

BARNSELY METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

This matter is a Key Decision within the Council's definition that has not been included in the relevant Forward Plan

**REPORT OF THE
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR PLACE
TO CABINET ON 29th APRIL, 2020**

STATEMENT OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT – UPDATE

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report seeks authority to adopt an updated Statement of Community Involvement (SCI).

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 **That the updated Statement of Community Involvement be adopted.**

3. INTRODUCTION

- 3.1 The SCI sets out how we will engage people in the preparation of planning policy documents and in planning application decisions.
- 3.2 The original Statement of Community Involvement was approved in 2006, and was prepared in line with previous regulations. It was updated in 2015 in line with current regulations to reflect the latest Local Plan system and stages of preparation. The 2015 update made it clear that our preferred method of communication is electronic given advances in technology coupled with decreasing Council resources.
- 3.3 The latest revised version makes clear what changes there will be to our normal consultation methods during the current COVID-19 pandemic and any similar situation that may arise in future.

4. PROPOSAL AND JUSTIFICATION

- 4.1 On the 25th March, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government's Chief Planner wrote to all Local Planning Authorities stressing the importance of us continuing to provide the "best possible service in these stretching times and prioritise decision-making to ensure the planning system continues to function, especially where this will support the local economy".
- 4.2 In order to ensure this is possible, particularly for the master planning that has been underway for the past year or so, it is proposed that an updated SCI is approved. This has been amended to make clear that it is important for the planning system to

continue to function and make decisions during the current COVID-19 crisis and in any similar circumstances which may arise in future. It makes clear what changes there would be to our usual methods of consultation in such circumstances.

- 4.2 The SCI was programmed for update this year to correct out of date references (such as replacing references to the Civic with Library @ the Lightbox) and to ensure it accurately reflects current practice. However it has become imperative to release an updated version as soon as possible that sets out what can be expected of the planning service during the current crisis and any similar situations that may arise in future.
- 4.3 The main changes relate to there being no face to face consultation such as drop in sessions for consultations on projects, for example the Masterplan Frameworks, because of the need for social distancing. Other examples of changes are that decisions on some planning applications normally made by Planning Regulatory Board may be made differently. The libraries are also closed at the current time where hard copies of some planning documents are usually deposited and where people can access computers.
- 4.4 There is an urgency to amend the Statement of Community Involvement arising from the need to carry out public engagement on the remaining masterplan frameworks that are required to be adopted before any planning applications can be determined on the sites in question. Cabinet will recall that two masterplan frameworks were adopted in December 2019 covering the MU1/Barnsley West site between Higham, Barugh Green, Redbrook, Gawber and Pogmoor and that Hoyland North site between Hoyland Common and the Dearne Valley Parkway. Of the five that are remaining public engagement is programmed for three of them over the summer. These are:
- Hoyland West (land between Sheffield Road and the M1 – local plan allocations ES13 & HS57)
 - Hoyland South (land between Sheffield Road, Cloughfields Road and Broadcarr Road – local plan allocations HS58, HS61, HS62, HS65 & HS68)
 - Royston (land off Lee Lane - local plan allocation MU5)
- 4.5 Cabinet will recall that at Royston there is a live planning appeal on part of the MU5 site where the masterplan framework is being developed. The appellant has sought to argue that the Council has not progressed the masterplan framework in a sufficiently timely manner and a further planning application has also been submitted for another part of that site. Similarly, the Council is aware of developer interest at Hoyland West, with a planning application anticipated in the summer.
- 4.6 At the same time, public engagement is a crucial part of the master planning process. Officers are therefore working closely with the appointed consultants and other stakeholders to explore innovative methods of engagement aimed at enabling us to go above and beyond what the updated SCI requires in circumstances where social distancing prevents face to face events. These methods are still being developed and but will focus on how to best interact with those that do not have access to online channels of communication.
- 4.7 Without the masterplans progressing there is a real danger that the authority could find itself defending further refusals for proposals that seek to circumvent the

masterplanning approach or that we are unable to support proposals that will be crucial for the economic recovery of the borough when restrictions are lifted. Accordingly, there is an urgent need to amend the Statement of Community Involvement to clarify what the public can expect as a bare minimum during this period of social distancing.

5. CONSIDERATION OF ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES

- 5.1 One alternative approach would be not to update the SCI. The SCI was programmed for update this year to correct out of date references (such as replacing references to the Civic with Library @ the Lightbox) and to ensure it accurately reflects current practice. However it is important to release an updated that sets out what can be expected of the planning service during the current crisis and any similar situations that may arise in future.

6. IMPLICATIONS FOR LOCAL PEOPLE/SERVICE USERS

- 6.1 The document sets out when and how local people and service users will be consulted on planning issues. The updated SCI sets out how it is important for planning decisions to continue to be made in situations such as the current COVID-19 pandemic and the main differences to service delivery. Progressing master planning in particular will be essential for the economic recovery and ensuring that the full range of community benefits can be secured through the planning process, both of which will be essential for local people.
- 6.2 It is recognised that those without access to the internet will find it more challenging to engage in master planning but this is not the case for the vast majority. E-mail is the dominant method for feedback on the local plan, previous masterplan frameworks and planning applications. Nevertheless, in recognition of the potential difficulties for those without access to the internet, options will be developed aimed at prioritising this group where utilizing other channels of communication such as telephone discussions.

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 Consultations have taken place with representatives of the Service Director – Finance (S151 Officer).
- 7.2 There are no financial implications associated with this report.

8. EMPLOYEE IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 There are no employee implications arising from this report.

9. COMMUNICATIONS IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 Communications support will be required in publicising the release of the updated SCI through press releases and social media.

10. THE CORPORATE PLAN AND THE COUNCIL'S PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK

- 10.1 The SCI supports planning activity which is critical to Local Plan is a key Council strategy document that will support achievement of each of the three main priorities set out in the corporate plan and more specifically outcomes 1-6, 9 and 11. The suite of SPD's provide further detail on how Local Plan policies will be applied.

11. PROMOTING EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION

- 11.1 An Equalities Impact Assessment has been undertaken to assess the impact of the changes to the SCI. This has established that it will be important to consider carefully the specific impacts a review/variation in service, may have on groups who are already disadvantaged in other ways. We must ensure they are not left further behind. The proposals will not have the same impact on all users. And must consider how the changes proposed will ensure inclusivity and accessibility. We are considering if we can look at each consultation to determine what the community/disability demographics are in that area. Where the consultation is on line only we are assessing how equality monitoring can be carried out to ensure inclusivity in the engagement process and any underrepresentation addressed through targeted interventions.

12. TACKLING THE IMPACT OF POVERTY

- 12.1 There are no direct implications arising from this report.

13. TACKLING HEALTH INEQUALITIES

- 13.1 The SCI sets out how we will consult on planning proposals. The impact on health of the individual proposals will be considered. There are no direct health implications arising from this document.

14. REDUCTION OF CRIME AND DISORDER

- 14.1 There are no direct crime and disorder implications arising from this document.

15. RISK MANAGEMENT ISSUES

- 15.1 The Council would usually consult on an updated SCI. Consultation was undertaken on the one produced in 2015 for a period of four weeks. The document doesn't make reference to consulting on future updates, although that is standard practice. The key changes and reason for approving it without consultation relate to the current COVID-19 pandemic. It is important to weigh the urgent need to release the document to give clarity on how we will consult on planning issues during this crisis, against the risk of not consulting. On balance there is greater risk in potential delay to proposals than in a challenge to the SCI following its adoption.

16. HEALTH, SAFETY AND EMERGENCY RESILIENCE ISSUES

16.1 The key reason for updating the SCI at this time is in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic, to give clarity to customers on how planning issues will be dealt with in this, and any similar situations that may arise in future. This will build in resilience to the document.

17. COMPATIBILITY WITH THE EUROPEAN CONVENTION ON HUMAN RIGHTS

17.1 There are no implications arising from this report.

18. CONSERVATION OF BIODIVERSITY

18.1 There are no issues relating to biodiversity arising directly from the SCI.

19. GLOSSARY

SCI Statement of Community Involvement

20. LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix A Financial Implications

Appendix 1: Statement of Community Involvement 2020

21. BACKGROUND PAPERS

SCI 2015 <https://www.barnsley.gov.uk/media/4534/sd14-statementofcommunityinvolvement-2015.pdf>

If you would like to inspect background papers for this report, please email governance@barnsley.gov.uk so that appropriate arrangements can be made

Report author: Paula Tweed

Financial Implications/Consultation



... 21/04/20.....

Dawn Greaves
(To be signed by senior Financial Services officer where no financial implications)