

15 June 2022		ITEM: 12 Decision: 110612
Cabinet		
Statement of Community Involvement		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Key	
Report of: Cllr Mark Coxshall, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Regeneration and External Affairs		
Accountable Assistant Director: Leigh Nicholson, Assistant Director Planning, Transportation and Public Protection		
Accountable Director: Julie Rogers, Director of Public Realm		
This report is Public		

Executive Summary

The Council is required to prepare a Statement of Community Involvement which sets out how the Council will consult the local community and other stakeholders on planning matters.

A revised Statement of Community Involvement has been prepared to reflect current planning legislation, national policy and guidance and new methods of consultation and engagement. Best practice recommends that it should be subject to public consultation before it is adopted.

1. Recommendation(s)

1.1 To approve the draft Statement of Community Involvement (Appendix A) for public consultation and agree to delegate authority to the Director of Public Realm in consultation with the relevant Portfolio Holder to make any changes resulting from that consultation and to adopt the final version.

2. Introduction and Background

2.1 Planning is all about creating successful places that enable people to live healthier, more prosperous, and better-connected lives. It's also about supporting local businesses and making sure that the things that make our places special are protected. Planning decisions can be small in scale like an extension to your home or nationally significant like the expansion of a port and everything in-between. Planning genuinely affects everyone who lives,

works, and visits in a place. So, it is important that local communities and stakeholders are aware of and can participate in the planning process and be involved in planning decisions.

- 2.2 The Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) sets out how the Council will engage and consult with the local community and other stakeholders on planning matters. It explains the key stages and provides information on how and when the local community and other stakeholders can get involved in the preparation of planning documents and in planning application decisions.
- 2.3 The Council is required by national legislation to prepare a SCI which it should review and update every 5 years. The previous SCI for Thurrock was adopted in December 2015. Work on an update was started in 2019 with a consultation on a draft version undertaken during the end of 2019, however progress was halted in early 2020 due to the Council focusing its resources on responding to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 2.4 As a consequence of the pandemic the Council, like its residents and businesses, has adapted to and established new ways of working and communicating effectively with others. These new methods are useful engagement tools which were not considered in 2019 draft. The pandemic also brought about temporary changes to how Councils could consult on planning matters which was in direct conflict with the approaches to consultation set out in SCIs published prior to 2020. Whilst restrictions and temporary changes to consultation have ceased it is important that any SCI update allows the Council to adapt its approach to consultation should the need ever arise.
- 2.5 The Council has therefore carried out a full review of the SCI, taking into account the changes proposed within the 2019 draft SCI and representations to the consultation, as well as subsequent legislative changes, revised national guidance and the Council's Collaborative Communities framework.
- 2.6 Main changes to the revised SCI (**Appendix A**) include:
 - The introduction of the new Thurrock Collaborative Communities Framework.
 - Updating consultation methods.
 - Consolidating consultation information and engagement methods relevant to plan making into the relevant plan making chapter.
 - Streamlining the preparation stages for Development Plan Documents, such as the Local Plan at the Regulation 18 stage.
 - The council's approach to Planning Performance Agreements with those developing schemes both in plan-making and development management.
 - Providing flexibility into how the Council will undertake planning consultations in exceptional circumstances.
 - Integrating important information in the Appendices into the main body of the document.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

3.1 The Council has a responsibility and legal duty to produce an up-to-date SCI. The proposed revisions to the SCI are considered necessary to meet those requirements and to align with the Council's Collaborative Communities Framework. However, the Council is not required by legislation to consult when reviewing and updating its SCI prior to adoption and the current SCI does not stipulate this as a requirement.

3.2 The following two options have therefore been considered:

1. The Council could adopt the revised SCI without public consultation.
2. The Council could consult on the proposed changes to the SCI and adopt a final version that has taken into account any consultation comments received.

3.3 The preferred option is to consult on the proposed changes as this is recognised within national Planning Practice Guidance to be best practice.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

4.1 It is essential that the Council has an up-to-date SCI as set out in Section 18 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act (2004) (as amended), and it is considered best practice to consult the public on the changes prior to adoption.

5. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

5.1 The revised SCI builds on the draft SCI which was approved and subject to consultation in 2019 by Cabinet. Following agreement by this committee public consultation will be carried out on the revised SCI prior to its adoption.

6. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

6.1 An up-to-date SCI is required to minimise the risk of legal challenge when preparing the Local Plan. The Local Plan has an impact on the delivery of all the Council's corporate objectives.

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Laura Last**
Senior Management Accountant

There is a dedicated budget for plan making to cover the basic costs of preparing planning documents.

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Mark Bowen**
Interim Head of Legal Services

The current system of plan making is contained in the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended) and the Town & Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 (as amended) and supported by the National Planning Policy Framework and Planning Practice Guidance.

The Authority has a statutory duty pursuant to Section 18 of the PCPA 2004 to prepare a statement of community involvement which is a local development document that sets out the authority's policies on giving advice and guidance for neighbourhood planning and on how it will involve those persons with an interest in matters relating to development in their area on the preparation of specified planning documents.

7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Rebecca Lee**
Community Development and Equalities Team Manager

The Council has a statutory duty under the Equality Act 2010 to promote equality of opportunity in the provision of services and employment opportunities between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it. The Statement of Community Involvement will be subject to a Community Equality Impact Assessment to ensure that all sections of the community, including harder to reach groups, will have the opportunity to be involved in helping to shape the future planning and development of Thurrock both through plan-making and the consideration of development proposals.

The Statement of Community Involvement builds on the principles already set out in the Council's Collaborative Communities Framework and specifically "involving residents in the decisions that affect their lives using co-design and co-production methods in the issues facing Thurrock as well as the solutions".

7.4 Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health Inequalities, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder, and Impact on Looked After Children

None

8. Background papers used in preparing the report (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

- Statement of Community Involvement (November 2015) – https://www.thurrock.gov.uk/sites/default/files/assets/documents/statement_community_involvement_201511.pdf
- Draft Statement of Community Involvement (December 2019) - <https://www.thurrock.gov.uk/sites/default/files/assets/documents/statement-community-involvement-201912-thurrock-draft.pdf>

9. Appendices to the report

- Appendix A – Draft Statement of Community Involvement 2022

Report Author:

Laura Bage
Principal Planning Officer
Local Plans Team