

Report to:	Cabinet	12 March 2024
Lead Cabinet Member:	Lead Cabinet Member for Planning	
Lead Officer:	Joint Director of Planning and Economic Development	

Statement of Community Involvement

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 SCI and seeks agreement following a period of public consultation for its consideration and adoption. The review of the SCI has considered matters including enhanced digital opportunities, lessons learned since 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. The draft consultation version was published in the August 2023 Forward Plan. This version of the SCI was first published in the Forward Plan in December 2023.

Recommendations

4. It is recommended that Cabinet agrees:
 - a) Consider the main issues raised in the public consultation, agree responses to the representations received and agree proposed changes to the Statement of Community Involvement as set out in the Statement of Consultation (Appendix 1 of this report);
 - b) Subject to (a), adopt the amended Greater Cambridge Statement of Community Involvement (Appendix 2); and
 - c) Delegate to the Joint Director of Planning and Economic Development, in consultation with the Executive Councillor for planning policy and transport and the Chair and Spokesperson for the Planning Policy and Transport Scrutiny Committee, the authority to make any necessary editing changes to the SCI prior to publication.

Reasons for Recommendations

5. This report presents the reviewed SCI for adoption following the conclusion of a six week period of public consultation. Whilst there is no mandatory requirement for consultation on a draft SCI, the Cabinet agreed at the meeting of 28 September 2023 that the draft SCI should be consulted on for a six week period to ensure that the needs and aspirations of our communities, partners and stakeholders were considered and taken into account in finalising the document. The public consultation on the draft reviewed SCI commenced on Wednesday 18 October 2023 and concluded on Wednesday 29 November 2023.
6. There were a total of 53 representations received during the consultation period from a total of 24 separate individuals or organisations. This is more than the representations received from the previous SCI consultation and is typical of a document of this nature. There was general support for the aims and approach of the draft SCI. The Statement of Consultation (Appendix 1) details the comments received, provides a summary of the main issues raised, and how they have been taken into account.

Details

Background

7. 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. It should be note that the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023 does not include a requirement to produce an SCI in anticipation that setting out consultation approaches will be part of the early stages of the new local plan making process when this is brought in.
8. 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

9. The SCI provides an introduction to the overall planning process, and then sets out how stakeholders can get involved in the preparation of plans including Local Plans (including Area Action Plans), supplementary planning documents and neighbourhood plans. A further section identifies how stakeholders have the 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 support offer available to community groups that are preparing such documents.

10. Whilst there is no mandatory requirement for consultation on a draft SCI, Cabinet in September 2023 agreed, to a consultation period of six weeks. The draft document was published on the Greater Cambridge Shared Planning website and stakeholders were notified of the start of the consultation. There were two 'in-person' consultation events at Northstowe Market on Sunday 22 October 2023 and The Meadows Community Centre on Friday 27 October 2023 where members of the public were invited to find out more about the SCI and give their views. An online webinar was held on Thursday 16 November 2023 where members of the public participated in a question-and-answer session with officers.

11. The Statement of Consultation (Appendix 1) sets out how officers considered issues raised in the consultation and the proposed modifications which were made to the SCI. A summary of the changes to the SCI include:

- Clarified key terms and definitions, corrected typographical errors and ensured correct hyperlinks are included;
- Updated references to planning legislation;
- Amended paragraphs in the SCI which were unclear to the reader, including the scope of community development forums, clarifying what a development plan is, the monitoring of policy documents; and
- The statutory and non-statutory consultee listed has been amended to ensure the correct organisations are listed.

Options

12. The options available to members are:

- a. Agree the Statement of Community Involvement as set out in Appendix 2 without making any further amendments;
- b. Agree the Statement of Community Involvement as set out in Appendix 2 and supporting documents, making further amendments; or
- c. Not agree the Statement of Community Involvement as set out in Appendix 2 and supporting documents.

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 SCI outlines the community engagement and delivery of consultations of which the costs will be covered by funding for specific projects or programmes, or through planning application fees from pre-application advice. In specific cases, the costs charged to applicants

reflect the cost to the Council for providing support and consultation services. This ensures that those who benefit financially from the Councils Planning Service make an appropriate contribution to the cost of service delivery.

15. The SCI also details the neighbourhood plan making support offer to Parish Councils and Neighbourhood Forums. This includes funding for the Strategic Environmental Assessment screening, has been increased from £1,000 to £2,000 maximum, and the offer of up to £1000 for a health check has been removed, reflecting experience as to where the Councils can offer most value to the process.

Legal

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

Staffing

17. There are no specific staffing implications of this review. The completing of the SCI review has been delivered within our existing staffing resources and this will be kept under review alongside other work priorities.

Risks/Opportunities

18. Risks have been managed by carefully reviewing the document to ensure it meets statutory planning requirements. The report highlights a number of opportunities to improve consultation and engagement with our communities which is a key corporate priority.

Equality and Diversity

19. 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 websites 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

20. 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

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

Consultation responses

There were a total of 53 representations received during the consultation period and they have been considered when preparing the SCI attached at Appendix 1. The communication of the results of the consultation, and of the final adopted document will follow standard procedure and will be in keeping with expectations and agreed approaches of both Councils.

Alignment with Council Priority Areas

A Modern and Caring Council

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

Background Papers

Background papers used in the preparation of this report:

Earlier versions of SCI

[Statement of Community Involvement 2019](#)

[Statement of Community Involvement Addendum June 2020](#)

[Statement of Community Involvement Updated Addendum December 2020](#)

Appendices

Appendix 1: Statement of Consultation

Appendix 2: Greater Cambridge Statement of Community Involvement March 2024

Appendix 3: Equalities Impact Assessment

Report Authors:

Lizzie Wood - Senior Planning Policy Officer

Telephone: 07563 421045

Email: lizzie.wood@greatercambridgeplanning.org