



DEVELOPMENT CONTROL AND REGULATORY BOARD

10 FEBRUARY 2022

REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

**REVISED STATEMENT OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT FOR
LEICESTERSHIRE**

PART A – SUMMARY REPORT

PROPOSAL: Revised Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) for Leicestershire

RECOMMENDATION: The Development Control and Regulatory Board is asked to comment on the draft Statement of Community Involvement (attached as Appendix A) ahead of it being reported to Cabinet seeking adoption.

Officer to Contact

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PART B – MAIN REPORT

What is a Statement of Community Involvement?

1. Planning authorities are required to adopt, and regularly review, a Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) by Section 18 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended).
2. The purpose of the SCI is to explain how and when the community will be able to take part in the production of planning policy, how they will be consulted on applications for planning permission, and how the planning authority will assist communities which make or modify a Neighbourhood Plan.
3. The current SCI was adopted in 2015.

Review of the SCI

4. The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires planning authorities to review their SCI every five years.
5. This review was an opportunity to take account of the various developments since the current SCI was adopted in 2015, including:
 - a. Changes to the regulations which require an SCI;
 - b. Current progress of the Development Plan review process;
 - c. Strategies introduced across the wider Council; and
 - d. Changes to society and technology use.
6. Website traffic statistics suggest that the current SCI is not a well-used document, and this review considered how it could be more useful, current and accessible for prospective applicants, members of the community, and County Council officers.

Regulatory Changes

7. In 2018, a requirement was introduced for SCIs to include the planning authority's approach to supporting communities with Neighbourhood Planning. This review provided an opportunity to comply with this change by adding a new section.

The Development Plan

8. The Council adopted the current Minerals and Waste Local Plan in September 2019 and officers are now looking ahead to its review. In light of this, improvements have been made to the way the SCI presents the Local Plan review process to improve understanding and enable effective community involvement.

Council-Wide Developments

9. Since the adoption of the current SCI, the County Council has published Engagement Principles. This review provided an opportunity to align the commitments made in the SCI with these organisation-wide standards.

10. The County Council's adoption of the Environment Strategy 2018-2030, and declaration of a Climate Emergency, led to consideration of how the commitments made in the SCI could align with the County Council's net zero ambitions. This has resulted in the introduction of sections which address how the County Council will consider the environment when it involves the community in planning matters.

Societal and Technological Changes

11. The Covid-19 pandemic required many organisations to rapidly adapt and evolve the way they use technology, and this has highlighted different ways of working. This review provided an opportunity to ensure the SCI captures the additional tools officers now have at their disposal, for example virtual meetings, and the flexibility this offers for members of the community.

12. The use of social media continues to grow, and this review looked at ways the County Council could use these platforms to involve the community in planning functions. The result is a commitment to use social media to publicise key stages of the Local Plan review process.

Usefulness and Utilisation of the SCI

13. Planning officers are often approached by prospective applicants for their advice on carrying out pre-planning application community engagement. In order to standardise advice and save officers time, a section has been added to the SCI to provide guidance and best-practice examples for community consultation, and an indicative list of consultees.

14. To improve the interconnectedness of the SCI with other information on the County Council website (and its pages on other platforms), more hyperlinks have been embedded in the text to allow readers to find and access related and up-to-date information.

Consultation on the SCI Review

15. There is no statutory requirement to carry out a consultation exercise during an SCI review, however given the nature of the document it is appropriate to allow members of the community and those with engagement expertise to have a input into the review process. As such, both internal and external consultation has been carried out.

Internal

16. During early stages of the review process, county planning officers engaged with colleagues in related services, for example the Communities team, to ensure commitments made within the SCI are consistent with their work and that Council-wide strategies are represented correctly.

17. The draft revised SCI has been shared with officers in related Services across the organisation to read and consider.

External

18. An external consultation period began on 10 January 2022, and will run for six weeks until 21 February 2022.
19. A wide range of organisations have been contacted for their comments on the draft revised SCI, included national organisations who could be statutory consultees on planning applications, minerals and waste operators with sites in the county, and local interest groups.
20. In addition to making direct contact with potentially interested parties, the draft revised SCI has been uploaded to the planning pages of the Council's website with instructions for how to make comments. Links have also been included on the County Council's 'Have Your Say' webpage and the Leicestershire Communities website, and the consultation has been publicised by a newsletter distributed to all town and parish councils in Leicestershire.

Next Steps

21. Following the end of the consultation period, officers will review the comments received and make any necessary amendments. Once the amendments have been completed, the SCI will be reported to Cabinet seeking adoption. This is scheduled to take place in April or May 2022.
22. Once adopted, all relevant planning functions will be carried out in accordance with the SCI.

Recommendation

23. The Development Control and Regulatory Board is asked to comment on the Statement of Community Involvement (attached at Appendix A) ahead of it being reported to Cabinet seeking adoption.

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