

Forest Heath District Council

(This report is not a key decision. This report has been subject to appropriate notice of publication under the Council's Access to Information Rules)

Report of the Cabinet Member for Planning, Housing and Transport

**LOCAL PLAN
WORKING GROUP**

15 AUGUST 2013

LOP13/011

JOINT STATEMENT OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT (SCI) - PROPOSED CONSULTATION (Key Decision Reference: MAY13/03)

1. Summary and reasons for recommendation(s)

- 1.1 The Planning & Compulsory Purchase Act requires local planning authorities to prepare a Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) which is essentially a strategy for involving the community in the local plan and planning application processes. Given the approach to a shared planning service for Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury, it is now considered appropriate to have a joint SCI that sets out a consistent 'engagement' strategy for application across both authorities. Prior to the SCI being adopted by the respective Councils, it needs to be subject to a 4-week period of public consultation.
- 1.2 A consultation draft SCI was presented to the Sustainable Development Working Group of St Edmundsbury Borough Council on 27 June 2013 and to the Forest Heath District Council Local Plan Working Group on 4 July 2013. It was resolved by both 'groups' that further consideration of the draft SCI and recommendation as presented be deferred. The reason for this was to allow sufficient time for a revised user friendly, plain English version, to be produced and submitted to a subsequent meeting of the Local Plan Working Group and Sustainable Development Working Group for assessment.

2. Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 **The Working Group resolves to recommend to Cabinet that the revised draft joint Statement of Community Involvement be approved for a period of public consultation.**

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3. How will the recommendations help us meet our strategic priorities?

- 3.1 This Statement will help ensure that the Council meets all of its Strategic Priorities by ensuring that the policies that we write and ultimately the decisions that we make are informed by consultation with our communities and are thus reflective of their needs and aspirations.

4. Key issues

- 4.1 The Planning & Compulsory Purchase Act requires local planning authorities to prepare a Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) which is essentially a strategy for involving the community in the local plan and planning application processes. Given the approach to a shared planning service for Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury, it is now considered appropriate to have a joint SCI that sets out a consistent 'engagement' strategy for application across both authorities. The SCI does not cover the approach to internal engagement on the development of planning policy and determination of planning applications across each Council. Prior to the SCI being adopted by the respective councils, it needs to be the subject of consultation.
- 4.2 A SCI for St Edmundsbury was prepared, consulted upon and finally adopted and published in February 2008. In the case of Forest Heath, a 'preferred option' version of the SCI was prepared and consulted on in June 2005. A final version of the document was not produced and as a consequence, the council does not currently have an adopted SCI.
- 4.3 Attached at Appendix A of this paper is a draft Statement of Community Involvement, the provisions of which are intended for application across both authorities. It takes into consideration comments received on the Forest Heath 'Preferred Option' consultation draft and updates the content of the adopted St Edmundsbury SCI to reflect current and proposed practices and provide a consistent approach to community engagement across both districts.
- 4.4 Although the preparation requirements have changed since 2008 and the regulations are silent in terms of consultation, DCLG recommend a period of consultation on a draft SCI document prior to its adoption. There is no longer a need for examination of the draft by a Planning Inspector.
- 4.5 It is therefore proposed to undertake a joint consultation, for a period of 4 weeks, commencing as soon as is expedient following the respective Cabinet

approvals. Following this consultation exercise, officers will assess comments received and seek to finalise the document in readiness for adoption by both Councils.

5. Other options considered

5.1 The requirement to produce a SCI provides little by way of alternatives. It would be possible to prepare separate District/Borough-wide SCIs for Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury. However, given that both authorities are implementing a shared planning service, it is considered appropriate that a joint document, reflecting the up-to-date and 'common' approach to community engagement is prepared.

6. Community impact

6.1 Crime and disorder impact *(including Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998)*

6.1.1 It is not considered that the SCI will have any impact on crime and disorder in the District.

6.2 Diversity and equality impact *(including the findings of the Equality Impact Assessment)*

6.2.1 The draft SCI incorporates mechanisms for engaging with all members of the community.

6.3 Sustainability impact *(including completing a Sustainability Impact Assessment)*

6.3.1 The draft SCI does not have any sustainability implications.

6.4 Other impact *(any other impacts affecting this report)*

6.4.1 None associated with this report.

7. Consultation *(what consultation has been undertaken, and what were the outcomes?)*

7.1 The consultation arrangements are identified above. All of those individuals and organisations appearing on the joint consultation database will be notified of the consultation on the draft SCI and each Council website will provide a link to the consultation document itself.

8. Financial and resource implications *(including asset management implications)*

8.1 There are no potential adverse financial or resource implications arising from the consultation on the draft SCI. The document can be prepared within the respective Council's budget.

9. Risk/opportunity assessment *(potential hazards or opportunities affecting corporate, service or project objectives)*

9.1 Without evidencing proper community engagement in the planning process there is a risk that the local plan documents that are produced could not proceed to examination/adoption. The subsequent lack of a sound development

plan framework militates against the proper planning of the borough/district and could place the councils at risk of planning appeals being upheld, with the possible award of costs against them.

10. Legal and policy implications

- 10.1 There is a requirement for LPAs to produce a SCI, (part 18 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act, 2004).

11. Ward(s) affected

- 11.1 All Wards in both Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury are affected by the provisions of the SCI.

12. Background papers

- 12.1 None

13. Documents attached

- 13.1 Appendix A: Forest Heath District Council and St Edmundsbury Borough Council consultation draft joint Statement of Community Involvement (SCI).