

WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL  
CABINET PLANNING AND PARKING PANEL – 19 NOVEMBER 2024  
REPORT OF THE ASSISTANT DIRECTOR (PLANNING)

REPORT ON PUBLIC CONSULTATION FOR THE DRAFT 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 The draft SCI was the subject of a report to CPPP on 15<sup>th</sup> August 2024, in which the revised SCI was presented and agreement sought to carry out a public consultation, with the final version being brought back to members 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 This report informs members of the result of the six-week public consultation on the revised SCI and discusses whether any amendments are recommended.

**2. Recommendation(s)**

- 2.1 That the Cabinet Planning and Parking Panel (CPPP) recommends to Cabinet that the SCI, as detailed in Appendix A, is formally adopted.
- 2.2 If unanimously agreed by the Panel, for the decision to be taken by the Executive Member using their delegated powers under paragraph 18.1(b) of the Cabinet procedure rules.
- 2.3 That any subsequent material amendments be made by the Executive Member for Planning and any subsequent minor amendments and editing changes that do not materially affect the content can be delegated to Assistant Director (Planning) in consultation with the Executive Member for Planning.

**3. Background**

- 3.1 Section 18 (1) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires all local authorities to produce a Statement of Community Involvement (SCI). The SCI is a document that sets out how the council will ensure that local communities, businesses and other stakeholders can be involved in local planning decisions and help shape the places where they live.
- 3.2 The 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.

- 3.3 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.
- 3.4 It may be appropriate to increase community engagement (for example with regards to the Local Plan) in some circumstances, and if resources permit, using methods of engagement that move beyond the regulatory requirements. However, it is important 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.
- 3.5 The public consultation on the revised SCI took place over six weeks, from 16 September to 28 October 2024. The draft document was published on the WHBC website, a notice was published in the local papers and stakeholders' views were sought.
- 3.6 One comment was received from Northaw and Cuffley Parish Council who appreciated the opportunity to participate in the consultation and welcomed the Council's clear commitment to involving a wide array of local stakeholders in the development of planning policies and supporting documents. They also welcomed the Council's commitment to keeping stakeholders informed with regards to changes to the planning process and associated requirements for collaborative frameworks and are eager to work with the Council in the future. This comment is attached as Appendix B to this report.
- 3.7 No amendments are considered necessary following the consultation. Consequently, it is recommended that the SCI be presented to Cabinet with a recommendation for formal adoption.

#### **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 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 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: Comments received following the public consultation on the SCI