



Report to Leader (Planning & Enforcement portfolio)

Decision Date:	10 February 2021
Reference number:	PE01.21
Title:	Draft Statement of Community Involvement (SCI)
Relevant councillor(s):	Warren Whyte
Author and/or contact officer:	Judith Orr Judith.orr@buckinghamshire.gov.uk
Ward(s) affected:	All of Buckinghamshire
Recommendations:	To agree the draft Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) for public consultation.
Reason for decision:	The SCI is a statutory document that sets out how the Council will consult the public and other bodies on how they can get involved in planning issues, including the Local Plan and planning applications. Approval is needed to consult on this draft SCI.

Executive summary

- 1.1 The draft Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) is a document that we are required to produce and keep up to date to ensure effective community involvement at all stages in the planning process. It sets out how anyone who lives, works, plays and carries out business in the Buckinghamshire Council area can be involved in local planning decisions and the preparation of planning documents. It is recommended that the draft SCI is approved for public consultation.

Content of report

- 1.2 The SCI explains when, how, and for what reasons the community will be able to participate in planning issues. These include plan making (local plans), Supplementary Planning Documents, neighbourhood plans, planning applications,

and planning enforcement. The main aim of the SCI is to make consultation and involvement in planning more transparent, accessible, collaborative, inclusive and consistent.

1.3 As a minimum, we will comply with any legislation that is currently in force or comes into force in the future. These legal requirements are therefore included as actions that 'we will' do in the SCI as opposed to ones that 'we may' do. It is however recognised that there needs to be a flexible approach to engagement depending on the context in which we are engaging.

1.4 The main principles of involving communities in the planning process that are set out in the draft SCI and are summarised below:

- encouraging our communities to **contribute** by providing opportunities to put their ideas forward where there is scope to influence our decisions;
- we will be **transparent** and clear about the planning process, what is being proposed and the scope to influence;
- we will use a **variety of methods** to make it easier for people to take part in the planning process, this will be appropriate for the subject being consulted upon;
- we will design engagement exercises to be **accessible**;
- we will encourage better **inclusion** of everyone affected by a planning matter, making the effort to include "hard to reach" groups
- we will **make information available** that is appropriate and understandable, raise awareness of planning matters and ensure people are kept up to date.
- we will analyse carefully and, where appropriate, **provide clear feedback** to participants after an engagement exercise within a published timescale.
- we will protect Buckinghamshire's residents by **redacting** sensitive information before it is made public,
- we will encourage **acceptable representations** (comments), by only accepting comments that are relevant to the subject being consulted on.

Other options considered

To not consult on the draft Statement of Community Involvement

- 1.5 Although we are not legally bound to consult, consultation on the draft SCI is consistent with the commitment in BC's Corporate Plan for residents to be 'at the heart of all we do'. It is however a statutory requirement to prepare and keep up to date an SCI. In any event, this option would result in delays in progressing the Buckinghamshire Local Plan, as without the SCI in place we would be unable to carry out consultation on key documents required to progress the Local Plan. As part of the process of Buckinghamshire Council coming into being on 1st April 2020, we must prepare a new local plan for the whole authority area within five years. This requirement could be adversely affected by a significant delay to adopting the SCI.

Legal and financial implications

- 1.6 Finance – no specific financial implications identified. It is considered this SCI to be a realistic use of available resources and its delivery will be resourced in-house, so as to reduce any financial implications of its production.
- 1.7 Section 17(8)(a) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 ("the PCPA 2004") provides that a Statement of Community Involvement must be 'adopted by resolution of the local planning authority'. The SCI is a local development document and while it does not set out planning policies, it does set out the policy which the Council will follow when consulting the public and other public bodies on the Local Plan and associated documentation. The draft SCI must itself be the subject of consultation with the public and all interested parties.
- 1.8 It is important to note that if the Council does not undertake the specific things the SCI say we will do then it could then be subject to legal challenge.

Corporate implications

- 1.9 The SCI supports the Council's Corporate Plan priority of 'Strengthening our Community' by taking on an inclusive approach and working with the Town and Parish Councils.
- 1.10 In terms of equality, the SCI seeks to encourage everyone affected by planning issues to be involved and more specifically, aims to include "hard to reach groups" such as young people, ethnic minorities, disabled people, Gypsies and Travellers and Travelling Showpeople in planning issues as far as is practicable.

Consultation with local Councillors & Community Boards

- 1.11 The draft SCI affects all wards and consequently there is not a 'local' focus for the decision. Members will be made aware of the SCI and this consultation as part of the Buckinghamshire Local Plan briefing meeting on 25th February 2021.

Communication, engagement & further consultation

- 1.12 The SCI will be made available on 'Your Voice Bucks' during the consultation period. It is proposed to write to a number of key stakeholders sending them a link to the Statement of Community Involvement and asking them if they wish to comment on its contents. The key stakeholders will include all Town and Parish Councils, local authorities who have strong links to Buckinghamshire, developers and landowners in the area, the local amenity groups and societies, Community Boards, MPs and statutory consultation bodies.
- 1.13 The consultation process will also be supported by the Communications Team through press releases, member newsletter article etc.

Next steps and review

- 1.14 Consultation will run from 16th February to 22nd March 2021. We will then review all of the comments received and update the SCI report as appropriate. The SCI report will then go to Cabinet for formal adoption. This is expected to be, subject to when the new Council is constituted, around June 2021.

Background papers

None. The Draft SCI is attached as an Appendix to this report.

Your questions and views (for key decisions)

If you have any questions about the matters contained in this report please get in touch with the author of this report. If you have any views that you would like the cabinet member to consider please inform the democratic services team. This can be done by telephone 01296 382343 or email democracy@buckinghamshire.gov.uk.