



Statement of Community Involvement

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Introduction

What is a Statement of Community Involvement?

The Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) is a document that we must 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 or carries out business in the Buckinghamshire Council area can be involved in local planning decisions and the preparation of planning documents.

The SCI explains when, how, and for what reasons you will be able to participate in planning issues. These include plan making, neighbourhood plans, planning applications, and planning enforcement.

On 1 April 2020, Buckinghamshire Council was created as a unitary local authority. It was formed from the former Aylesbury Vale, Chiltern, South Bucks and Wycombe district councils and Buckinghamshire County Council. The former councils each had their own SCI, this SCI will replace those and set out how we will be involving the community as Buckinghamshire Council.

Why is the Statement of Community Involvement relevant?

We recognise that planning affects people's daily lives, as the decisions we make shape the place we live and work in. As a result, we want to involve communities as early in the process as possible.

There are many benefits for involving communities in planning matters, these include:

- a greater focus on **local needs and priorities**;
- planning decisions are informed by **local knowledge**;
- **increased community understanding** of how planning policies are developed and how they are linked to other council documents;
- creates a sense of **ownership** of key policy documents;

- **removes barriers** (physical, language or social) and gives communities access to information and opportunities to voice their needs and opinions; and
- it creates **accountability** by generating a wider interest in monitoring our outcomes.

As our residents and business community, we want you to feel empowered to get involved with planning should you wish.

We aim to make consultation and involvement in planning transparent, accessible, collaborative, inclusive and consistent. We will do this through the methods set out in this SCI.

Vision and Principles

Our principles for involving communities

As a minimum, we will comply with any legislation that is currently in force or comes into force in the future. This includes any national legislation in an emergency situation, such as the coronavirus pandemic.

We will tailor our approach where needed for specific issues, audiences and the scale of proposals.

Our main principles of involving the various communities in the planning process are set out 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 such as young people, ethnic minorities, disabled people, Gypsies and Travellers and Travelling Showpeople;
- we will **make information available** that is appropriate and understandable, raise awareness of planning matters and ensure people are kept up to date. All data stored and published will be compliant with our data protection policy;
- we will analyse carefully and, where appropriate, **provide clear feedback** to participants after an engagement exercise within a published timescale. This will include changes we have made as a result of comments;

- we will protect Buckinghamshire's residents by **redacting** sensitive information before it is made public, such as personal addresses, phone numbers, email addresses, and dates of birth. Where we are able to we will also redact statements which we consider may cause offence to the wider community; and
- we will encourage **acceptable representations** (comments), by only accepting comments that are relevant to the subject being consulted on. No profanities, statements inciting hate, racism, religious bigotry, defamatory comments towards groups or individuals or any such statements that can be considered offensive to any members of society will be accepted. If your representation is rejected, you will be notified of the reason for this once it has been processed.

Your Council, Your Way

We want residents to be at the heart of what we do. There are lots of different ways for people to get involved in shaping the new Council's knowledge, plans, policies and planning decisions. We have sought to include all of these in our Statement of Community Involvement.

More information on our values and how these are delivered through our services can be found in the Council's [Corporate Plan](#).

Equalities

As required by [law](#), this document has been drafted to have regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between different groups.

This SCI has also used the [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines](#).

More detail on the Council's equalities commitment is set out in the Council's [Corporate Plan](#).

Digital

Buckinghamshire Council is committed to delivering a digital planning service. We are working with the MHCLG and other authorities to improve our service through digital innovation and technology, including the use of emerging digital tools. With these tools, we hope to improve community engagement while making planning more accessible, transparent, and efficient.

Planning for the future of Buckinghamshire

Our plans for the future of Buckinghamshire will be set out in the Buckinghamshire Local Plan. A Local Plan shows where development can happen, and where it needs to be carefully controlled.

The Local Plan is the prime consideration when determining planning applications unless material considerations indicate otherwise. A material consideration is a matter that should be taken into account in deciding a planning application or an appeal.

Documents we produce

Local Plan

Local Plans, including those relating to minerals and waste, set out the main planning strategy and policies for their area.

Supplementary Planning Documents

Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) provide more detailed guidance to further explain the policies and proposals set out in Local Plans.

Other documents

We may prepare other development briefs and guidance which are not formal SPDs, and we may also carry out consultation on these documents.

Local Development Scheme

The Local Development Scheme (LDS) shows what Local Plans the Council is preparing, and the timetable we expect to follow. It does not however include neighbourhood plans, supplementary planning documents or other guidance documents.

Community Infrastructure Levy

Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) is a charge which can be levied by local authorities on new development in their area. CIL charging schedules have been adopted in the Chiltern, South Bucks and Wycombe areas. The situation in Aylesbury Vale is under review following the [Planning White Paper's](#) proposal to abolish CIL.

How you can get involved in the Local Plan

A Local Plan currently goes through several main stages:

1. Plan preparation
2. Plan publication stage and submission for examination
3. Plan examination
4. Publication of recommendations – Inspector's report stage
5. Plan adoption

As a minimum, we will involve all those required by legislation in the various stages of Local Plan preparation, and will reach out to other groups and agencies as appropriate to the matter being discussed.

The list below shows the range of consultees the Council engages with, but it is not an exhaustive list.

- national statutory bodies and agencies (e.g. Highways England, Natural England, the Environment Agency, Historic England, etc.)
- other local authorities (as appropriate)
- parish and town councils, and Community Boards
- service providers of all kinds, including the emergency services, utility companies and health providers
- national organisations such as the National Trust
- local organisations and societies such as civic amenity groups
- businesses and economic groups including the Local Enterprise Partnerships
- environmental stakeholders, e.g. Chilterns Conservation Board, wildlife trusts
- groups who are less likely to be heard (hard to reach groups), and groups with a specific role in equalities

- individuals (who have asked to be notified)
- house builders / agents / landowners / housing associations
- schools and youth groups

Plan preparation stage

We will:

- get in touch with consultees to say we intend to produce a Local Plan and invite them to say what they think the plan should contain;
- advertise our intention to produce a Local Plan, including a notification on the Council's website, so that the public and organisations may register their interest; and
- issue information through press releases.

We may:

- prepare a specific platform online so that people can get involved interactively;
- publish a draft plan for public consultation;
- create online surveys through 'Your Voice Bucks';
- prepare newsletters, leaflets and response forms, where appropriate;
- hold events, exhibitions and briefings – face-to-face or online;
- engage town and parish councils and other stakeholders through workshops and forums; and
- reach out through social media and online video recordings.

Plan publication stage and submission for examination

We will:

- publish notification on the Council's website that the Publication Plan (the version that the Council considers ready for Examination) is being consulted on;
- get in touch directly with consultees to let them know of the proposed Publication Plan;
- invite comments on the Publication Plan for a minimum of six weeks from the date of publishing;
- clearly set out how people and organisations can make valid representations (comments);

- make all statutory publication documents available, including the [consultation statement](#) either electronically and/or in paper form, for inspection at all of the council offices/ hubs; and
- issue a press release.

We may:

- make paper copies of the plan document available at the main libraries;
- produce further publicity such as posters, leaflets or newsletters;
- undertake briefings with town and parish councils and other stakeholders either online or in person;
- use social media and online video recordings.

Plan examination stage

We will:

- get in touch directly with all those who made representations at the Publication stage of the date, time and place of the hearings, and the name of the person appointed to hold the examination;
- at least six weeks before the first hearing, give details on the Council's website and at main council offices of the date, time and place of the hearings and the name of the person appointed to hold the examination; and
- make examination documents available on the Council's website.

We may:

- use social media and online video recordings.

Publication of recommendations – Inspector's report stage

We will:

- make the Inspector's recommendations report available for inspection at the main council offices and hubs and on the Council's website;
- notify all those who requested to be informed of the Inspector's recommendations report; and
- issue a press release.

We may:

- place copies of the Inspector's report in libraries; and
- use social media to inform people.

Plan adoption stage

We will:

- make available the Local Plan, Adoption Statement and the Sustainability Appraisal and Habitat Regulation Assessment reports at the main council offices and hubs and on the Council's website;
- send a copy of the Adoption Statement directly to those who asked to be notified;
- issue a press release.

We may:

- place copies of the Inspector's report in libraries; and
- use social media to inform people that the Local Plan has been adopted.

How you can get involved in the preparation of Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs)

There are three types of SPD that the Council prepares:

- Site or area specific (e.g. Development Briefs)
- Design Guidance
- Topic based policy guidance (e.g. affordable housing)

The process of preparing SPDs is simpler than that of Local Plans because they are not subject to public examination:

1. Early engagement and preparation of a draft SPD
2. Consultation on the draft SPD
3. Adoption

Early engagement and preparation of a draft SPD

We will:

- identify specific groups and individuals who are likely to have an interest in what the SPD will say;
- undertake a targeted engagement process with those groups and individuals to explore issues and options; and
- produce a draft statement of consultation setting out who we have engaged with in preparing the draft SPD, the issues raised and how we have addressed those issues.

We may:

- invite views from the general public through surveys or by notifications on our website inviting comments or social media channels; and
- where appropriate, screen the SPD under the [Habitats Regulations](#) and [Strategic Environmental Assessment legislation](#) and consult with the statutory consultation bodies.

Consultation on the draft of the SPD

We will:

- publish the consultation draft of the SPD on our website, together with the required supporting documentation and make paper copies available to view at the main council offices (where appropriate).

We may:

- issue a press release telling people about the consultation;
- make paper copies of the draft consultation SPD and supporting documentation available at the main libraries, as appropriate;
- produce further publicity such as posters, leaflets or newsletters;
- hold exhibitions, workshops or forums, face-to-face or online;
- use social media to inform people that the consultation is taking place and produce an online video; and
- consider the representations received and put our responses to the issues raised in a Statement of Consultation document, which will be available online and in the council offices/ hubs, where appropriate. We will amend the SPD, where we consider that a valid point has been made, to reflect the point raised in the representation.

SPD adoption

We will:

- publish the adopted document, the amended consultation statement and adoption statement by making them available to view at the council offices, where appropriate, and on the Council's website; and
- send a copy of the Adoption Statement directly to those who asked to be notified.

We may:

- issue a press release;
- make paper copies of the adopted document available at appropriate libraries; and
- reach out through social media.

Planning for the future of your Neighbourhood

Neighbourhood Planning gives communities the ability to shape their local area and enables them to develop a planning strategy that can help ensure that they get the right type of development for their neighbourhood.

More information on neighbourhood planning can be found on the [GOV.UK website](#).

If you want to make a neighbourhood plan

There are formal stages required by legislation when developing a neighbourhood plan, these stages are:

1. Designating the neighbourhood area
2. First draft of the neighbourhood plan (Pre-Submission version)
3. Final draft of the neighbourhood plan (Submission version)
4. Examination
5. Referendum
6. Adoption

More information on how to prepare a neighbourhood plan can be found in the [neighbourhood plan toolkit](#).

Our legal duties to groups making a neighbourhood plan

We are required by [law](#) to offer help and advice to groups producing neighbourhood plans. This includes:

- providing policy guidance to support the neighbourhood planning process;
- advice on methods of public consultation and engagement;
- advice on how to publicise the proposed plan to the community, how to consult and publicise; and
- advice on the availability of [grant funding](#) for neighbourhood planning groups.

This is in addition to our commitments during the individual plan stages.

Designating the neighbourhood area

We will:

- publicise the application on our website;
- determine applications for neighbourhood areas;
- for unparished areas, we will consult on applications for neighbourhood area designation for a minimum of 6 weeks and publicise the consultation on our website; and
- provide a paper copy of the application at the nearest council office.

We may:

- amend the boundary of the neighbourhood area if it is inappropriate; and
- for unparished areas, provide a paper copy of the application at other council offices and main libraries.

First draft of the neighbourhood plan (pre-Submission version)

We will:

- arrange for a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) screening report to be prepared for the neighbourhood planning group;
- advise on the consultation process and who to consult;
- comment on the draft neighbourhood plan; and
- publicise the consultation on our website.

We may:

- arrange for a Habitat Regulation Assessment (HRA) screening report to be prepared; and
- provide a paper copy of the Pre-Submission Plan at the council office and / or main library nearest to the neighbourhood area.

Final draft of the neighbourhood plan (Publication version)

We will:

- consult on the Submission Plan for a minimum of 6 weeks;
- publish the plan on our website;

- provide a hard copy of the plan and supporting documents at the nearest council office for inspection; and
- collate all responses and prepare them for submission to the examiner.

We may:

- publish the comments received on our website;
- summarise the comments received for the examiner; and
- provide hard copies of the plan at other council offices and main libraries.

Examination

We will:

- liaise with the neighbourhood planning group to appoint an examiner;
- publish details of the examination on our website;
- pass any representations made at the Publication stage to the examiner;
- manage and fund the process of the examination;
- act as a key contact for the examiner;
- answer any questions raised by the examiner; and
- publicise the examiner's report on our website.

We may:

- notify consultees; and
- provide the examiner with a summary of the main issues raised in the representations.

There may be instances where we disagree with the Examiners findings, if this is the case, clear reasons would need to be given for going against the Examiner's recommendations. Additional consultation would also need to take place.

Referendum

We will:

- arrange and fund the referendum, provided there are no Covid-19 restrictions in place;
- publish information about the neighbourhood plan;
- give notice that a referendum is taking place; and
- publish the results of the referendum.

Adoption

We will:

- 'make' (i.e. adopt) the plan, subject to the outcome of the referendum;
- publish the decision to 'make' a neighbourhood plan on our website; and
- notify all individual and organisations who asked to be notified.

Planning for new development

We are responsible for determining planning applications, this includes applications for:

- changes to your home;
- new houses and businesses;
- changing a building from one use to another;
- new schools, roads, pathways and infrastructure; and
- new sites for minerals and waste developments.

We are not responsible for [Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects](#) (NSIPs), such as changes to the motorway, HS2, East-West Rail, etc. More information on these can be found on the [GOV.UK website](#).

How we make decisions on planning applications

What we must consider

Decisions on planning applications must be made in line with the Development Plan (Local Plans, SPDs, etc.), unless there are 'material considerations' that indicate otherwise.

Material considerations can include but are not limited to: loss of light, loss of privacy, parking, traffic, noise, design, appearance and materials, effects on listed buildings or conservation areas, policies in a Local Plan, and policies in the [National Planning Policy Framework](#)

Anything relevant to making the decision is a material planning consideration, however in general it relates to matters in the public interest rather than private (e.g. the value of an adjoining property would not be a material consideration.)

How long we have to decide

The time periods for determination are set out in [law](#).

The time limit is usually:

8 weeks for most planning applications

13 weeks for 'major' (larger) developments

16 weeks for applications that need an [Environmental Impact Assessment](#).

If more time is needed to determine an application, an 'extension of time' can be privately agreed between the planning officer and the applicant.

If we fail to determine the application in time, the applicant can appeal to the Secretary of State against 'non-determination'.

More information on how applications are determined is set out on the [GOV.UK website](#).

How and when we will involve you in the planning application process

Before the application is submitted

We will:

- encourage applicants to consult the community where relevant.

We may:

- liaise with town and parish councils and local Community Boards, where relevant

Once the application is submitted

We will:

- make planning applications and the supporting documentation available to view on [our website](#) as set out in [law](#);
- consult upon applications as set out in [law](#);
- notify town or parish Councils or neighbourhood forums with a 'made' neighbourhood plan of applications in their area.

We may:

- display a planning notice near the application site;
- post letters to neighbours adjoining the application site;
- publish a press notice;
- notify town or parish councils;
- consult with other organisations such as the Environment Agency, Natural England etc. where applicable;
- encourage people to set up notifications for applications through the Council's website; and
- publicise a weekly list of planning applications via public channels.

During the determination process

We will:

- publish documents requested by the case officer on our [website](#) as soon as practicable;
- invite comments on applications by letter, email, or through our [website](#);
- consider the issues raised in response to the application;
- consult town and parish councils; and
- if the application is considered at Planning Committee, provide applicants, town and parish council representatives, and those who have commented on a planning application an opportunity to speak at Planning Committee.

It should be noted that we will not directly respond to individual representations (comments) received.

After we have made a decision

We will:

- publish the decision notice and officer report on our [website](#);
- email or write to the applicant with the decision notice; and
- publish any relevant appeal documents on our [website](#) or on the PINS website.

If the planning decision has been appealed

If the applicant does not agree with our decision they have the right to appeal to the Planning Inspectorate (PINS), in these cases anyone can submit comments directly to PINS for consideration.

More information on how to comment on appeals can be found on the [GOV.UK website](#).

Dealing with unauthorised development

Sometimes, development goes ahead without planning permission or without meeting all of the specified planning conditions, this is known as 'unauthorised development'. When this happens, our planning enforcement team will investigate and, where appropriate, take formal enforcement action.

How we make decisions on unauthorised development

We will undertake our enforcement duties as set out in our [Enforcement and Monitoring Plan](#).

You can view more information on the planning enforcement process and the types of actions available with unauthorised development on [GOV.UK's website](#).

How and when we will involve you in enforcement matters

If you suspect a breach of planning control, you can report concerns via the Council's [website](#).

An overview of the service and what you can expect from this process is set out in the Council's [Enforcement and Monitoring Plan](#).

Glossary

Acceptable representations – Comments that are relevant to the subject being consulted and do not contain statements that are considered offensive to any group or members of society.

Adoption - The final confirmation by a Local Planning Authority that a development plan document has statutory status.

Adoption Statement – A statement required by law that the Local Planning Authority must publish after the adoption of a development plan document.

Consultees - Any person, organisation or body who is formally consulted

Conservation Areas – Areas identified by a local planning authority of special architectural or historic interest.

Council's [Corporate Plan](#) – Outlines our ambitions and priorities for Buckinghamshire Council.

Council's main office - The Gateway, Gatehouse Road, Aylesbury, HP19 8FF

Design Guidance - Sets out the characteristics of well-designed places and illustrates how to achieve in practice, well-designed places that are attractive, enduring and thriving.

Draft plan – A complete version of a development plan document that can be subject to minor changes after consultations.

Designating the neighbourhood area – A process where a Local Planning Authority declares a mapped area as a Neighbourhood Area following a valid application from a relevant body.

Development Briefs and guidance - Set out potential land uses, extent and kind of development, the constraints of sites, open space and access arrangements to inform development proposals for the areas.

Development Plan: Statutory documents that set out the Local Planning Authority's policies and proposals to guide or promote the development and use of land and buildings in the authority's area.

Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) – Provides information on the likely impact of proposed development projects on aspects of the environment.

Examination - Consideration of public views on a proposed Local Plan, held before an Independent Planning Inspector who has been appointed by the Secretary of State to determine whether the plan is 'sound' and can recommend changes to the Local Plan.

Habitats Regulations (HR) – Stages of assessment required by law under the Habitats Regulations (Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017), to be carried out on any development project that has the potential to affect the protected features of a habitats site (for example a European protected site) before deciding whether to undertake, permit or authorise such projects.

Independent examiner – An examiner with relevant experience and qualifications who is independent of the Local Planning Authority and Parish Council or Neighbourhood Forum, appointed by the Local Planning Authority to examine whether the neighbourhood plan meets the 'Basic Conditions' and other relevant legal requirements (for example, consultation).

Inspector's report - A report issued by a planning inspector concerning the planning issues debated at the independent examination of a Local plan. These reports will be binding upon the Local Planning Authorities.

Legislation - A law or a set of laws that have been passed by Parliament, also known as Acts of Parliament or statutes. These take precedence over any other source of law. Legislation is also used to describe the act of making a new law.

Local Plan – Statutory development document that guides decisions on future development proposals and addresses the needs and opportunities of the area. It is also used in deciding planning applications and other planning related decisions.

Local Planning Authority (LPA) - Local Government body with statutory planning powers to exercise urban planning functions within their area. Buckinghamshire Council is a Local Planning Authority.

'Made' – The word used to describe a Neighbourhood Plan that has been through examination and/or referendum and has been accepted to be included as part of the Local Development Plan Document.

Material considerations – Relevant issues taken into account when deciding whether to grant or refuse a planning application.

MHCLG - Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. MHCLG is the UK Government department for housing, communities and local government in England.

Neighbourhood Area - An area designated by the LPA following an application by the parish council or a prospective Neighbourhood Forum. The application must include a map identifying the area and a statement explaining why the area proposed is considered appropriate.

Neighbourhood development plans (NDPs) - Contains the planning policies for the use and development of land in the Neighbourhood Area. Neighbourhood planning is not a legal requirement but a right which communities in England can choose to use.

Neighbourhood Development Order (NDO) - Allows the community to grant planning permission for specified types of development without the need to submit plans to the LPA.

Neighbourhood Forum - An organisation or group empowered to lead the neighbourhood planning process in a neighbourhood area where there is no town or parish council. A group or organisation must apply to the local planning authority to be designated as a neighbourhood forum. .

Planning Inspectorate (PINS) - The Planning Inspectorate is a joint executive agency of the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). The Inspectorate works on behalf of the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (England), to deal with planning appeals, national infrastructure planning applications, examinations of local plans and other planning-related and specialist casework in England and Wales.

Redacting - Editing a document to conceal or remove information deemed to be confidential or sensitive before publication.

Representation - Comment or objection to a development plan document, planning application or other Council documents which are consulted on.

Referendum - A public vote held to decide a single issue, such as public voting carried out in the making of a Neighbourhood development Plan, by those living and carrying out business in the neighbourhood area.

Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) - Sets out our standard on how we intend to engage with local communities, businesses and other interested parties in the preparation and review of planning documents, local planning decisions and planning applications.

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) - A process which requires the identification and evaluation of the impacts a plan is likely to have on the environment and by which environmental considerations are required to be fully integrated into the preparation of certain plans. It is a European Union Directive which has been transposed into the UK law and set out in the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004.

Sustainability Appraisal (SA): A process used to assess the impact of a plan, project or strategy on the economy, community and environment. The aim of the process is to minimise any adverse impact by suggesting ways to avoid or reduce the impacts. Undertaking a sustainability appraisal of the Local Plan is a

statutory requirement of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. An SEA can be incorporated into an SA report where both assessments are required.

Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) – Documents that expand on or provide further detail to policies in the Local Plan. SPDs can be used to provide further guidance on the development of specific sites, or on particular issues, such as design and also to show how policies can be taken forward, but they do not have development plan status.

Your Voice Bucks - A public consultation and engagement platform where you can take part in public consultations, surveys and other engagement activities being held in Buckinghamshire.