

SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL**CABINET****DATE: 28 APRIL 2015****REPORT OF: MR MIKE GOODMAN, CABINET MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING****LEAD OFFICER: TREVOR PUGH, STRATEGIC DIRECTOR, ENVIRONMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE****SUBJECT: REVISION OF STATEMENT OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT****SUMMARY OF ISSUE:**

The Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) is the County Council's public statement of how it engages with the public and consultees on planning applications and planning policy documents.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

It is recommended that Cabinet recommends the County Council adopt the revised Statement of Community Involvement (SCI).

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATIONS:

It is a statutory requirement to produce the SCI and to keep it up to date. The current SCI was adopted in 2006 and this revision takes account of changes in legislation and policy and the county planning authority's commitment to making best use of electronic communication.

DETAILS:

1. The SCI is a statutory planning document which the County Council is required to prepare by the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. It is a statement of policy for involving local communities and interest groups in matters relating to planning applications for minerals, waste and county development and minerals and waste policy documents.
2. A revised SCI is necessary to ensure that it remains relevant and reflects current legislation and policy as well as the practices being adopted by the Planning Department in light of the Planning Review 2013.

3. The key changes to the revised SCI statement are:
 - The approach to consultation and engagement is more streamlined which reflects the simplified plan making process;
 - The revised SCI is more succinct and readable than the current version;
 - The methods of contact for consultees have been updated to reflect increased use and availability of electronic communication;
 - The move to handling all planning applications in electronic form and enabling consultees to view online documents associated with planning applications;
 - The implementation of the recommendations as a result of the Planning Department review of service, including the use of an online planning portal to submit planning applications and the introduction of pre-application fees.
4. These amendments to the SCI also reflect the changes to planning legislation since the council adopted the SCI in 2006, namely, the Localism Act 2011 and the revised Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012.
5. These changes affect how local planning authorities prepare their development plans by streamlining the plan making process. Whilst the legislation did not change the requirements for the SCI, it did introduce the 'duty to cooperate' and set out key requirements for consultation with statutory organisations and bodies on matters of strategic cross boundary importance.
6. As well as changes to the legislation the Planning Department underwent a review in 2013. One of the key changes that came out of the review was the move to use of the Planning Portal for the submission of planning applications and the publishing of application documents on the County Council's own website.

CONSULTATION:

7. A fifteen week public consultation was undertaken from 27 October 2014 to 2 February 2015. Consultees were notified by email or letter and asked to fill out a feedback form with their comments on the proposed SCI.
8. Among those consulted were previous applicants, agents, District and Borough Councils, Parish Councils, Resident and Amenity Groups, Local Stakeholders and Equality and Diversity groups. Overall nineteen representations were received and all were generally supportive. In particular, consultees were supportive of the Council's use of electronic communications to more effectively engage local communities in the planning process and displaying planning application documents on our own website.
9. There were a few minor amendments such as rewording some of the paragraphs to make its meaning clearer for the public which have been addressed where possible.
10. The Planning and Regulatory Committee was consulted on 10 December 2014. The Committee felt that the document needed an executive summary so that people will understand what information the document contains. An executive summary has been included in the SCI.

RISK MANAGEMENT AND IMPLICATIONS:

11. It is important that the County Council's SCI remains compliant with legislation, policy and practice. Failure to do so could lead to successful challenges to decisions on relevant planning applications, whereby they are overturned and costs are potentially awarded against the County Council.

Financial and Value for Money Implications

12. The SCI continues to commit the County Council to going beyond the minimum requirements set out in legislation insofar as letters to neighbours will always be sent as well as a site notice displayed. However, this is considered good practice and involves no change in current procedures which have been made more efficient by automating the envelope handling process. By making best use of electronic communication, the planning department will be able to be more efficient when communicating with consultees and other interested parties.

Section 151 Officer Commentary

13. The Section 151 officer confirms that there are no material financial issues, risks or changes to resource requirements associated with the adoption of a revised SCI.

Legal Implications – Monitoring Officer

14. The County Council is the Minerals and Waste Planning Authority for Surrey. It is required by the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended) to prepare a Statement of Community Involvement and update the statement from time to time as required.

Equalities and Diversity

15. The SCI commits the County Council to improving access to planning decisions for older people, younger people, people with disabilities, carers and women who are pregnant or looking after children. We will achieve this by:
- Communicating electronically whenever possible
 - Publishing plans, planning applications and other documents on our website together with an online comments form
 - Making use of social media
 - Using plain English in our documents
 - Using premises with access and facilities for people with limited mobility, impaired sight or hearing difficulties
 - On request making documents available in large print or in languages other than English
 - People without access to the internet or email will be able to view planning documents at County Hall or at local borough and district council offices and make representations by letter.
16. An Equalities Impact Assessment has been carried out and is included as Annex 2 to this report.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT:

17. Upon adoption the revised SCI will replace the previous 2006 SCI and become the County Council's adopted policy for consultation and engagement with the community on the minerals and waste plans and on planning applications for minerals and waste development and the County Council's own proposals for development.

Contact Officer:

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Consulted:

Previous applicants, agents, District and Borough Councils, Parish Councils, Resident and Amenity Groups, Local Stakeholders and Equality and Diversity groups.

Planning & Regulatory Committee

Annexes:

Annex 1: Revised Draft Statement of Community Involvement.

Annex 2: Revised Draft Statement of Community Involvement Equality Impact Assessment

Sources/background papers:

Surrey Statement of Community Involvement 2006.