

STATEMENT OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Report By: Forward Planning Manager

1. Wards Affected

Countywide

2. Purpose

- 2.1 To inform members of the progress being made on preparation of the Council's Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) and to receive and agree the final draft for submission to the Secretary of State and for consultation purposes. This document is required as part of the new planning system and will set out how the Council will consult on planning matters.

3. Background

- 3.1 Reports were presented to Planning Committee on the 30th September 2005 and the 20th January 2006 which provided information on the new planning system and the need to prepare a Statement of Community Involvement (SCI). The purpose of the SCI is to:

- Identify who will be consulted on particular types of documents and applications and when they will be actively involved in plan making and in reaching decisions on planning applications;
- Set out transparent, accessible and meaningful approaches to community involvement in plan preparation and decision making on planning applications;
- Encourage early involvement in decision making between the community, interest groups and stakeholders. This can help to resolve any initial conflicts and can generate a sense of ownership early in the process and on agreed outcomes.
- Recognise and understand the different needs of all sections of the community and stakeholder interests and establish the most effective means of enabling all sections of the community to make their views known and help shape planning decisions in their areas;
- Explain how the results of the consultations will be fed into preparation of local development documents and how those involved will be kept informed;
- Set out standards for the Council to achieve and explain how the process will be resourced and managed and how the new planning process will be co-ordinated with other community involvement and consultation initiatives undertaken by the Council.
- To ensure that the Council complies with the adopted Statement of Community Involvement when preparing its Local Development Documents and this compliance must be kept under review and revised where necessary.

3.2 The process by which an SCI is prepared is laid down by Government in the Town and Country Planning (Local Development)(England) Regulations 2004. The following provides a summary of some of the key regulations:

- Reg 25 – Initial consultation
- Reg 26 – Draft SCI for public consultation
- Reg 27 – Consider and amend SCI as appropriate
- Reg 28 – Submit SCI to Secretary of State
- Reg 34 – Possible public examination*
- Reg 35 – Binding Inspectors report*
- Reg 35 – Publish inspectors report *
- Reg 36 Adopt the SCI with any revisions

*It is hoped that a public examination into the soundness of the SCI will not be necessary. However if there are objections that cannot be met by the Council then these will be dealt with by an independent Inspector. The Inspectors report will be binding on the authority.

4 Timetable for production

4.1 The Local Development Scheme (LDS) which forms a three year work plan for the Forward Planning policy section is required as part of the new planning system. The LDS has established that the SCI needs to be submitted to the Secretary of State by July 2006. The timetable below indicates the various stages that need to be undertaken to achieve this end date.

AUGUST – SEPTEMBER 05	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compilation of SCI database • Letter informing of ‘informal pre-submission consultation as required by Reg. 25’ • Preparation of leaflet / questionnaire (i.e. pre-submission consultation) and list of consultees with covering letter • New/updated text on the website
OCTOBER – NOVEMBER 05	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-submission consultation (6 weeks) [Reg. 25 (2)]
DECEMBER 05 – JANUARY 06	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consideration of responses • Prepare draft SCI
FEBRUARY 06	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publish draft SCI (i.e. formal pre-submission participation) [Reg. 26] • 6 weeks statutory consultation period
MARCH – JUNE 06	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consideration of responses • Responses made available to public i.e. web

JUNE – JULY 06	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Submission to Secretary of State [Reg. 28] • Public deposit / public consultation
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5 Consultation – Regulation 25 and Regulation 26

5.1.1 In line with Regulation 25 and as approved at Planning Committee on the 30th September an initial information gathering consultation was undertaken between 17th October 2005 to 30th November 2005. A variety of consultation methods were used to gain information on how successfully the Council has consulted people on planning matters in the past and how it could make improvements.

5.1.2 The information received from this consultation was used to prepare a pre submission draft of the SCI which was presented and approved by Planning Committee on the 20th January 2006. In line with regulation 26 this draft of the SCI has been the subject of a six week consultation lasting from 30th January – 17th March 2006.

5.1.3 The attached consultation report at appendix 2 provides a detailed account of the consultation process. In summary a variety of consultation methods have been used to encourage feedback on the pre - submission draft of the SCI. These include a questionnaire seeking further information on different elements of the SCI document, an informative workshop event, discussions with those representing groups at risk of exclusion and a meeting with Parish Councils which was organised through the Herefordshire Association of Local Councils network. In addition a public notice was placed in local newspapers, encouraging feedback on the SCI which was available for viewing and comment on the web and hard copies were available in the planning offices, info points and libraries across the County.

5.1.4 Whilst the consultation report provides a detailed analysis of the feedback gained from the consultation process, the following provides a summary of some of the main issues raised:

- 68% of respondent's were satisfied that the document was either fairly or very clear in its general approach on preparation of planning policy documents
- 74% of respondent's were satisfied that the document was either fairly or very clear in its general approach to dealing with communication on planning applications
- 81% of respondent's were satisfied with the consultation methods contained in the SCI
- 78% of respondent's were satisfied with information included in Chapter 10 of the SCI which lays out the consultation standards to be applied in preparing LDF documents.
- 81% of respondent's feel that community consultation at the pre-application stage would be beneficial.
- Further contact details have been provided for the hard to reach groups
- Greater use of simplified language, summary leaflets and the press is requested

- Support for Herefordshire Matters and for Planning Surgeries which are now included within the SCI as a method of communicating on planning matters.
- Request that consultations should be undertaken openly before decisions are taken
- All consultation documents be available free of charge – whilst documents are placed on web-site, a reasonable printing cost to some is justified.
- Concern over neighbour notification not being comprehensive enough – this has to be assessed on an individual basis.
- Request to extend timescales for responses to consultations – timescales are normally restricted by legislation.
- Need for good feedback on planning decisions – whilst decisions are placed on web-site, the release of further summaries are being considered.
- Concern over the complexity of the process – the process is mainly determined by regulations.
- Use of Town/ Parish/ village notice boards/facilities to display information – to be discussed with Parish Councils.

5.1.5 In line with regulation 27, the information received through the consultation period has been considered and where appropriate the SCI has been amended. The amended report known as the SCI submission draft is attached as appendix 1 of this report. Tracked changes have been used so it is easily identifiable where changes have been made. Each comment received has been given due consideration and has been responded to. This information can be found in the attached consultation report.

7 Next stage

7.1 In line with Regulation 28 this submission draft of the SCI is subject to further consultation and this is proposed to take place between 12th June to 21st July 2006 for a six week period. This final consultation is different from the previous two exercises which were about gathering information to improve the document. This time the consultation is about gaining support or otherwise to a document that is being submitted to the Secretary of State for consideration. If there are objections into the soundness of the document that cannot be met by the Council then these will be dealt with by an independent Inspector. The Inspectors report will be binding on the authority.

7.2 An appendix of the SCI lists all those organisations on the LDF database that the Council will consult where appropriate. In addition and during this time a response form will be made available to the wider public. This final consultation will be advertised by public notice and press release.

RECOMMENDATION THAT

it be recommended to the Cabinet Member (Environment) that the final draft SCI setting out how the Council will consult on planning matters is submitted to the Secretary of State and published for consultation purposes in line with the Town and Country Planning (Local Development)(England) Regulations 2004.

Background papers

SCI Pre-Submission Draft (January 2006)

The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004

Town and Country Planning (Local Development)(England) Regulations 2004.

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