

Gloucester City Council

Meeting:	Cabinet Council	Date:	13 September 2023 21 September 2023
Subject:	Adoption of the Gloucester Statement of Community Involvement		
Report Of:	Cabinet Member for Planning and Housing Strategy		
Wards Affected:	ALL		
Key Decision:	Yes	Budget/Policy Framework:	No
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Appendices:	1. Response Report 2. Revised Gloucester Statement of Community Involvement		

FOR GENERAL RELEASE

1.0 Purpose of Report

- 2.1 This report seeks acknowledgement of the responses received to the public consultation on the Statement of Community Involvement (SCI), endorsement of the changes made to the draft SCI as a result of the consultation and adoption of the revised SCI.
- 2.2 An SCI is a document required by the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. It sets out the council's principles and requirements for involving the community in both preparing and revising planning documents and in the consideration of planning applications.
- 2.3 The SCI also informs the community what the council's roles and responsibilities are regarding any Neighbourhood Planning the community may wish to prepare.
- 2.4 Cabinet approved the SCI for a public consultation in May 2023. The consultation is now complete, and this report presents the responses received and the changes made to the document as a result.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 Cabinet is asked to **RECOMMEND** to Council that:
- (1) the Response Report (Appendix 1) be endorsed
 - (2) the Revised Statement of Community Involvement be adopted
 - (3) authority be delegated for the correction of any errors such as spelling, grammar, referencing and formatting to the Planning Policy Manager, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Planning and Housing Strategy.

2.2 Council is asked to **RESOLVE** that:

- (1) The Response Report (Appendix 1) be endorsed.
- (2) The Revised Statement of Community Involvement be adopted.
- (3) Authority be delegated for the correction of any errors such as spelling, grammar, referencing and formatting to the Planning Policy Manager, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Planning and Housing.

3.0 Background and Key Issues

- 3.1 The City Council's last SCI was adopted in 2015 and requires updating to reflect current regulations and the changing ways in which we all communicate.
- 3.2 The SCI promotes early engagement in planning and ensures that the public will be well informed of any planning matters. Early engagement can foster a sense of ownership, understanding and positively shape place making.
- 3.3 The SCI sets out for both plan making and decision taking who we will inform, when, by what method, and what will be done with any comments received.
- 3.4 For plan making (Planning Policy) it informs the community and key stakeholders of the formal consultation processes we will undertake in producing Development Plan Documents. These documents include plans such as the emerging Cheltenham, Gloucester and Tewkesbury Strategic and Local Plan.
- 3.5 The SCI explains what each stage of plan making involves, who the key consultees are, the consultation methods and tools we will use, how people can put forward their comments and ideas, and what we will do in response.
- 3.6 It sets out a number of potential consultation methods and when they might be used. It commits the council to involving a wide range of individuals and organisations, including the local community, stakeholders and 'harder to reach' groups. It is important that the needs of those groups of people who do not usually get involved in the process, and who may have specific needs to be met or addressed, are able to get involved if they wish.
- 3.7 The SCI sets the framework for consultation and engagement with the community and stakeholders. In addition, consultations undertaken during the plan making process will be individually designed to ensure they are relevant, appropriate and responsive to their nature and scope.
- 3.8 For decision taking (planning applications – Development Management), the SCI sets out what consultation and notification will take place depending on the type and scale of application. In all cases the council will meet the minimum statutory requirements and, in some cases, exceed them. For example, there are no requirements to notify the public of reserved matters applications. However, a reserved matters application could contain a lot of detail such as the layout and design of new development. The SCI therefore requires that a reserved matters application be treated like a full planning application with neighbours notified accordingly and invited to comment.

- 3.9 The SCI also sets out what role the council as Local Planning Authority will take in supporting neighbourhood planning matters.
- 3.10 Cabinet approved the SCI for public consultation in May 2023. This was held for 6 weeks between 20 June and 1 August 2023. The community were able to view the documents online and by appointment at Council's main office. Everyone with an email address on the Planning Policy and Economic Development database was contacted, as well as local agents, all local secondary schools, colleges and universities, and representatives from the Council's 'Development Forum'. The consultation was also shared with the Community Wellbeing Team and to all elected Members. A Press Release and social media campaign were also used.
- 3.11 The consultation was focussed on a short survey which gave people the opportunity to express how they would like to be consulted on planning matters and join the database should they wish to be involved in future planning consultations. There was also a free-text box for any other comments they wished to make.

Response to the Consultation

- 3.12 Full details of the comments received are presented in the attached Response Report (Appendix 1).
- 3.13 68 people completed the online survey and 9 organisations, including statutory consultees, emailed a response.
- 3.14 Where appropriate changes have been made to the Revised SCI, shown as tracked changed (Appendix 2). Most of these changes are minor and made for clarification purposes. It has also been updated to reflect the fact the Council has recently agreed to produce a new Gloucester, Cheltenham and Tewkesbu
- 3.15 Comments were also made that are not directly related to the content of the SCI, but how it will be implemented. These highlight a number of issues and frustration from residents, particularly with the notification of consultations and the decisions taken. It is important that the issues raised in these comments are fully considered outside of this report and actioned where appropriate.
- 3.16 The majority of respondents are happy with digital only methods of communication. One person chose printed newspaper and library display as their only preferred methods. Others who chose newspaper or library also chose social media, email, or council website as methods for being told about planning matters.
- 3.17 There were a number of key themes:
- 1) People responding generally felt that they did not know about planning applications or found out about them too late to comment.
 - 2) People felt that planning applications should be refused in line with public opinion. In response, the planning legislation does not allow applications to be refused based on local opinion.
 - 3) People expressed that social media could be used better and wanted comments on social media to be taken into consideration. For plan making this is possible for the earlier stages. However, at the formal Regulation 19 stage (formal Publication of the plan) the regulations require 'representations to be received by

the local planning authority' and the LPA have to 'notify any persons who made representations' of the independent examination.

- 4) People want greater access to officers and more information from Members.
- 5) People want information to be non-technical and easily accessible. This is also a key principle of the SCI.

4.0 Social Value Considerations

4.1 There are no social value implications as a result of this report.

5.0 Environmental Implications

5.1 The SCI is fairly neutral in terms of environmental implications. There is the potential to save some paper and printing with a reduced number of hard copy documents.

5.3 It is the content of the consultations themselves, not a matter for the SCI, that has the potential for wider impact in terms of producing better quality developments and policies to ensure planning contributes to the council's climate targets.

6.0 Alternative Options Considered

6.1 No action could be taken which would result in a conflict with the regulatory requirements.

7.0 Reasons for Recommendations

7.1 The Council is required to have an adopted SCI by the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 section 18. The last SCI was adopted in 2015 and therefore in need of updating.

8.0 Future Work and Conclusions

8.1 The tracked change version and Response Report will be published on the Council's website so that people can see how their comments were taken on board.

8.2 If adopted the SCI will be published online and used by Planning Policy and Development Management on forthcoming planning applications and plan making activities with immediate effect.

8.3 The Planning Policy team will continue to work with the Community Engagement Team to design effective consultations within the framework of the SCI.

8.4 The suggestions that relate to the implementation of consultations, rather than the content of the SCI. These include for example the create a notification system where residents can be messaged (text or email) if a planning application is submitted in their ward to improve how people are notified of planning applications? Other suggestions included community noticeboards, newsletters, a dedicated space in the city for discussing urban planning issues, better engagement with young people, live streaming planning meetings and putting recordings on YouTube, QR codes on site notices, and having more access to officers. It is proposed that all of the ideas suggested are considered by Planning Managers in consultation with the Head of Place, and where appropriate these will be taken forward.

9.0 Financial Implications

- 9.1 Having an up-to-date SCI will facilitate a modest saving in terms of printing costs. The current 2015 SCI requires a paper copy of the plan and supporting information to be sent to every library across the city. For the last plan consultation (Gloucester City Plan Main Modifications) this cost was approximately £800. The GCP has been out on regulatory consultations six times.
- 9.2 All libraries across the city have computers, staff that can help people use the computer and print relevant information. A paper copy of consultation materials will always be available to view at the council's main reception as per the regulations.
- 9.3 As is currently the case, any financial requirements for consultation will be fed into the budget allocations for Development Management, Planning Policy or the Strategic and Local Plan, as appropriate.

(Financial Services have been consulted in the preparation of this report.)

10.0 Legal Implications

- 10.1 Section 18 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended) requires all local planning authorities to adopt an SCI. This has to take into account the following requirements:
1. (a) Section 6 of the Neighbourhood Planning Act 2017, which states that a "statement of community involvement must set out the local planning authority's policies for giving advice and assistance" in relation to Neighbourhood Planning. This requirement came into force on 31 July 2018.
 2. (b) Regulation 4 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2017 came into force on 6th April 2018 and requires a local planning authority to review a SCI "every five years, starting from the date of adoption of the statement of community involvement."
- 10.2 The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 (as amended) do not require a revised SCI to go through an examination process.
- 10.3 The revised SCI sets out how the Council will meet the statutory requirements for consulting on various types of planning documents and through the development management process.
- 10.4 When adopted, the SCI must be published on the Council's website.

(One Legal have been consulted in the preparation of this report.)

11.0 Risk & Opportunity Management Implications

- 11.1 As set out above, the Council is required to produce and review an SCI up-to-date SCI in accordance with the requirements of Section 18 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended)

11.2 Risk assessments will be used as applicable at the time of planning any public consultation events.

12.0 People Impact Assessment (PIA) and Safeguarding:

12.1 The PIA Screening Stage was completed and did not identify any potential or actual negative impact, therefore a full PIA was not required.

13.0 Community Safety Implications

13.1 No known community safety implications.

14.0 Staffing & Trade Union Implications

14.1 No known staffing or union implications.

Background Documents: None