

WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL  
CABINET PLANNING AND PARKING PANEL – 15 AUGUST 2024  
REPORT OF THE ASSISTANT DIRECTOR (PLANNING)

STATEMENT OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT (SCI)

**1. Executive Summary**

- 1.1 The Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) sets out how the Council will engage on planning matters.
- 1.2 This report presents a new SCI and seeks agreement to carry out a public consultation prior to a final version being brought back for consideration and adoption. The current SCI requires updating to reflect changes to government policy and the move to a more digitised planning system.
- 1.3 The SCI sets out how, when and where the council will involve the community in preparing local plans, planning documents and when considering planning applications. It also outlines the consultation procedures that applicants should undertake before submitting a planning application.

**2. Recommendation(s)**

- 2.1 That the Panel recommends to Cabinet that:
  - The SCI 2024 (Appendix A), and accompanying Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) (Appendix B) be subject to public consultation.
  - that any subsequent material amendments prior to consultation be made by the Executive Member for Planning and that any subsequent minor amendments and editing changes that do not materially affect the content prior to consultation be delegated to Assistant Director (Planning) in consultation with the Executive Member for Planning.

**3. Background**

- 3.1 The council is required to produce an SCI in accordance with section 18 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. Section 10A of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) Regulations 2012 require an SCI to be kept under review. The current SCI was adopted in 2013.
- 3.2 The SCI describes how the public, businesses, interest groups and individuals within the local authority areas can get involved in influencing the local planning policy, the planning application process and neighbourhood planning, and help to shape where we live and work.

- 3.3 The draft SCI provides an introduction to the overall planning process, sets out how stakeholders can get involved in the preparation of plans including Local Plans, supplementary planning documents and neighbourhood plans. A further section identifies the mechanisms by which stakeholders will be provided an opportunity to engage in the planning application process.
- 3.4 The SCI has been prepared to reflect the requirements of current planning regulations. The Government is proposing major changes to the plan-making system and associated consultation requirements. These have not yet been implemented but if/when they are, our consultation procedures will be amended accordingly.
- 3.5 It may be appropriate to increase community engagement (for example with the Local Plan) in some circumstances, and if resources permit, use methods of engagement that move beyond the regulatory requirements. However, the SCI does not commit the Council to actions that cannot be resourced in all cases, as this could then call into jeopardy decisions and actions taken, give rise to disproportionate costs, or cause delays to the planning process.
- 3.6 There is no mandatory requirement for consultation on a draft SCI however, in the spirit of ensuring meaningful engagement in the planning process, it is proposed that a consultation period is undertaken for six weeks. The draft document will be published on the WHBC website and we will notify stakeholders to seek their views. Comments received will be considered and reported to members when they are asked to adopt the final version of the SCI.

#### **4. Link to Corporate Priorities**

- 4.1 The Council's Corporate Plan 2024-2026 contains corporate priorities to meet the borough's housing need, help build a strong local economy, take action on climate change, protect and enhance the environment and heritage, and maintain a safe, healthy and diverse communities. It also highlights the need to be accessible and the importance the council places on interactions with our communities and business and that the council wants everyone to have a say in the services it provides and how they are delivered. The SCI will help ensure such engagement in planning.

#### **5. Financial Implication(s)**

- 5.1 The production of this consultation document will be met from existing budgets. However, there may be some direct financial implications arising from the Statement of Community Involvement in the future as it commits the council to public consultation on local development documents and planning applications.

#### **6. Legal Implication(s)**

- 6.1 The council is legally required, under section 18 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, to produce an SCI, to set out how we will engage with our communities who have an interest in matters relating to development in their area. Section 10A of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) Regulations 2012 (as amended 2017) require an SCI to be reviewed every five years starting from the date of adoption of the SCI. Since the introduction of Neighbourhood Plans (which once made form part of the development plan) the Council must comply with the provision of the Neighbourhood Planning Act 2017.

## **7. Climate Change Implication(s)**

7.1 No climate change implications have been identified resulting from this report.

## **8. Security and Terrorism Implication(s)**

8.1 There are no security and terrorism implications arising directly as a result of this report.

## **9. Equality and Diversity**

9.1 An Initial Equalities Impact Assessment was conducted on the revised SCI. As the document aims to engage with all sections of the community, the potential impact is generally considered to be positive, so the assessment did not proceed beyond the screening stage.

## **10. Procurement Implication(s)**

10.1 There are no procurement implications arising directly as a result of this report.

## **11. Risk Management Implications**

11.1 The council are legally required to update the SCI every 5 years from adoption and so would not be legally compliant if it did not have an up to date SCI in place.

## **12. Policy Implication(s)**

12.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states that local planning authorities should seek to involve all sections of the community in the development of Local Plans and in planning decisions. On this basis, the Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) is an important Local Development Document because it sets out the council's approach to community engagement. It aims to ensure inclusive consultation that involves all parts of the community, as far as possible, throughout the planning process. Production of the Local Plan and supplementary planning documents and the development management process must comply with the requirements in the SCI.

### **Appendices:**

Appendix A: Statement of Community Involvement, July 2024.

Appendix B: Equalities Impact Assessment, June 2024.