

6 February 2023

Report of	Laura Goulding
Title	Statement of Community Involvement 2023
Wards affected	All

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 Colchester City Council is required to prepare a Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) setting out how it intends to consult when preparing planning policies and deciding planning applications. The current SCI was adopted in June 2020 and updated to reflect temporary measures during the Covid-19 lockdowns and restrictions. Certain requirements that were introduced in response to the coronavirus pandemic have now expired and are no longer in effect. These temporary measures have been removed and new updates have been included in the SCI to reflect the latest legislation.

2. Recommended Decision

- 2.1 To agree to the changes made to the Statement of Community Involvement to reflect the specific requirements arising from national policy guidance and legislation changes.
- 2.2 To publish the updated Statement of Community Involvement on the Council's website.

3. Reason for Recommended Decision

- 3.1 To ensure Council procedures on planning and community involvement are modified to align with current Government guidance and legislation.

4. Alternative Options

- 4.1 The Committee could decide not to update the Statement of Community Involvement, but this would conflict with the latest national policy guidance and regulations and may undermine plan making and decision making in the City.

5. Background Information

- 5.1 A Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) is a document required by Section 18 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 which sets out what consultation will take place with the community on planning policy documents and planning applications.
- 5.2 The Council approved the latest version of the Colchester SCI in June 2020. It is available on the [Council website](#). The 2020 update addressed the Covid-19 implications for the ability of authorities to comply with policies set out in their SCI's. The Government addressed the need to modify consultation requirements for an interim period in the Flexibility of Local Authority Meeting Regulations 2020 and in modifications to Planning Policy Guidance (PPG) published 13 May 2020.

Information removed from SCI

- 5.6 Colchester Council published a covering table at the front of the previous September 2018 SCI highlighting changes to the document covering the temporary Covid restrictions which have now been revoked. This table has now been removed from the SCI to reflect these changes in legislation.
- 5.7 Press Notices in newspapers are no longer required to advertise consultations and have been removed from the SCI. The Council will continue to advertise consultations via the Council's website and/or social media.

Additions and changes to the SCI

- 5.8 In light of the Covid-19 pandemic a paragraph has been added to the introduction in case there is a comparable situation in the future and the Council cannot fully comply with this SCI. The Council is committed to effective consultation and communication with its residents, and in order to do this some consultation methods may have to change temporarily, in response to any temporary national policy guidance.
- 5.9 Updates have been made to reflect the adoption of the Colchester Local Plan, with Section 1 adopted on 2 February 2021 and Section 2 adopted on 4 July 2022.
- 5.10 The Colchester Council 2018 SCI stated a minimum 6-week consultation period for Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD). National legislation permits that the consultation period for SPD's be minimum 4 weeks. We have updated the SCI to align with the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012.
- 5.11 Following updates to the Planning Committee Procedure, in 2021, a section has been added to explain the process of 'Have your Say' at both Planning Committee and Local Plan Committee.
- 5.12 A 'Plan Making' process section been added to help explain the Local Plan, Neighbourhood Plan and Supplementary Planning Documents process.
- 5.13 A section has also been added to the Neighbourhood Planning chapter to better explain the support Colchester City Council can offer. Officers are also preparing a Neighbourhood Planning Guide to provide further details of the neighbourhood planning process, including for review and modifications of adopted NHPs. This will be published on the Council's website and a link added to the SCI once finalised.

- 5.14 A paragraph has been added to the 'Procedure for Dealing with Written Representations to Applications' section. This explains that we will not directly notify those who have made representations to applications of the proposed committee date for consideration of the application. This is due to receiving thousands of representations annually, which cannot be responded to. This is confirmed on our website and has been the case for some time.
- 5.15 The Public participation 'Have your Say' at Planning Committee and Local Plan committee has been added and expanded upon to reflect the changes made since the Covid19 restrictions. During Covid19 lockdowns committees took place online to allow the meetings to continue safely. Meetings have now returned face to face but are also live streamed allowing the public to observe the meeting.
- 5.16 The Appeals chapter has been revised to outline more clearly the process, including that the government appointed inspector will decide on the procedure which could be via written representation, a hearing or a public inquiry and is determined on a case by case basis.
- 5.17 The SCI will be kept under review and modified as required to take account of both the latest health and safety requirements and adoption of new consultation methods. It may be necessary to revise the SCI at short notice, but any changes will be brought to the first available Local Plan Committee to enable scrutiny and review.

6. Equality, Diversity and Human Rights implications

- 6.1 An Equality Impact Assessment has been prepared for the Local Plan, and is available to view by clicking [here](#).

7. Strategic Plan References

- 7.1 The Strategic Plan is relevant in particular contributing to priorities under the themes:
- Creating safe, healthy and active communities;
 - Delivering homes for people who need them; and
 - Growing a fair economy so everyone benefits.

8. Consultation and Publicity

- 8.1 This SCI update is publicised via presentation at Local Plan Committee. This is in line with Government advice that while there is no requirement to have a formal consultation on the SCI, *'it is good practice for authorities to inform the public of their intentions to update this document and of the changes that have been made'*.

9. Financial implications

- 9.1 There are no financial implications for the Council

10. Community Safety Implications

- 10.1 There are no community safety implications for the Council.

11. Health and Safety Implications

- 11.1 There are no health and safety implications for the Council.

12. Risk Management Implications

- 12.1 Adopting the Statement of Community Involvement will reduce the risk of the Council failing to adhere to the most recent regulations.

13. Environmental and Sustainability Implications

- 13.1 The Council has declared a Climate Emergency and has committed to being carbon neutral by 2030. The purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development as defined in the National Planning Policy Framework. Achieving sustainable development means that the planning system has three overarching objectives, which are interdependent and need to be pursued in mutually supportive ways. These are economic, social and environmental objectives.

Appendices

Appendix One: Statement of Community Involvement 2023