

Meeting:	Council
Meeting date:	16 December 2016
Title of report:	Statement of community involvement consultation, communications and programme to adoption
Report by:	Cabinet member infrastructure

Classification

Open

Key decision

This is not an executive decision

Wards affected

Countywide

Purpose

To adopt the statement of community involvement.

Recommendation

THAT:

- a) the revised Herefordshire Council statement of community involvement (at appendix 1a & 1b) be adopted; and**
- b) authority be delegated to the monitoring officer to make any consequential amendments to the statement necessary following future changes to the council's constitution relevant to public engagement in order to ensure consistency between the documents.**

Alternative options

- 1 Preparation and adoption of the statement of community involvement is a statutory requirement. The continued use of the existing statement of community involvement is an alternative option. However, this is not recommended as it does not give due consideration to principal use of online communication whenever practical, contains information which is now obsolete and does not provide information on neighbourhood development planning, community right to build and neighbourhood development orders.

Reasons for recommendations

- 2 To ensure the council adheres to the National Planning Policy Framework and local development scheme and the requirement to review the statement of community involvement as and when the need is identified.
- 3 The statement of community involvement forms part of the local plan framework and as such is a budget and policy framework item.

Key considerations

- 4 It is a requirement of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 that as part of the local development framework a statement of community involvement is prepared which sets out the council's policy in respect of consultation on planning matters. The revised statement of community involvement would replace the current document adopted in March 2007. Extensive review of the planning process leading to the publication of the Localism Act in 2011 and National Planning Policy Framework in 2012 means there is now far greater emphasis on early engagement with all potentially affected parties.
- 5 Over the last eight years, use of online technology as a communication and information tool has increased extensively. It is accepted that more traditional 'offline' modes of communication, such as letters via post and hard copies of documents are still necessary; however, these can now be used to a much lesser degree. The draft of the new statement of community involvement reflects this culture shift.
- 6 The basis of the Localism Act is to devolve power from central government. It gives communities the opportunity to take responsibility for the shaping of development in their area, within the parameters of the core strategy.
- 7 Along with the new legislation came the introduction of neighbourhood planning, subject to majority support in a referendum and working in tandem with the strategic policies within the Herefordshire local plan – core strategy.
- 8 Each neighbourhood development plan establishes general planning policy for sustainable growth and use of land within a defined area.
- 9 Communities are also given the opportunity to manage development without the need to go through the conventional planning application process, in the form of a neighbourhood development order or community right to build. However, proposals will still need to meet certain criteria and overwhelming community support must be demonstrated before any work can go ahead.

- 10 The revised statement of community involvement details the various ways in which people are able to be involved in the planning process and the commitment the council has to ensure there is ample opportunity to do so.
- 11 Public consultation on the new statement of community involvement has been conducted on-line including email correspondence to specified consultees and the local development framework database to publicise the consultation. It included an on-line questionnaire using the questions set out in appendix 4.
- 12 The consultation was also publicised through the local media, council social media pages and website. A report has been produced setting out the results of the consultation in appendix 5 and the conclusions that can be drawn from it in appendix 2.
- 13 Following consideration by general overview and scrutiny committee on 5 September, further amendments (as detailed in appendix 3) have been made in order to improve clarity on certain aspects and provide additional guidance where it was thought to be required.

Community impact

- 14 The council's code of corporate governance includes a commitment to encourage public participation in local government and the adoption of a revised statement of community involvement supports this commitment. The statement of community involvement identifies those groups considered to be more of a challenge to engage with and sets out suggested methods to achieve greatest participation.
- 15 Established organisations representing these groups provide a vital communication network for the council to utilise. Many of the organisations listed in the original document, produced in 2007, no longer exist, hence the revised statement of community involvement replaces those with current information.

Equality duty

- 16 In order to ensure that due regard for equality and diversity is met, the following measure will be taken:
 - The document is available in alternative formats
 - A number of changes have been made to the document in light of the consultation including the removal of acronyms and the use of plain English.
 - A summary will be made available to ensure that the information is accessible. See appendix 1b.

Financial implications

- 17 There are no financial implications arising directly as a result of this decision.
- 18 Emphasis on utilising online communication as much as possible means potential cost efficiencies if the revised document is adopted.

Legal implications

- 19 Adoption of the revised document fulfils the statutory requirement for the council to maintain an up to date statement of community involvement, detailing its commitment to engage with the public during preparation of planning documents. This is in accordance with Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

Risk management

- 20 By consulting on and adopting the revised document, the council will avoid breaching its statutory duty to maintain a statement of community involvement.

Consultees

- 21 Public consultation was undertaken between 10 February and 23 March 2016 upon the draft document in accordance with the requirements set out in the existing SCI. The summary of these representations and response is set out in appendix 5 & 2.
- 22 It was considered by GOSC on Monday 5 September and Appendix 3 sets out the changes suggested by the committee and the cabinet's response to those changes.
- 23 Cabinet considered the draft statement and the consultation responses on 3 November and recommended the statement to Council for adoption.

Appendices

Appendix 1a - Draft Statement of Community Involvement.

Appendix 1b – Summarised version of draft Statement of Community Involvement

Appendix 2 – List of changes to original draft following public consultation

Appendix 3 – List of changes proposed by General Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Appendix 4 – Consultation questions

Appendix 5 – Summary of consultation responses

Background papers

- None identified.