

STATEMENT OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Interim version in response to Covid-19 Restrictions

What is the Interim Statement of Community Involvement?

Leeds City Council (LCC) is the Local Planning Authority (LPA) for Leeds and is responsible for preparing planning documents that set out how Leeds and the neighbourhoods that make up the Leeds District will grow and change in the future, as well as making decisions on individual planning applications.

The Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) is a Local Development Document (LDD) and sets out how we, the Council, will consult and engage with you, the public, on planning matters, including the preparation of planning documents, commenting on planning applications and the preparation of Neighbourhood Plans. Our current SCI is in need of update and we had been working towards a revised version since earlier this year.

Due to Covid-19 and the ongoing restrictions on movement and social interaction impacting how we work and contact people, the Council decided to introduce this Interim SCI as a temporary document that will allow us to continue to make planning decisions and to continue to positively engage and consult with you in ways that are safe, effective and meaningful during the pandemic, until the full SCI can be introduced. This Interim SCI will therefore:

- Set out what our planning responsibilities are.
- Detail consultation methods used during this interim period.
- Establish what we will do to make consultation and engagement on planning matters safe, effective and meaningful while restrictions are in place.
- Continue to provide encouragement to all communities to take part in consultation and engagement on planning matters in Leeds.
- Re-assure communities across Leeds that efforts will be made for the planning service to be responsive to changing needs and circumstances during a challenging and unpredictable time.

During the period of restrictions we will continue to prepare the full revised SCI, explore new ways of using digital technology and improve local intelligence on the particular needs of the diverse communities around Leeds, including taking into account how Covid-19 has affected their ability to engage with the planning system and how we can address this moving forward.

How will Covid-19 affect consultation and engagement in Leeds?

There are a number of potential restrictions to normal services due to both Government guidance during the Covid-19 pandemic, Council protocols and changing local restrictions. These will be kept under constant review as restrictions on movement and social distancing

are subject to change at short notice. The restrictions that may be in place during the period of this Interim SCI could involve the following:

- Council offices and venues such as libraries and community hubs may be closed to members of the public and possibly staff.
- Hard copies of documents may not be available for access by the public.
- The Council's ability to send letters, and the ability of residents to receive letters, may be limited and postal delays may cause delays to services.
- Due to the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic on staff and the impact of restrictions on normal ways of working, there may at times be some delay in service delivery.
- Face to face meetings, workshops, presentations etc. will be suspended.
- Face-to-face plans panel meetings, appeal hearings/inquiries and public examinations will be suspended.
- Site visits will only take place if they can be carried out safely in line with the Government's guidance on social distancing.

Whilst we will consult and engage on all normal planning functions during this interim period, in simple terms, the majority of the Council's consultation activity will be online during the period that national or local Covid-19 restrictions are in place. There will be some exceptions to this. For example, we will continue to post 'site notices' as we are aware that these are an important and effective means of communication for some (especially those who are not digitally connected).

The Government has laid a new Statutory Instrument (SI) for planning. The [Local Planning, Development Management Procedure, Listed Buildings etc. \(England\) \(Coronavirus\) \(Amendment\) Regulations 2020](#) amends a number of regulations which were made in response to the pandemic, extending the current temporary measures to 31 December 2021. This includes local planning and spatial development strategies, and temporary development management measures due to expire in December this year. The new SI allows councils to continue to make relevant planning documents available online rather than being required to provide hard copies. The new regulations come into force on 24 December 2020.

Overcoming barriers to engagement/consultation during Covid-19

Leeds is no different to other parts of the country where there are some communities who either do not feel engaged with the planning process, or feel unable to make their views heard. Covid-19 and social distancing restrictions mean that this presents an additional challenge but also an opportunity to explore new and different ways to engage and consult. During this interim period we will not only explore and improve our digital presence but also seek to ensure that groups that are often disconnected from the planning process (children and younger people, people with disabilities, older people, those with different language needs) feel valued during this difficult time with positive and pro-active engagement.

Consultation and engagement on planning policy documents

The wide variety of planning documents prepared by the Council are set out in ‘The Local Development Scheme’ (LDS). The LDS gives an overview of what the planning policies are for the Leeds district, and sets out the current documents which form the Local Plan for the district ([Adopted Local Plan](#)). The **Local Plan** for Leeds currently comprises a number of statutory development plan documents. These set out strategic policies, allocate sites for development and set policies for decision making on planning applications:

- Leeds Core Strategy 2019
- Site Allocations Plan 2019
- Aire Valley Leeds Area Action Plan 2017
- Natural Resources and Waste Plan 2015
- Saved policies of the Leeds Unitary Development Plan Review 2006
- Made Neighbourhood Plans

Due to the current restrictions as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic the scope of any consultation and engagement activity will be limited for the foreseeable future, with temporary changes being put in place. There will be a degree of flexibility about this, given the evolving nature of the Covid-19 restrictions locally and nationally.

Table 1 - Summary of the Process for preparing a Development Plan Document (DPD)

| Stage | Purpose & Requirements | Interim Arrangements |
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| Stage 1: Developing the evidence base. Preparing the Plan. Consultation on the Scope. | Evidence gathering and background research to inform the draft Plan. Give notice to stakeholders/the public. Notify neighbouring authorities (duty to cooperate). Views sought on the Issues, Options & Scope and Initial Sustainability Appraisal Report over a six week period. The evidence base and comments assist in producing the Plan. | <p><i>Note: it is not anticipated that Covid-19 restrictions will be in place during the entire life-cycle of a Development Plan Document</i></p> All consultation documents will be made available on the Council’s website. Where practical and appropriate we will use social media, community briefings, local media etc. to raise awareness. Where practicable, consultation documents will be mailed out to individuals on request where necessary (i.e. if online access is not possible) and if alternative arrangements cannot be found. Where practicable and appropriate, public engagement may take place in the form of online meetings/ |

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| | | <p>presentations/workshops or virtual Q&A sessions.</p> <p>Where appropriate, we will liaise with and send targeted information to Parish/Town Councils, Neighbourhood Forums, community groups and groups representing people with protected characteristics to bring information to their attention.</p> |
| <p>Stage 2: Publishing the draft Plan for Pre-Submission Consultation</p> | <p>The Publication Draft Plan is published for a formal consultation stage before it is submitted to the Secretary of State for consideration at a Public Examination.</p> <p>The draft Plan and Sustainability Appraisal Report are made available for stakeholders, consultees and the public.</p> <p>The Council will consider representations made at this stage and may amend the draft Plan prior to Submission.</p> | <p>The Publication Draft Plan will be published on the Council website, along with a statement of the representations procedure setting out all the matters necessary relating to how to make representations on the draft Plan.</p> <p>Online methods of consultation, such as a consultation portal or online surveys will be used, and these will be signposted on the website or in any published notification.</p> <p>The Council will positively engage with those who wish to make a formal comment but are unable to by digital means. This may involve consultation documents being mailed out to individuals on request, where practicable and if alternative arrangements cannot be found.</p> <p>General responses to the issues raised at consultation will be included in the Consultation Statement.</p> |
| <p>Stage 3: Submission to the Secretary of State</p> | <p>The Publication Draft Plan and Sustainability Appraisal Report are submitted to the Secretary of State together with the submission policies map and all representations received under Stage 2 and any proposed changes and other supporting documents.</p> <p>An independent Planning Inspector is appointed to examine the draft submission Plan. The draft submission Plan, Sustainability Appraisal Report and policies map are published</p> | <p>All documentation is sent to the Secretary of State online, and copies of the draft submission Plan, Sustainability Report and submission policies map are published online via the Council website.</p> <p>We will notify the general and specific consultation bodies, as well as those who requested to be notified, of the submission of the document to the Secretary of State.</p> |

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| | and stakeholders notified about Submission for Public Examination. | |
| Stage 4: Examination in Public | The draft submission Plan is examined by the Planning Inspector taking into consideration the key issues raised through comments received at stage 2 and the Council's responses. This normally involves an Examination in Public, to which the public will be invited to attend and take part. The Inspector considers whether the Plan is legally compliant and 'sound' together having regard to national policy and representations made. The Inspector may recommend modifications to the Plan (if requested by the Council to do so). | We will make the examination documents available on the website and signpost the documents to raise awareness of the examination. If an Examination in Public is required, this may be postponed until such a time as Government restrictions on social distancing are lifted, or it may take place virtually via an online platform during the Covid-19 pandemic and the public will be able to participate where relevant and watch live, online. The Inspector's report will be published online, and we will give notice of the report to anyone who asked to be notified. |
| Stage 5: Receipt of the Inspector's Report | The Inspector's report will be published. | The Inspector's report will be published on the Council's website. Notification will be provided to anyone who has asked to be notified at this stage. |
| Stage 6: Adoption of the Development Plan Document | Following receipt of the Inspector's report a Decision Statement is published. The Local Plan, Sustainability Appraisal Report, policies map and Adoption Statement are published and made available for the public to view. | All the documents will be published and made available on the Council's web site. We will send a copy of the Adoption Statement to any person who has been asked to be notified of the adoption of the local plan. We will send a copy of the Adoption Statement to the Secretary of State. |

Table 2 – Summary of the process for preparing Supplementary Planning Documents and informal planning documents

| Stage | Purpose & Requirements | Interim Arrangements |
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| Stage 1: Developing the evidence base and Scoping | <p>Establish the need for the SPD. Evidence gathering and research to inform the SPD including formulating objectives and gathering technical evidence. Notify neighbouring/joint authorities under duty to co-operate, along with statutory consultees as specified in the regulations.</p> <p>An Equalities Impact Screening is carried out, and an Equalities Impact Assessment (if required). A Sustainability Appraisal Screening Report (if required) is prepared.</p> | <p><i>Note: it is not anticipated that Covid-19 restrictions will be in place during the entire life-cycle of a Supplementary Planning Document.</i></p> |
| Stage 2: Consultation of Draft | <p>Views and comments sought on the draft document. The Draft SPD and Sustainability Appraisal Screening Report (if required) together with the Consultation Statement are made available for consultation.</p> | <p>We will make consultation documents available on the Council website. Where practical and appropriate we will use social media, community briefings, local media etc. to raise awareness.</p> <p>Online methods of consultation, such as a consultation portal or online surveys will be used, and these will be signposted on the website or in any published notification.</p> <p>The Council will positively engage with those who wish to make a formal comment but are unable to by e-mail. This may consultation documents being mailed out to individuals on request, where practicable and if alternative arrangements cannot be found.</p> <p>General responses to the issues raised at consultation will be included in the Consultation Statement.</p> |

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| <p>Stage 3: Analysis of Representations and Preparation of Revised Draft</p> | <p>Regard will be had to consultation responses, and necessary amendments made to the draft. Produce a Consultation Statement setting how who was consulted, how and what changes were made to the draft.</p> | |
| <p>Stage 4: Consultation of Revised draft</p> | <p>Views and comments sought on the revised draft document. The Draft SPD and Sustainability Appraisal Screening Report (if required) are made available for consultation. Analyse comments and prepare a second Consultation Statement.</p> | <p>We will make consultation documents available on the Council website. Where practical and appropriate we will use social media, community briefings, local media etc. to raise awareness. Online methods of consultation, such as a consultation portal or online surveys will be used, and these will be signposted on the website or in any published notification. The Council will positively engage with those who wish to make a formal comment but are unable to by e-mail. This may involve consultation documents being mailed out to individuals on request, where practicable and if alternative arrangements cannot be found. General responses to the issues raised at consultation will be included in the Consultation Statement.</p> |
| <p>Stage 5: Publishing the Adopted SPD</p> | <p>Publish a report on the Council's List of Forthcoming Decisions, which is made available online for 31 days. The SPD is adopted and together with an adoption statement and final consultation statement is published.</p> | <p>The SPD, adoption statement and consultation statement will be made available on the website and signposted. A copy of the adoption statement is emailed to any person who has asked to be notified of the adoption of the supplementary planning document.</p> |

Planning applications

Planning permission is required for many new buildings, alterations or extensions, and changes of use of land or buildings. In Leeds, the planning process is managed by our

Development Management services which deals with around 5,000 planning applications per year. The Interim SCI sets out how the Council will consult on planning applications during the period of Covid-19 restrictions.

There are five main types of planning application, and there are target timescales laid out by regulations for making a decision on each type of application. Please note that due to current restrictions in place due to the Covid-19 pandemic, some decisions may take longer than normal requiring agreement on extension of time periods.

| Type | Includes | Target timescale for decision |
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| Major planning applications | Minerals and waste developments. Residential development for more than 10 units (for full or reserved matters applications) or on a site greater than 0.5 hectare (for outline applications). Industrial or commercial floorspace of over 1,000 square metres or over 1 hectare of land. | 13 weeks |
| Minor planning applications | All developments under the thresholds highlighted for major applications. | 8 weeks |
| Other applications | Applications of this type include householder planning applications, small scale change of use applications, Listed Building applications and applications for advertisement consent. | 8 weeks |
| Prior approval notifications | Some developments or changes of use which do not require planning permission, do require a 'Prior Approval' application so the LPA can assess the impacts and risks of the proposal. | 8 weeks |
| Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) development | Development which is either Schedule 1 development or Schedule 2 development which is likely to have significant effects on the environment by virtue of factors such as its nature, size or location. Review of Old Mining Permissions with EIA development. | 16 weeks |

Planning application publicity

Once a valid application has been submitted we will notify relevant people about it so anyone who is potentially impacted can view the plans and submit comments, should they wish to do

so. To comply with the Town & Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015, our approach to publicity and consulting on a planning application is:

- Consult for 21 days.
- Consult relevant statutory consultees.
- Publish relevant applications on the Council’s website via Public Access.
- Depending upon application type, send letters to adjoining neighbours, allowing 21 days for comments, or
- Display one or more site notices in a suitable nearby location and/or newspaper advert where necessary
- Consult various specialist organisations and public bodies, when appropriate
- Consult various internal/external services, such as Highways or Environmental Health, when appropriate

Table 3 - Process and Consultation on Planning Applications

| Stage | Process & Requirements | Interim Arrangements |
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| Pre-application Discussions (not a mandatory stage or legal requirement) | The Council encourages developers to have early pre-application discussions with local communities prior to the submission of a formal application. | Any engagement should take place in line with the current guidance and regulations set out by the Government in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. |
| Stage 1: Receipt of application | Check compliance with the Council’s validation criteria | Applications should be submitted electronically via the Council website. Applications submitted by post will take longer to process. Once validated the application will be available to view on the Council’s website via the Public Access function. |
| Stage 2: Publicity & Consultation | Commence appropriate notification processes, allowing 21 days for comments to be submitted. | We will publish the application on the Council’s website with details of how to comment. We will consult statutory consultees via email. Depending upon the restrictions in place at the time due to the Covid-19 pandemic, and where necessary due to the type of application, we may send letters to adjoining neighbours, display a site notice in a suitable nearby location or publish a newspaper advert. |

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| | | <p>Comments should be submitted online via the Public Access function on our website (where you can register and get updates on applications). If you do not have access to a computer you may use libraries or other community hubs if they are open due to Covid-19 restrictions, or you may send us a postal letter.</p> |
| <p>Stage 3: Assessment</p> | <p>Planning applications will be determined by considering matters which are relevant to planning, such as compliance with the National Planning Policy Framework, Local Plan and site specific issues. The planning officer will normally visit the site. Regard will be had to all representations submitted when the application is assessed and will be detailed in the officer's report.</p> | <p>Socially-distanced site visits will only take place if the national/regional Covid-19 pandemic restrictions allow it, and if the officer can safely adhere to the Council's Site visit Covid-19 protocol. If not, resources such as online satellite imagery & Aerial photographs (if up-to-date) and site photographs from the applicant may be used instead to help assess site specific issues.</p> |
| <p>Stage 4: The decision</p> | <p>The majority of decisions on planning applications (98%) are made by officers under the Chief Planning Officer's delegation scheme. Applications which are exception to the delegation scheme and therefore cannot be dealt with by Planning Officers are determined by the Plans Panels in accordance with the Chief Planning Officer's delegation scheme.</p> | <p>Plans Panel meetings are held remotely via a virtual platform, and the public can watch them live, online. Once an application has been determined, the decision notice and officer's report will be available to view on Public Access within 5 working days. If you have chosen to track the application on Public Access you will be notified of the decision by email.</p> |
| <p>Stage 5: Post decision</p> | <p>If the applicant does not agree with the decision to refuse an application or a condition imposed on a permission they do have the right to lodge an appeal against the decision to the Secretary of State via the Planning Inspectorate. If an appeal is made the consultees, neighbours who were notified at the application stage, anyone who commented on the application and Town/Parish</p> | <p>Due to Covid-19 you cannot currently appeal in writing. An appeal needs to be lodged with the Secretary of State online. Most appeals will be dealt with via written representation, and submissions can be made via the online portal. Where necessary, informal hearings and/or Public Inquiries will take place virtually via an</p> |

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| | Councils if there is one in the area, will be notified again, and will also have the opportunity to submit comments to the Planning Inspectorate. | online platform during the Covid-19 pandemic. Appeal decisions are published and can be viewed on the Council's website. |
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What changes have been introduced to neighbourhood planning in response to the Covid-19 pandemic?

The Localism Act 2011 gives local communities the 'right' to prepare a neighbourhood plan. Neighbourhood planning (which includes the preparation of a neighbourhood development order (NDO) or community right to build order (CRtBO)) is a way for local communities to decide the future of the places in which they live and work by having a direct say in where new development takes place, what it should look like and other key planning policy issues that are locally important.

The government has been clear that all members of society are required to adhere to guidance to help combat the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19). The guidance has implications for neighbourhood planning including: the referendum process; decision-making; oral representations for examinations; public consultation; and the Community Infrastructure Levy. This planning guidance supersedes any relevant aspects of current guidance on neighbourhood planning, including in paragraphs 007, 056, 057, 061 and 081 until further notice.

- **Referendums:** all neighbourhood planning referendums that have been recently cancelled, or are scheduled to take place, between 16 March 2020 and 5 May 2021 are postponed in line with the Local Government and Police Crime Commissioner (Coronavirus) (Postponement of Elections and Referendums) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 until 6 May 2021.
- **Decision-making:** Where the local planning authority has issued a decision statement (as set out under Regulation 18 of the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012) detailing its intention to send a neighbourhood plan to referendum, that plan will be given significant weight in decision-making, so far as the plan is material to the application.
- **Examinations:** The general rule remains that examinations should be conducted by written representations. If an examiner considers that oral representations are necessary, these should not take place in person. Wherever possible, oral representations may still take place using video conferencing or other suitable technologies.
- **Public consultation:** The Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 require neighbourhood planning groups and local planning authorities to undertake publicity in a manner that is likely to bring it to the attention of people who live, work or carry on business in the neighbourhood area at particular stages of the process. It is not mandatory that engagement is undertaken using face-to-face methods. However, to demonstrate that all groups in the community have been sufficiently engaged, such as those without internet access, more targeted methods may be needed including by

telephone or in writing. Local planning authorities may be able to advise neighbourhood planning groups on suitable methods and how to reach certain groups in the community.

There are also requirements in the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 that require at some stages of the process for neighbourhood planning groups and local planning authorities to publicise the neighbourhood planning proposal and publish details of where and when documents can be inspected. It is not mandatory for copies of documents to be made available at a physical location. They may be held available online. Local planning authorities may be able to advise neighbourhood planning groups on suitable methods that will provide communities with access to physical copies of the documents.

Monitoring and Review

Due to the current restrictions as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic the scope of any consultation and engagement activity will be limited in scope for the foreseeable future, with temporary changes being put in place. There will be a degree of flexibility about this, given the evolving nature of the Covid-19 restrictions locally and nationally. We will, however, make use of this interim period to test and monitor new ways to consult and engage with particular attention paid to digital communication for those who can access it and other, more traditional methods (printed copies, telephone discussions) for those who can't.

In particular the Council is seeking to move away from PDF documents towards online material, such as web pages. This is because they are responsive for tablet and mobile devices, easier to translate into different languages, and can be spoken aloud by screen readers. The [Public Sector Accessibility Regulations 2018](#) also mean that taking these steps will help us meet our legal obligations too. Our approach to communicating in the ways outlined ensure that information will be more accessible and we can deliver the Council's Best City ambition to be compassionate and caring.