

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: New Communities Portfolio Holder 26 January 2010
AUTHOR/S: Executive Director (Operational Services) / Corporate Manager
(Planning and Sustainable Communities)

LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK ADOPTION OF STATEMENT OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Purpose

- 1 The purpose of this report is to advise on the results of a public consultation exercise carried out on the Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) and to seek approval for it to be formally adopted by the Council. Once adopted, the SCI will form part of the Local Development Framework and be used to guide the involvement of the community and other national and local stakeholders in the planning process in South Cambridgeshire.
- 2 This is a key decision because it is included as one of the key aims of the Council to achieve in 2009/10. The agreement to carry out the public consultation was taken at the joint meeting of the Portfolio Holders for Planning and New Communities on 1 October 2009 and it was first published in the August 2009 Forward Plan.

Executive Summary

- 3 This report outlines the representations received on the SCI that was subject to a period of public participation between October to December 2009. As a result of these representations amendments have been made to the draft SCI. The next step is to adopt the SCI when it will form part of the Local Development Framework.

Background

- 4 The Statement of Community Involvement is one of the key documents in the LDF. It sets out when and how the Council will be consulting on the LDF with the community that lives and works in South Cambridgeshire. It also describes the ways in which individuals can have a say on planning applications being considered by the Council.
- 5 The Council in its Corporate Plan for 2009/10 has identified the preparing and consulting on a Statement of Community Involvement as a Council Action to be implemented this year. This action will help achieve the Council's Aim A that states 'We Are Committed To Being A Listening Council Providing First Class Services Accessible To All'. This aim will be realised by the Council listening to and engaging with the local community.

The Results of the Consultation

- 6 During the consultation 21 respondents made 85 representations relating to the SCI, of which 4 were supporting, 4 were objections and 77 were comments.
- 7 A brief outline of the contents of the SCI is provided below together with a summary of the main issues raised during the consultation period and the subsequent changes that have been made to the SCI.

- 8 The draft SCI set out the existing tried and tested consultation procedures that South Cambs has been using for consulting on its LDF and planning applications so it is clear who can have a say and when and how they can get involved in the planning process. There are some statutory duties that are set out in national regulations for local planning authorities to follow when consulting on both planning policy documents and planning applications. South Cambridgeshire District Council carries out these statutory requirements and also additional methods have been used to involve the community and stakeholders in planning matters.
- 9 The draft SCI provided an opportunity for the Council to reassess how it has carried out consultations and to suggest some improvements. It provided an opportunity for the community and stakeholders to suggest ways the Council could improve its current way of doing things.
- 10 The main issues raised during the consultation are as follows –
- Concern that not all people have access to the Internet and therefore cannot access easily the consultation documents.
 - Suggestions of making more paper copies of documents available. Offer from Cambridge City Council to have an inspection copy of all future consultation documents in their offices in the City.
 - Concern that organisations need to be given sufficient time to respond to consultations and that the timing of consultations needs more thought
 - Concern that not everyone will know how to become involved in consultations
 - Concerns that the existing database, which the Council uses for mailing of consultations, is not comprehensive enough.
 - Concern that the existing methods of consultation do not allow residents in Cambridge City to have an equal opportunity to become involved.
 - Additional suggestions made for means of publicising consultations –such as using the Cambridgeshire Voluntary Sector Forum and Cambridge CVS newsletter.
 - Concern at overreliance on South Cambs Magazine to notify people about planning matters. – Not good for City residents and may not be trusted by hard to reach groups.
 - Support for Parish Forum
 - Questioning of methods included in the list that the Council is suggesting is best to involve minority or disadvantaged groups.
 - Suggestion of additional mailings to respondents to notify them when responses are available to view on-line.
 - Concern about making representations – the format of the paper and the on-line response forms causes confusion; the timing of the deadline.
 - Support from organisations for being included in the database and objections from those that think they should be.
 - Suggestions to amend wording to clarify who must be consulted with planning applications or areas to be covered by Section 106 agreements
 - Suggestion that additional information should be covered in pre-application meetings; that applicants consult with specialist groups before an application is submitted; Parish Councils should be notified when pre-application meetings take place; applicants should be made aware of the relevant planning policies in the district
 - Request to have removed telecommunications development from being an application likely to cause ‘wider concerns’.

- Need for SCI to be updated to reflect current situation in making decisions on planning applications, e.g. role of Chairman's delegation meetings has changed.
- Too much emphasis throughout the SCI on the need to consider resources available for consultations.

11 A detailed schedule of all representations received on the SCI is provided in Appendix 2. The schedule provides a summary of each representation received in plan order together with any suggested change to the text of the SCI, the Council's assessment of them and, where appropriate, proposes amendments to the text of the draft SCI.

12 Summary of the main changes made to the SCI –

- Additional paper copies of consultation documents to be made available for inspection at the City Council's Service Centre in Mandela House, Cambridge.
- Where there are alterations made to the agreed Local Development Scheme timetable there will be an update included on the LDF section of the Council's website.
- The Council sends out an email at the beginning of each month to all the Parish Councils in the district providing an up-to-date timetable of all the consultations that are current or are planned that will affect the district of South Cambs. In future the Council will publish this information on a new consultation page within the LDF section on the Council's website.
- The section on 'Methods of consultation with minority or disadvantaged groups' will be amended to include additional methods following the experience of carrying out the consultation on the Travellers and Gypsy DPD last year.
- Clarification added in SCI as to what is meant by non-material planning considerations.
- Amendments made to the category on the existing database so the requests for notification on consultations are targeted to particular documents to meet the specific requirements of an individual or organisation. This more specific request to be notified to be included on future consultation letters and on the Council's website.
- Information about consultations to be sent to Parishes for inclusion in village magazines or on websites.
- An additional paper version of consultation documents to be sent to the Parish Clerk if a village does not have a parish office or convenient local library in order that he/she can make available the documents to the local community.
- Additional method for consulting on LDF by notifying the Partnership Manager so that the members of the Local Strategic Partnership and Neighbourhood Panels can be made aware of the opportunity to comment on planning matters.
- The Council will ask in future consultations how the person/ group heard about the consultation in order to monitor the methods used and which is most successful.
- Commitment from the Council to continue to revise the response form used in consultations so that it is as clear and straightforward as possible to complete and to highlight that members of the planning policy team are always available to provide advise in completing forms both on-line and with paper versions.

- Include a paragraph highlighting the need to be aware of the deadline for submitting comments on a consultation and encouraging people not to leave it until the last day to submit comments.
- Clarification of who the Council must consult with for planning applications.
- Mention that South Cambs offers 21 days for advertising planning applications in a conservation area.
- Wind farms added as an example of a planning application that could be of wider concern and therefore may have increased advertising.
- Amend decision-making section to reflect that Chairman’s delegation meetings no longer occur.
- Amend text relating to SPD that will be produced for planning obligations.
- Amend database to reflect which adjoining Parish Councils no longer wish to be sent notification of consultations.
- Amend flow charts in Appendix C so that they are clearer in adopted SCI.

Adoption process

- 13 The SCI has been prepared in compliance with the legislative and regulatory requirements for the preparation of an SCI, which were amended in April 2009, and is now ready for adoption. Members are recommended to adopt the SCI as amended (as contained in Appendix 2). Once adopted, the SCI will become part of the Local Development Framework. The final version of the SCI is included in Appendix 1.

Implications

- 14 In preparing the draft SCI consideration had to be given to the resource implications of this project. The Council has in the past used a variety of methods to consult with the community and stakeholders on planning matters – these are tried and tested methods. The draft SCI included some suggested additional methods of consultation to be carried out in the future and respondents to the consultation have in turn suggested other methods that they consider should be used by the Council. The Council needs in the future to consult with the community using the limited resources that are available in the most efficient and effective way.

15	Financial	Resources will be used in a more effective and efficient way by having consultation methods on planning matters set out clearly in the adopted SCI.
	Legal	The Council must prepare a Statement of Community Involvement to form part of its Local Development Framework.
	Staffing	Resources will be used in a more effective and efficient way by having consultation methods on planning matters set out clearly in the adopted SCI.
	Risk Management	No significant risks.
	Equal Opportunities	The Statement of Community Involvement is highlighting how the Council consults currently with the minority or disadvantaged groups and suggests future changes. An Equalities Impact Assessment has been carried out on the SCI.

Consultations

- 16 The draft SCI was prepared in consultation with officers in Development Control who are involved with planning applications; New Communities Team – Major Development team who deal with major applications, Section 106 Officer, Community Engagement & Communications Officer, Community Facilities Project Manager; Local

Strategic Partnership Manager; and the Equalities and Diversities Officer. This was prior to it being agreed for consultation. As part of the public consultation letters were sent to a wide range of organisations and this also included a CD-ROM, containing the draft SCI. Also the Equalities and Diversities Officer; the Local Strategic Partnership Manager and the Economic Development Officer were notified of the consultation in order that they could pass this information on to ensure that the relevant specialist forums / partnership groups that they have contact with could have an opportunity to comment on the SCI.

- 17 As part of this consultation a request was made for consultees to let the Council know if we had the most up-to-date contact details for them so that future consultations could be targeted at the most appropriate person within an organisation. This request resulted in a number of amendments to our planning policy database. In particular it provided an opportunity to find out if adjoining Parish Councils wanted to be included in future consultations carried out by South Cambs. It was assumed if we had not heard from these parishes that we would continue to include them on the mailing list of consultations that we considered to be appropriate to them.

Effect on Strategic Aims

18	<p>Commitment to being a listening council, providing first class services accessible to all.</p> <p>The consultation on the draft Statement of Community Involvement has directly assisted the Council in being a listening council. The SCI sets out how and when people may become involved in planning matters. The community and stakeholders have had the opportunity to comment on the draft and respond in saying how they wish to be involved in planning matters in future. The document also highlights how minority and disadvantaged can become involved in planning matters in South Cambs.</p>
	<p>Commitment to ensuring that South Cambridgeshire continues to be a safe and healthy place for all.</p> <p>By having clearly set out how consultations on planning matters will be carried out there is the opportunity for people to ensure that planning policy documents and planning applications consider safety and health issues within South Cambs, to ensure that they taken into account in place-making.</p>
	<p>Commitment to making South Cambridgeshire a place in which residents can feel proud to live.</p> <p>By responding to consultations on planning matters residents will feel part of the place making within South Cambridgeshire.</p>
	<p>Commitment to assisting provision for local jobs for all.</p> <p>By producing a Statement of Community Involvement setting out guidance on consultation the local community and stakeholders will know how to participate in planning matters particularly those relating the economy of the district.</p>
	<p>Commitment to providing a voice for rural life.</p> <p>The Statement of Community Involvement sets out clearly how the community and stakeholders can become involved in consultations on planning matters. The SCI will directly provide an opportunity for people to express their views on planning matters in future.</p>

Conclusions/Summary

- 19 This report outlines the representations received on the SCI that was subject to a period of public participation from October to December 2009. As a result of these representations amendments have been made to the draft SCI.
- 20 The draft SCI included questions and information relating to the public consultation and therefore some revisions have had to be made to the text in the final document to reflect that it is now the final adopted version, which has been subject to consultation. This final SCI has been updated to reflect the current structure and practices in the planning department.
- 21 The next step is to adopt the SCI when it will form part of the Local Development Framework. The final version is contained in Appendix 1.

Recommendations

- 22 The Portfolio holders for Planning and New Communities are invited to adopt the Statement of Community Involvement, as contained in Appendix 1. (Appendix 2 lists the changes made to the draft SCI following the consultation process)

Background Papers: the following background papers were used in the preparation of this report:

Consultation Draft of the Statement of Community Involvement (October 2009)

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