

Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) consultation

Planning Policy Committee Thursday, 16 January 2025

Report of: Deputy Chief Executive

Purpose: For decision

Publication status: Open

Wards affected: All

Executive summary:

The Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) sets out how and when the Council, as the Local Planning Authority (LPA), will engage and consult with local communities, local businesses and other interested parties on planning matters within the District.

The Council's last SCI was adopted in June 2020. Officers undertook a review as part of the initial processes for preparing a new Local Plan; and concluded that a new SCI was needed. A draft SCI was produced in July 2024.

A consultation on the draft SCI ran for six weeks from 17 October to 28 November 2024. Thirteen representations were received.

This report provides a summary of the key issues raised in the consultation and presents the revised final version of the SCI. Subject to any views of the Committee, the SCI will be adopted and come into force with immediate effect. There are no further regulatory stages required.

This report supports the Council's priority of:

Priority 1: Protecting and enhancing our environment.

Priority 4: Putting residents at the heart of what we do.

Contact officer Margret Haggerty Senior Planning Policy Officer
MHaggerty@tandridge.gov.uk –

Recommendation to Committee:

It is recommended that the revised SCI is adopted and published on the Council's website.

Reason for recommendation:

Local planning authorities are required to prepare and keep up to date a SCI as set out in section 18 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

Introduction and background

- 1 The SCI is a statutory document which sets out the Council's approach to engaging with the Community and explains why, how, and when the community will be able to participate in planning issues. These include plan making (local plans), Supplementary Planning Documents, neighbourhood plans, planning applications, and planning enforcement.
- 2 The main aim of the SCI is to ensure a consistent and effective community involvement at all stages of the planning process.
- 3 The requirement to produce a SCI and to review it every 5 years is set out in Section 18 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.
- 4 The Council's last SCI was adopted in June 2020 and included various measures on temporary steps associated with the Covid-19 pandemic.
- 5 In April 2024, a decision was made by the Council to start work on a new Local Plan. As part of the early preparations for a new Local Plan, officers undertook a review of the SCI prior to the expiration of the five-year period and recommended that a new SCI was required.
- 6 The SCI has been drafted with support from Arup; and in consultation with Officers from relevant Council departments, including Communications, Planning Policy, Development Management and Enforcement.
- 7 The updated version will ensure that the Council will remain in accordance with legislative requirements but also reflects changes to communication approaches, increased focus on digital engagement, changes to policy and regulations, and the reversal of pandemic related measures.

Consultation

- 8 It is not a legal requirement to consult on the SCI, however, consultation on the SCI aligns with aspects of the Council's priority of

'Putting residents at the heart of what we do' and demonstrates the Council's commitment in encouraging communities to contribute where there is scope to influence the Council's decisions.

- 9 A six-week consultation on the draft SCI was launched on 17 October 2024. It ran until 28 November 2024.
- 10 The Council consulted all statutory consultees and key stakeholders including all Parish Councils, developers and landowners in the district area, local amenity groups and societies, and those on the Council's consultation database who have expressed their interest in planning policy.

Headline Results

- Thirteen responses were received: Nine responses from statutory consultees - Natural England, Historic England, National Highways, Environment Agency, Surrey County Council, Thames Water, Southern Water, Lingfield Parish Council and Wealden District Council.
- One response from a key stakeholder – a developer.
- Three responses from Tandridge residents.

Key Issues and Themes

- 11 Nine of the 13 respondents provided comments. This section summarises the key issues and themes within those comments and identifies where changes have been made to the SCI as a result.
- 12 **Planning Notices** – An example is the issue that relates to where planning applications notices are displayed. A notice was erected in the respondent's private property without prior notification suggesting that the Council might be encroaching by putting up physical notices in private properties without due prior notification to the landowner. This can be addressed by ensuring that all possible avenues such as searching the land registry for landowner details are explored to reach landowners prior to putting up notices on their land.
- 13 **Lack of real engagement** – This was the main concern of the three residents that responded. They also expressed the difficulty in accessing consultation documents and in understanding planning decisions. These comments will be considered internally as part of continuous improvement of the Council's planning services, however, no direct amendment of the SCI is required.
- 14 **Consultees list** – Respondents suggested a few key stakeholders that they would like to be added onto the consultee list in the SCI. The consultees listed in the SCI are statutory, however, the SCI also makes provision for non-statutory consultees to be consulted. No amendment is recommended.

- 15 **Consultation period** – A suggestion was made that for planning applications and neighbourhood plans the consultation period should be longer. The Council consults in accordance with the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012. Therefore, no amendment is recommended.
- 16 **Acceptable Representation** – there was a suggestion that the Council should not accept anonymous representations. This is a general principle that is already applied to consultations and therefore it is considered appropriate to specify this within the SCI. Additional wording has been inserted as follows: “anonymous representations will not be accepted. Representations received during statutory consultations will be published. However, in cases where comments are made public, sensitive information will be redacted before they are published, such as personal addresses, phone numbers, email addresses, and dates of birth”.
- There was another suggestion that abuse within comments should be the basis of a non-crime hate incident and should be sent to the police. The equality section of the SCI already sets out how abusive comments will be dealt with; therefore, no further change has been made.
- 17 **Commitment to consultation methods** – One respondent suggested that the category of ‘what we might do methods’ could be adopted for specific consultation processes, to provide clarification on when these methods may be used. Such a change would lead to a great deal of repetition, as the methods would be listed repeatedly for different consultation processes. Therefore, no amendment is recommended.

Key implications

Finance Comments (completed by the S151 Officer)

The draft SCI was commissioned for a total fee of £5k. The consultation process, however, has no additional cost implications as it was organised and processed in-house using existing staff resources.

There are no direct cost implications of adopting the SCI per se, however, future costs will be incurred as a result of carrying out consultation exercises on planning matters.

Legal Comments (completed by the Head of Legal)

Section 18(3) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 provides that a Statement of Community Involvement is a local development document (subject to section 17(8)(a)). Although the SCI does not set out planning policies and must not be specified as a development plan document in the local development scheme, it does set out the policy which the Council will follow when consulting the public and other public bodies on the Local Plan and associated documentation.

It is important to note that if the Council does not undertake the specific things the SCI say 'we will' do then it could be subject to legal challenge.

Equality

Duty under the Equalities Act 2010

In assessing this proposal, the following impacts have been identified upon those people with the following protected characteristics (age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation). The proposal would have a neutral impact on the protected characteristics.

Climate change

There are no significant environmental / sustainability implications associated with this report.

Appendices

Appendix A - Statement of Community Involvement

Background papers

None.

----- end of report -----