

Draft Revised Statement of Community Involvement in the Planning Process

Cabinet

Date: 17th October 2012

Author:	Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning and Sustainability Head of Planning
Wards:	All
Locality Affected:	All
Parishes Affected:	All

1. Purpose and Reasons

- 1.1. The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended) requires each Local Planning Authority to produce a Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) to set out a checklist as to how the Council will involve the community in undertaking its planning functions. The SCI is important as any independent examination into plans that the Council produce will assess whether we have undertaken clear and meaningful consultation of our proposals. The Inspector will use the SCI to test this.
- 1.2. The Borough Council's current Statement of Community Involvement was adopted in January 2007. Following this, a revision of this document has been required for planning purposes to reflect the number of changes to the legislative framework aimed at simplifying the planning system. The Localism Act 2011 places greater emphasis on community engagement in the planning process, specifically through Neighbourhood Plans, Neighbourhood Development Orders and Community Right to Buy Orders. Also, the Council has realigned its operating model on the 'Stronger Together' principles, providing a clear community focus for our activities and processes, through localities.
- 1.3. It is important that the Statement of Community Involvement remains relevant and up-to-date, and this review builds upon an evaluation of methods and feedback from recent consultations on planning matters. The draft Statement of Community Involvement is included at Appendix 1 to this report.

2. Recommendations

Cabinet is recommended to:

- 2.1 Approve the draft Statement of Community Involvement (attached at Appendix 1) for consultation in accordance with the arrangements detailed in paragraphs 4.1 to 4.3 of this report; and
- 2.2 Authorise the Head of Planning and the Director of Law and Democratic Services to make minor changes to the content of the Statement of Community

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Involvement, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning and Sustainability and with the Cabinet Member for One Swindon, Localities and Housing, prior to publication for consultation.

3. Detail

Purpose of the SCI

3.1 The revised draft SCI sets out the different stages of community involvement in planning matters. These are:

- Informing
- Involving
- Consulting
- Providing feedback

3.2 The draft Statement of Community Involvement identifies the community groups and other bodies that the Council will involve (these include: Statutory consultees, Councillors, Parish and Town Councils, Developers/Agents, Business, local groups and organisations, and the General Public). The draft particularly draws upon experience of involving 'hard to reach' groups, and suggest a number of methods to promote their involvement.

Methods of Consultation

3.3 The SCI suggests a range of methods of community involvement. The approach taken will depend on its appropriateness to the particular stage of plan production or the type of planning application being considered. It is also dependent on the Council's resources available at the time, but include:

- Informal local 'coffee-morning' events
- Workshops and structured community engagement events
- The greater use of web-based technology, whilst at the same time ensuring no-one is disadvantaged from not having access to technology.
- Locality meetings
- Parish and Residents groups meetings
- Local Interest Groups meetings
- Information on Parish/Town and community websites and in newsletters

3.4 Councillors, with the support of the Locality Leads, will provide one of the means for coordinating activities at the parish/town council, community and neighbourhood level.

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- 3.5 The SCI demonstrates the links with other community involvement initiatives such as the Swindon Sustainable Community Strategy, One Swindon and Swindon Strategic Partnership and the Swindon Compact.
- 3.6 The draft consultation document demonstrates the methods best suited for the different stages in the preparation of local development documents from evidence gathering through to adoption. There is also guidance on how the results of community involvement will be fed into the preparation of Local Development Documents by reporting back to the community.
- 3.7 The SCI sets out the standards that the public can expect, including: how planning applications will be consulted on; how people can make comments on applications; and how the Council will enter into pre-application discussions with developers. There is also an explanation of the role of Planning committees and guidance on planning appeal procedures.

4. Next Steps

- 4.1 The SCI itself must be subject to public consultation. It is important that it has community ownership. The consultation draft will provide an opportunity for the public to make comments on whether the document truly reflects the way communities want to be involved in the preparation of planning policy documents and on planning applications.
- 4.2 If Cabinet approves the draft SCI it will be made available for public consultation for a period of eight weeks as soon as practicable. Copies of the draft SCI would be distributed to a wide range of statutory consultees, including parishes, community councils and resident's associations. The documents would be made available for inspection at the Civic Offices, at libraries throughout the Borough, and on the Council's website. A statutory notice and press release will be made available to the local media.
- 4.3 Following completion of the public consultation period, officers will take account of representations raised to the consultation draft and prepare a final draft which will be presented to a future Cabinet for adoption.

5. Alternative Options

- 5.1 The Council could continue to rely upon the existing Statement of Community Involvement, adopted in 2007 which refers to planning legislation and processes which have since been changed. This document is out of date and no longer in line with best practice, and it would not meet the Borough and Governments aspiration for meaningful public engagement in the planning process.

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6. Implications, Diversity Impact Assessment and Risk Management

Financial and Procurement Implications

- 6.1 The financial implications arising from publishing and consulting on the draft Statement of Community Involvement are to be met from existing Forward Planning budgets for 2012/2013.

Legal and Human Rights Implications

- 6.2 It is not envisaged that the content of this report will have a direct implication upon human rights issues, in so far as greater opportunities will be available to individuals to partake in the planning process. The SCI will seek to improve the quality of consultation for Swindon's residents and stakeholders, building on the principles of basic human rights. The opportunity for public consultation embraces these principles, providing a mechanism by which stakeholders can make formal responses to the proposals contained within the consultation draft SCI itself.

All Other Implications (including Staff, Sustainability, Health, Rural, Crime and Disorder)

- 6.3 The Council has a duty to ensure that the SCI is in accordance with the sustainability principles of the National Planning Policy Framework.

Links to One Swindon, Strategic Objectives, Plans and Policies

The draft SCI links to the Corporate Plan's priorities and objectives that have a spatial dimension, in particular the Community Strategy.

Diversity Impact Assessment

- 6.4 A Diversity Impact Assessment has been undertaken and there are no significant implications arising from this report. The SCI will require that all sections of the community, including those that are regarded as "hard to reach" are engaged in planning matters.

Risk Management

- 6.5 There is a risk that the SCI will become out-dated to help avoid this, the SCI will be reviewed regularly to ensure that it fit for purpose.

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7. Consultees

- 7.1 The Board Director Finance, Revenues, Benefits and Property (Section 151 Officer), Board Director for Localities and Director of Law and Democratic Services (Monitoring Officer) are consulted in respect of all reports.

8. Background Papers

- 8.1 None

9. Appendices

- 9.1 Appendix 1: Draft Statement of Community Involvement
- 9.2 Appendix 2: Diversity Impact Assessment on the Draft Statement of Community Involvement

10. Key Decision/Decision in Forward Plan

- 10.1 This is not a Key Decision and is included in the Cabinet Forward Plan for October 2012.