

Cabinet – 5 February 2025

Adoption of the revised Statement of Community Involvement

Purpose	For Decision
Classification	Public
Executive Summary	<p>The Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) sets out how the District Council will consult and involve others in planning matters. It covers both the preparation of local plans and planning guidance, and applications for planning permission.</p> <p>Whilst a required statutory document, it is also a statement of the council's commitment to the involvement of our communities in planning matters.</p> <p>Last revised in July 2020, it is important that the document is reviewed from time to time to ensure that it is up to date. This report seeks Cabinet approval to finalise the amendments to the SCI (Appendix 1) and adopt the amended SCI document.</p>
Recommendations	<p>It is recommended that Cabinet recommend to Council the following:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• to note the outcomes of the public consultation that took place for 6 weeks on the proposed amendments to the SCI and agrees the draft responses to the representations received (set out in Appendix 2).• to agree the changes to the SCI set out in Appendix 1 and formally adopts the amended SCI document; and• that any final editorial changes to the document prior to publication be agreed by the Strategic Director of Place, Operations and Sustainability in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Economy.

Reasons for recommendations	<p>The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires the council to have a SCI.</p> <p>The SCI was last reviewed in 2020 and moderate changes are recommended to reflect changes in legislation, best practice and to aide clarity.</p> <p>The NFDC Corporate Plan puts community engagement central to its 'People' priority.</p>
Wards	All wards outside the National Park
Portfolio Holder	Councillor Derek Tipp – Planning and Economy
Strategic Director	James Carpenter – Place, Operations and Sustainability
Officer Contact	<p>Andrew Herring Senior Policy Planner 023 8028 5471 andrew.herring@nfdc.gov.uk</p>

Introduction and background

1. Planning directly affects the places where people live and work, the economy and residents' health and well-being. Meaningful public consultation and engagement on all aspects of planning is vital. It allows communities to have an input into the planning of their area. By maintaining community involvement at the centre of what the council does, we can gain a real understanding of our communities' priorities.
2. Following Cabinet approval in October 2024, a public consultation has been carried out on the proposed revisions to the Statement of Community Involvement (SCI). This report summarises the process and consultation responses received.
3. Just at the end of the consultation period a new National Planning Practice Framework (NPPF) was published. Officers have considered any implications arising from the NPPF in relation to the comments received and proposed.

Consultation response

4. The draft revised SCI was subject to 6 weeks of formal public consultation from Wednesday 23 October – Friday 6 December 2024.
5. For this consultation officers used a variety of mediums to engage with the wider public. This included contacting those on our planning database, publication on the council's website, promotion on social

media (e.g. Facebook, LinkedIn), and direct news releases. A new online consultation platform called 'Go Vocal' was also used where comments could be made directly into a copy of the SCI document. The social media posts also included a helpful 1-minute summary of what an SCI was and why it was important. These posts were repeated during the consultation period.

6. Overall, there were 12 respondents to the public consultation. This compares to 13 received during the last revision to the SCI in 2020. It is not mandatory to consult on revisions to an existing SCI but it was considered good practice to do so. Whilst a generally low number of responses were received, it is comparable to the expected number for a non-statutory consultation.
7. Comments received during the consultation have been considered and some minor changes covered in the next section are proposed in the schedule in Appendix 2, are recommended. These have been incorporated in the document in Appendix 1 (previous agreed changes in October 2024 are shown in red underlined text, with yellow highlighted text showing changes made since the public consultation in October-December 2024).

Revisions to SCI

8. As reported and agreed at the 2 October 2024 Cabinet, there are number of proposed revisions to the SCI as set out in Appendix 1 (shown in red underlined text). In summary these revisions include:
 - Insertion of a number of weblinks;
 - Deletion of previous references to the Covid-19 pandemic and associated restrictions;
 - Clarifications on statutory legislation and updates where there have been changes to the National Planning Policy Framework;
 - Updates in relation to the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and how the council will involve others in allocating CIL to projects;
 - Modest revisions to provide further detail in relation to the different stages of Local Plan production (Section 2); and
 - More extensive updates to the part of the SCI dealing with Development Management and what the council will do at various stages of the planning application consent process (section 6 and Appendix 4 of the SCI).
9. As highlighted in Appendix 2, a number of the responses which are proposed to be taken on board relate to factual updates to legislation or expanding on definitions. Some of the comments received are noted but relate to matters outside the scope of the SCI such as time

limits for speaking at planning committee and amendments to statutory consultee lists (which are set out in legislation).

10. The commitments made and set out in the SCI, as proposed to be updated, represent the minimum that NFDC will do and how the council will engage with residents and wider public bodies.

Corporate Plan priorities

11. The existing SCI already helps to deliver all the priorities of the NFDC Corporate Plan. The Corporate Plan puts community engagement central to its 'People' priority, and under its 'Place' priority the council aims to balance growth with conservation and sustainable development. This also closely aligns with the objective to foster economic growth while ensuring inclusivity and sustainability (under its 'Prosperity' priority).

Financial and resource implications

12. The costs of undertaking the preparation of the SCI, and its implications for consultation in relation to future plan-making and the development management function of the council are capable of being met within existing budgets.

Legal implications

13. The requirement to prepare the SCI is set out in Section 18 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.
14. Regulation 10A of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations (as amended) requires that local planning authorities should review their SCIs at least once every 5 years to ensure that policies remain relevant and effectively address the needs of the local community.

Risk assessment

15. The SCI commits the council to undertake certain community engagement activities in its function as a local planning authority. Failure to undertake these activities as a minimum presents a risk of future local plans being found unsound and judicial challenge of future planning decisions with associated financial, reputational and planning consequences.

Environmental / Climate and Nature implications

16. Consulting the community on both plan making and proposals for planning applications helps to ensure that the Council delivers high quality development within its area that reflects the needs of local communities.

Equalities implications

17. The proposed revisions to the SCI will help to ensure that opportunities to engage with communities on planning matters across plan making and development management are equal. There are opportunities to advance equality and foster good relations through targeted and specific consultation in plan-making, which will in itself be subject to continuing monitoring and review. The development of an appropriate consultation and engagement strategy for plan-making consultations and in relation to development proposals through development management should lead to positive engagement.

Crime and disorder implications

18. None arising directly from this report.

Data protection / Information governance / ICT implications

19. The Council will continue to utilise existing ICT software and processes to maintain data protection of individuals and organisations involved in the planning system.

New Forest National Park/Cranborne Chase National Landscape implications

20. The New Forest National Park Authority is required to produce its own Statement of Community Involvement to support the proposed review of its local plan. The proposed changes to the NFDC SCI are broadly in line with that of the National Park Authority, with similar methods used in how it consults and involves others in planning matters. There are no specific implications identified for the Cranborne Chase National Landscape.

Appendices

Appendix 1 –
Revised SCI (as amended following
public consultation)

Appendix 2 –
Statement of Consultation January
2025 (and NFDC response to
comments)