues</u></p>	
<p>Paragraph 7.2 should describe what is considered a suitable manner for private consultations to be carried out, as it states that Council's approach may be amended where private consultation has been carried out in a suitable manner and the results made publicly available. .</p>	<p>It may be that the Council will not need to carry out consultation on an issue which has already been consulted on. The suitability of private consultation will need to be considered in relation to the complexity of the issue. The public availability of the results is important and the level of public response will help inform whether there is a need for additional consultation.</p>