

# Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) – Consultation Draft

Date: 1<sup>st</sup> March 2022

Report of: Chief Planning Officer

Report to: Development Plans Panel

## **What is this report about?**

### **Including how it contributes to the city's and council's ambitions**

- At the 21st January 2022 Development Plans Panel (DPP) meeting, a scoping report was presented to Members outlining what the draft SCI could look like, with positive feedback received on a three-part SCI that is in plain English, locally distinctive and clear. The draft (Appendix 1) is presented for Members' consideration prior to consultation in March and April 2022.
- Good practice has been followed in the preparation of the draft SCI, with 'soft market testing', a scoping consultation and the involvement of the 'SCI Engagement Group' in its preparation and in the consultation undertaken. The draft document responds positively to the feedback received to date and to the lessons learned from the Local Plan Update (LPU) consultation in summer 2021. It also includes many of the recommendations outlined in "Paper Tigers": A critical review of Statements of Community Involvement in England", published in October 2021. It is hoped that the outcome of this approach will be a greater involvement from all communities in consultation and engagement activities in the future.
- Subject to DPP's endorsement, consultation will take place on the draft SCI commencing late March and this is a further and final opportunity to adapt and improve the document. The consultation will also be an opportunity to explore whether consultees think the introduction of a series of 'indicators' to monitor the effectiveness of consultation and engagement is a good idea and, if so, to consider what these could be.
- Once adopted, the SCI will become binding and the Council must comply with it when undertaking statutory consultations. As a statutory document (which is also a legal requirement of any plan making or decision taking process), it is important to formalise an approach which is achievable and deliverable. The draft SCI is appropriately ambitious, but not unattainable given available resources, budgets and practicalities.
- It is intended that following this opportunity for Members of DPP to express their views on the draft SCI, consultation will commence late March 2022 for a period of 6 weeks.

## **Recommendations**

Development Plan Panel are recommended to:

- a) Consider the draft Statement of Community Involvement at Appendix 1 and make comments, and
- b) Note the draft Statement of Community Involvement will be subject to a 6 weeks consultation.

### **Why is the proposal being put forward?**

- 1 Community engagement is integral to good planning decisions as the planning system operates in the public interest. A local authority's duty to carry this out is enshrined within a Statement of Community Involvement (SCI).
- 2 The SCI is a statutory document (required under the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004) and sets out how residents and other stakeholders can get involved in the preparation of planning policies, frameworks and the neighbourhood planning process and how comments can be made on planning applications.
- 3 The adoption of a new SCI for Leeds presents an opportunity to ensure that the planning service is leading on wider city ambitions around inclusion and diversity, and to ultimately provide a service that is both effective and responsive to the diverse needs across the District. The SCI needs to be a document that is fit for purpose given the scale, character, diversity and complexity of Leeds. It needs to strike a balance between opportunities for comment and reaching a timely outcome for development proposals. It is considered that the draft SCI presented to Members achieves this.
- 4 Care has been taken to ensure that the document is presented in plain English, is as jargon-free as possible and provides clarity on what the Council will do as a minimum, as well as what we aspire to do. It also sets out how consultees can be more effectively involved in consultation and engagement and how we will monitor and review effectiveness.
- 5 The three-part draft helps with navigation, especially for those new or relatively unfamiliar with the planning process, consultation and engagement matters:
  - **Part 1** provides a clear and simple explanation of what the SCI is and how the document should be used. The 'consultation principles', co-produced with the 'SCI Engagement Group', are included and these set a positive and encouraging tone. Advice is also included on how communities can engage and take part in consultations more effectively.
  - **Part 2** sets out how the Council will consult on planning policy documents and planning applications and how it will support communities to prepare neighbourhood plans. Clarity is provided on what the Council will do as a minimum and when community involvement will take place. What we aspire to do and achieve is also included where appropriate.
  - **Part 3** provides information on the opportunities and challenges for consultation and engagement in Leeds, setting the scene for the introduction of a series of consultation 'indicators' that will help to monitor effectiveness. What these indicators could be will be a focus of the consultation.
- 6 The consultation will be an opportunity to follow some of the successful techniques first used during the Local Plan Update (LPU) consultation during summer 2021, including the use of social media and digital technology. The majority of the consultation will be undertaken online but we will take the opportunity to publicise the consultation at meetings that are already taking place during March and April 2022, at community and neighbourhood planning meetings, equality hub meetings and community committee meetings. It is hoped that consultation

responses can be gained from as many of these meetings as possible. We will also respond positively to requests for face-to-face discussions and any special needs.

- 7 The consultation will pose a series of simple questions which should help to maximise participation, with an option to provide more detailed responses if preferred. The questions will focus on the extent to which the draft SCI is user-friendly, suggestions for how the document can be improved, ideas to encourage greater levels of participation from across all neighbourhoods in the district as well as a focus on possible 'indicators' to monitor effectiveness. It is the latter point that will perhaps benefit most from discussion and face-to-face contact.

### What impact will this proposal have?

#### Wards affected:

Have ward members been consulted?  Yes  No

### What consultation and engagement has taken place?

- 8 Levels of engagement with stakeholders has been high and constructive to date. An early 'soft market' exercise helped lay the foundations to form the 'SCI Engagement Group' and this group assisted in advising on what the new SCI should look like and in the consultation in 2019.
- 9 Responses to the SCI scoping consultation were received from a total of 48 respondents. This included responses from a variety of Parish and Town Councils, Neighbourhood Forums, Community and Residents Associations, Action Groups, interest groups and forums and 17 individual residents from across the Leeds Metropolitan District.
- 10 Respondents were asked a variety of questions during the consultation including what planning matters are important to them, their experiences regarding commenting on planning applications and planning policy documents and any involvement with neighbourhood planning.

### What are the resource implications?

- 11 Revising the SCI does not commit the Council to additional expenditure, but any additional consultation activities may lead to pressure on resources and existing staff. A key consideration will be how digital technology and electronic communication can be used to reduce costs, as well as using in-house expertise and existing networks to make our consultation and engagement material and resources as engaging as possible and maximise reach. It is anticipated that any costs to the Council associated with community involvement will be met from within existing provision. However, it should be recognised that the more extensive consultation practices that the SCI prescribes, the more consultation costs are likely to increase. The expectation is that the revised SCI will encourage developers to embed consultation and engagement as standard practice and where possible for this to be front loaded.

### What are the legal implications?

- 12 Section 18 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that a Local Planning Authority must prepare a Statement of Community Involvement.
- 13 The SCI was originally a document that was required to be approved by Full Council and subjected to an independent examination. The law has since changed and the Chief Planning Officer now has delegated authority to adopt the statement.

14 The decision to approve consultation on the draft SCI rests with the Chief Planning Officer.

### **What are the key risks and how are they being managed?**

15 The revised SCI will seek to balance the increased expectations of local communities with the need for an efficient and effective planning system. This will mean ensuring that once adopted, the Council complies with the commitments made. The introduction of 'indicators' will be a useful way to manage risk and to monitor activity, to be included as part of the Council's Authority Monitoring Report (AMR).

### **Does this proposal support the council's three Key Pillars?**

Inclusive Growth

Health and Wellbeing

Climate Emergency

16 The revised SCI will support Inclusive Growth by aiding meaningful community collaboration which can help to identify those neighbourhoods lacking in certain types of housing, employment opportunities, retail provision and open spaces which can, in turn, influence what sort of development is encouraged or supported in that area. This means that the right sort of development should take place in those areas that need it most, improving sustainability across the District.

17 Health & Wellbeing can be addressed through supporting engagement with those neighbourhoods where improvements to green space and active travel infrastructure are needed, working towards prioritising appropriate developments in those areas to the direct benefit of the health and wellbeing of those communities.

18 By ensuring that we have a clear and robust framework for open and informative consultation and engagement on planning matters, we can facilitate participation that is valued, accessible and inclusive and can be an investment for the planning service in the future.

19 The opportunity to consult on possible 'indicators' to assist with monitoring and review of the SCI could help with issues around trust and collaboration and encourage more people to not only take part in consultation and engagement, but to do so again.

20 The revised SCI will help us to better work with communities to identify opportunities to improve physical and social infrastructure in a sustainable way in line with the aims of the declared Climate Emergency priority, as well as maximising public support for new sustainable and/or emission-reducing initiatives which may require behaviour change by residents and businesses.

### **Options, timescales and measuring success**

#### **What other options were considered?**

21 The preparation and adoption of an SCI is a statutory requirement. The approach taken in the draft document sets out a meaningful and serious approach to increase consultation and engagement activity in every neighbourhood in Leeds.

#### **How will success be measured?**

22 The draft SCI sets out an opportunity to introduce a series of 'indicators' to assist in monitoring and review, which will form a part of the consultation on the draft document. In addition to this, the satisfaction levels of individual consultation and engagement activities will be covered in a

'Consultation Report' for local plan making and a 'Consultation Statement' for neighbourhood planning.

### **What is the timetable for implementation?**

23 Consultation will take place on the draft SCI commencing late March 2022 for 6 weeks with adoption of the final document expected by Summer 2022.

### **Appendices**

24 Appendix 1 - Draft Statement of Community Involvement (SCI)

### **Background papers**

25 None