



<b>Report to:</b>	Cabinet	28 September 2023
<b>Lead Cabinet Member:</b>	Lead Cabinet Member for Planning	
<b>Lead Officer:</b>	Joint Director of Planning and Economic Development	

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## **Review of the Statement of Community Involvement (Draft for Consultation)**

### **Executive Summary**

1. The Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) sets out how the Council will engage on planning matters, and must be reviewed at least every five years. This report presents a reviewed and updated draft SCI and seeks agreement to carry out a public consultation prior to a final version being brought back to members for consideration and adoption. The review of the SCI has considered matters including digital opportunities, lessons learned for the Covid 19 pandemic, opportunities to enhance participation on planning applications including youth engagement, and has reviewed the neighbourhood plan support offer.

### **Key Decision**

2. Yes.
3. It was first published in the August 2023 Forward Plan.

### **Recommendations**

4. It is recommended that Cabinet:
  - a) Agrees the draft Statement of Community Involvement 2023 (attached at Appendix 1) and accompanying Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) (Appendix 2) be subject to public consultation;
  - b) Agree that the preparation of materials and the running of the consultation be delegated to the Joint Director of Planning and Economic Development
  - c) Agree that any subsequent material amendments prior to consultation be made by the Lead Member for Planning, Policy and Development Management, and that any subsequent minor amendments and editing changes that do not materially affect the content prior to consultation be delegated to the Joint Director of Planning and Economic Development in consultation with the Lead Member for Planning, Policy and Development Management.

## **Reasons for Recommendations**

5. This report presents the draft reviewed SCI for consultation purposes, identifying the points at which there will be an opportunity for communities and stakeholders to be involved and engage in the various parts of the planning process. It is recommended that the draft SCI is made available for comment to ensure that the needs and aspirations of our communities and stakeholders are understood and taken into account in finalising the document.

## **Details**

### **Background**

6. The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act (2004) introduced the requirement for local authorities to prepare a Statement of Community Involvement, and the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 (as amended) requires local planning authorities to review their SCI at least every five years. The current SCI for Greater Cambridge was adopted in July 2019. It is now over four years old, and the review gives the opportunity to consult and consider responses and publish a new SCI before the five years expires.
7. The SCI sets out how to engage in the planning process in Greater Cambridge. The SCI describes how the public, businesses, interest groups and individuals can get involved in influencing local planning policy, the planning application process and neighbourhood planning, and help to shape where we live and work.

### **The Statement of Community Involvement Review**

8. The draft SCI provides an introduction to the overall planning process, and then moves into detail about how stakeholders can get involved in the preparation of plans including Local Plans (which includes Area Action Plans), supplementary planning documents and neighbourhood plans. A further section identifies the mechanisms by which stakeholders will be provided an opportunity to engage in the planning application process. An overview of the process of preparing a neighbourhood plan or order is provided, followed by the broad support available to community groups that are preparing such documents.
9. In carrying out the review officers have in particular considered:
  - Opportunities provided by digital technology, including the lessons learned during the Covid 19 pandemic;
  - Learning from the Greater Cambridge Local Plan consultations, where we tried new methods of consultation;
  - Providing more information to guide pre-application engagement by developers, including a range of engagement methods which they can consider;
  - Highlighting the importance of reaching underrepresented groups, including young people;

- A new section on planning obligations/developer contributions and how the Councils may seek views on the use of contributions on priority projects for infrastructure for example public art or children's play spaces;
- Updates to our neighbourhood planning support offer reflecting experience gained, including refocusing our funding offer on SEA screening rather than a health check.

10. The SCI is drafted to reflect the requirements of planning regulations, and provides examples where the Local Planning Authorities (LPA) may, if resources permit, use methods of engagement that move beyond the regulatory requirements. It is important that the SCI does not commit the LPAs to actions that cannot be resourced in all cases, as this could then call into jeopardy decisions and actions taken, give rise to disproportionate costs, or cause delays to the planning process. This does not, however, preclude the Council from choosing to use additional mechanisms to increase community engagement as and when it is considered appropriate to do so, as we have been able to do with the local plan for example.

11. There is no mandatory requirement for consultation on a draft SCI, however in the spirit of ensuring meaningful engagement in the planning process, it is proposed that a consultation period is undertaken for six weeks. The draft document will be published on the Greater Cambridge Shared Planning website and we will notify stakeholders to seek their views. Comments received will be considered and reported to members when they are asked to adopt the final version of the SCI.

## **Options**

12. The options available to members are:

- a. Agree the draft SCI in Appendix 1 is published for consultation and the accompanying EqlA in Appendix 2,
- b. Not agree the draft SCI for public consultation.

## **Implications**

13. In the writing of this report, taking into account financial, legal, staffing, risk, equality and diversity, climate change, and any other key issues, the following implications have been considered:-

## **Financial**

14. The revised draft SCI does not introduce additional costs, and also seeks to make good use of digital opportunities for consultation. The revised neighbourhood plan support offer for the SEA screening has been increased from £1,000 to £2,000 maximum, but the offer of up to £1000 for a health check has been removed.

## **Legal**

15. There are no legal implications arising from the report. Officers have sought appropriate legal advice when preparing the review.

## **Staffing**

16. There are no specific staffing implications of this review. It is currently anticipated that completing the SCI review can be delivered within our existing staffing establishment. This will be kept under review alongside other work priorities.

## **Risks/Opportunities**

17. Risks have been managed by carefully reviewing the document to ensure it meets legal requirements. It also remains in draft such that there are opportunities to explore issues arising with stakeholders prior to its adoption. The report highlights a number of opportunities to improve consultation and engagement that have been considered when preparing the draft SCI.

## **Equality and Diversity**

18. There are no specific implications of this review. The Greater Cambridge SCI has been informed by an equalities impact assessment. This has considered to have a positive effect on providing digital engagement and consultation through our website/s to groups who may have previously felt excluded whilst at the same time ensuring people who cannot or do not have access to digital communication means are not digitally excluded by use of suitable means of communication, for example, use of large print, audio or braille.

## **Climate Change**

19. There are no direct implications. The Greater Cambridge SCI review considers opportunities to use digital and electronic communication which may help in reducing the need to travel.

## **Health & Wellbeing**

20. There are no direct health & wellbeing implications arising from the report, although the positive engagement opportunities sought by the draft SCI may help with community wellbeing.

## **Consultation responses**

21. None.

## **Alignment with Council Priority Areas**

### **A Modern and Caring Council**

22. The Draft SCI explores how we can consult both efficiently and effectively.

## **Background Papers**

Background papers used in the preparation of this report:

[Statement of Community Involvement 2019](#)

## **Appendices**

Appendix A – Greater Cambridge Statement of Community Involvement (Draft for Consultation) 2023

Appendix B – Draft Equality Impact Assessment for the Statement of Community Involvement 2023

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