

REVIEW OF THE STATEMENT OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT (SCI)

Executive Summary

The planning system and, in particular, the Localism Act puts public involvement at the heart of the planning process. Local Authorities are therefore required to prepare a Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) to demonstrate what, how and when it intends to engage the public in the planning process. National policy requires an SCI to be reviewed every five years from the date of adoption. The current SCI was adopted in February 2015. The SCI is therefore due for its statutory review. The Executive approved the revised SCI for public consultation at its meeting on 9 September 2021. The consultation took place between 27 September 2021 and 8 November 2021. A total of 4 individuals made representations. A summary of the representations and how they have been taken into account is in Appendix 1.

Where Officers have proposed modifications to the SCI as a result of the representations, they are incorporated in the revised SCI as a track change, and this is included in Appendix 2. Overall, the proposed changes are of minor nature and do not change the thrust of the Draft SCI that was approved by the Executive prior to the public consultation. The revised SCI will bring it up to date to reflect current changes in national planning policy. The Executive is therefore requested to recommend to Council to approve it.

The report was considered by the LDF Working Group on 16 December 2021. The Group had suggested some minor modifications to the SCI. Details of the proposed modifications are set out in the Minute of the meeting, which is attached as Appendix 4. The proposed modifications are incorporated in the SCI and are highlighted for reference.

Recommendations

The Executive is requested to:

RECOMMEND TO COUNCIL That

- (i) the various representations to the Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) consultation together with Officers' responses and recommendations as set out in Appendix 1 to the report be noted;**
- (ii) the revised Statement of Community Involvement included in Appendix 2 to the report be adopted for the purposes of setting out how the Council wishes the local community to be involved and engaged when preparing key planning policy documents and determining of planning applications; and**
- (iii) the requirements of the Statement of Community Involvement should apply from the date of adoption, in this case 10 February 2022.**

Reason: To provide the necessary framework for involving the local community in planning decisions.

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The items above will need to be dealt with by way of a recommendation to Council.

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1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to:
 - outline the various responses and analysis to the consultation on the Statement of Community Involvement (SCI), which took place between 27 September 2021 and 8 November 2021;
 - note the proposed revisions to the adopted SCI; and
 - seek member's approval to adopt the revised version of the SCI for it to be used as a framework for involving the local community in planning decisions.
- 1.2 Woking Borough Council is required by Government legislation to prepare a Statement of Community Involvement setting out how it wishes to consult the local community when preparing key planning documents and determining planning applications. The Council places community involvement at the heart of the delivery of its planning service. The SCI provides a transparent framework to ensure that public involvement is embedded in service provision in a consistent and appropriate manner, in line with the objectives of the Corporate Plan.
- 1.3 The current SCI was adopted on 12 February 2015. The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) (Amendment) Regulation 2017 requires local planning authorities to review their SCIs every five years from the date of adoption of the SCI. The Executive approved the revised SCI for public consultation at its meeting on 9 September 2021. The consultation took place between 27 September 2021 and 8 November 2021. A total of 4 individuals made representations. A summary of the representations and how they have been taken into account is in Appendix 1.
- 1.4 Where Officers have proposed modifications to the SCI as a result of the representations, they are incorporated in the revised SCI as a track change, and this is included in Appendix 2. Overall, the proposed changes are of minor nature and do not change the thrust of the Draft SCI that was approved by the Executive prior to the public consultation.
- 1.5 Changes to the planning system now give authority to the Council to adopt the SCI when requirements for public consultation have been met. Officers are satisfied that the requirements for public consultation have been met. The Executive is therefore requested to recommend to Council to approve the SCI to provide the framework on how the public will be involved in the planning process.

2.0 Nature and analysis of representations

- 2.1 The revised SCI was approved by the Executive for public consultation, which took place between 27 September 2021 and 8 November 2021. 4 individuals responded to the consultation. A summary of the representations received with officer's response and recommendations is in Appendix 1. Copies of the representation can be inspected on request from the Planning Policy Team (planning.policy@woking.gov.uk). The representations covered matters such as making sure 'everyone' is consulted, depositing consultation documents at supermarkets and coffee shops for wider accessibility and having a dedicated officer to assist consultees in accessing and understanding what is being consulted on. This summary is not exhaustive, and Members are encouraged to read the details in Appendix 1. Minor changes have been made as a result of the representations. A version of the SCI with track changes of the proposed amendments is in Appendix 2. The track changes will be removed before the SCI is published on the website. A Consultation Statement setting out details of the consultation events undertaken to inform the SCI has been prepared to accompany the updated SCI and is in Appendix 3.

3.0 Summary of the key topic covered in the SCI

- 3.1 The SCI broadly covers the following:

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- **Section 1** – explains what SCI is about and how it has been developed. It also provides an overview of the nature of the community the planning service is likely to engage with and a list of the general and specific consultation bodies who will be consulted on planning issues.
- **Section 2** – provides a list of Local Development Documents that the Council is likely to prepare and involve the community in their preparation, the various stages of preparing the documents and the techniques that would be used to involve the community.
- **Section 3** – sets out how people can get involved in the planning application process, including pre-application consultations and engagement by developers.
- **Section 4** – deal with how the Council will engage with local communities in preparing their Neighbourhood Plans. It also highlights how local residents will be involved in the key stages of the Neighbourhood Planning process.
- **Section 5** – sets out how the Council will monitor what it says it will do in the SCI. It identifies the resources that will be needed to ensure that all sections of the community are involved in the preparation of key planning policy documents and when determining planning applications.

4.0 Next steps

- 4.1 The revised SCI will have to be approved and adopted by Council. The Executive is therefore requested to recommend to Council to approve the SCI for adoption at its meeting on 10 February 2022. When adopted, the document will set the framework for how the public will be involved in plan making and the development management process. It is recommended that the effective date for the requirements of the document to apply is 10 February 2022, which is the day of adoption by Council.

5.0 Corporate Strategy

- 5.1 As highlighted in the Corporate Plan, the Council is establishing a stronger commitment to embedding a culture of consultation into decision making process, empowering communities and making decisions alongside communities. The SCI will provide a transparent framework to ensure that public involvement is embedded in service provision in a consistent and appropriate manner.

6.0 Implications

Finance and Risk

- 6.1 There is no additional financial implication for preparing the SCI. Its preparation is funded from the Planning Policy Service Plan budget.
- 6.2 The Council has a statutory obligation to review the SCI every five years. The Council will be failing in its duty if the SCI is not reviewed.

Equalities and Human Resources

- 6.3 There are no human resources implications.
- 6.4 The SCI will ensure that all sections of the community are engaged in the planning process.

Legal

- 6.5 The Council has a legal obligation to prepare an SCI, and review it every five years. The review of the SCI will ensure that this duty is met.
- 6.6 In preparing local development documents, the authority must comply with their Statement of Community Involvement. It is therefore important to have an up to date adopted SCI in place to provide the necessary framework against which plans will be assessed.

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7.0 Engagement and Consultation

- 7.1 A Consultation Plan setting out the details of the engagement and consultation undertaken to inform the SCI is attached as Appendix 3. In summary, the revised SCI has been prepared with the active involvement of the relevant sections of the Council. The draft SCI was scrutinised by the LDF Working Group and the Executive before it was published for community engagement and consultation. The community was given six weeks to comment on the document, and their comments have informed the final version of the SCI.

8.0 Conclusions

- 8.1 The planning system puts public involvement at the heart of the planning process. Consequently, Local Authorities are required to prepare a SCI to demonstrate what, how and when it intends to engage the public in the planning process. Significant weight is attached to Local Development Documents that has undergone extensive public consultation. For example, a development plan document will be judged amongst other things on how well it has been prepared in accordance with the adopted SCI. There is no doubt that the current adopted SCI is over five years and should be reviewed to satisfy national policy. The updated SCI is therefore needed sooner than later for the Council to meet its statutory requirement and to provide the necessary framework on how the Council will consult the local community on the preparation of key planning documents and determining planning applications. Members are therefore requested to recommend to Council to approve the document for adoption.

REPORT ENDS