

Statement of Community Involvement - Addendum setting out revised changes to the SCI to be applied from 15 September 2020

This document sets out temporary changes in respect of the council's approach to the publicity of planning policy documents and planning applications in relation to the government requirements for preventing the spread of COVID-19. The proposed amendments are temporary until such time as national social distancing measures are lifted, at which point the council will revert back to the original version of the SCI (March 2018). This will be publicised as and when relevant.

Context

What is the Statement of Community Involvement?

This Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) sets out the ways in which partners, stakeholders and the community can be involved in the council's planning processes. This covers both the production of planning policy and decisions relating to planning applications.

The council's current SCI was adopted in March 2018 following consultation in October – December 2017 and can be viewed [here](#).

Why do we need to temporarily amend the Statement of Community Involvement?

The council regularly undertake consultation exercises for the purposes of its planning functions, including for planning applications, emerging planning policy and neighbourhood plan documents. The council's Local Development Scheme details the timeframes for forthcoming planning policy documents and is available to view [here](#). There is a legal requirement for SCI's to be reviewed within 5 years from the date of adoption, in accordance with the duty on local planning authorities introduced by the Town and County Planning (Local Planning) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2017.

National Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) has recently been updated in light of the Covid-19 Pandemic and recommends that council's review their SCI and update it in light of the government's guidelines for helping prevent the spread of the disease¹. As a result the council is making some temporary amendments to the requirements set out in the adopted SCI. These are to protect the health of our communities and staff, while still ensuring that the council can continue to successfully conduct its planning functions in a manner which is underpinned by extensive and effective community engagement.

Proposed temporary modifications to the Statement of Community Involvement

The following section sets out the specific temporary amendments which are required within the SCI and explains the reasons for these.

The extent of the temporary amendments to the SCI can be viewed in appendix 1: 'Revised Statement of Community Involvement, July 2020' where the changes are shown through a series of track changes within the document.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/plan-making#covid19>

1. Changes required which are relevant to planning policy matters

a) Availability of our documents

Issue:

- Arrangements set out in the SCI require, amongst a range of other consultation measures, that hard copies of consultation documents are made available for inspection at the council offices, local libraries and other local public locations which are considered appropriate for the consultation. However, at this time, with suitable locations such as libraries and council offices being closed, there will not be a requirement for such documents to be made available in these locations.

Temporary solution required in the SCI:

- The council will make its consultation documents available online via specific consultation pages on the council website.
- The council may be able to provide a hard copy of consultation documents for consultees who do not have access to the internet (free of charge) on request. This should be requested by calling the council contact centre on 01256 844844.
- For consultations on a pre-submission neighbourhood plan (regulation 14), customers should contact the parish council directly to obtain a copy of the consultation document. For consultations on a submission neighbourhood plan (regulation 16), customers should contact the council contact centre on 01256 844844.
- When the council offices and other locations listed in the SCI re-open, subject to government guidance and if it is safe to do so, documents will be placed in these locations for public inspection. This will be communicated in consultation material. These documents will need to be accessed in a manner which accords with the council's wider policies and procedures for ensuring the safety of visitors to the council offices and other relevant premises.

b) How to respond to consultations

Issue:

- The council runs consultations in order to seek feedback from varied stakeholders, ranging from businesses to members of the public. Paper response forms will not be made available in libraries whilst restrictions relating to the Covid-19 pandemic remain. The council's preference is that customers always respond online in the first instance, where they are able to.
- Paper submissions will still be processed, although in light of the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic delays in processing paper submissions may be experienced.

Temporary solution required in the SCI:

- The council will continue to run consultations online, which anyone can respond to by either using the electronic forms supplied, via the council's consultation database or by email to the relevant team.
- If customers would like to receive a paper consultation form, for example due to lack of internet access, they should call the council contact centre on 01256 844844 where they can request a paper consultation form is posted to them. Forms can then be returned to the council offices via post.
- Consultation periods may be extended to provide time for accessing documents and responding.

c) Meetings, workshops and focus groups

Issue:

- The council values the views of consultees, residents, interest groups and other stakeholders when developing planning policies. Due to the government restrictions associated with preventing the spread of COVID-19, the council is restricted in its ability to hold face-to-face meetings, workshops, focus groups or exhibitions. This is to protect the health of our communities and staff.

Temporary solution required in the SCI:

- The council will seek to engage with communities and interested groups virtually using software platforms such as MS Teams and through online exhibitions where suitable, in addition to other relevant meetings. This is particularly relevant whilst restrictions on social interaction are in place due to COVID-19, but such consultative measures, if successful, may continue to be utilised in the future.
- Where online platforms are not suitable or cannot be used by specific groups, the council will use other approaches including telephone calls to engage with stakeholders.

d) Neighbourhood Planning and Referendums

- The council will continue to support the progression of neighbourhood plans in the borough, in a manner which seeks to facilitate their continued progression, while according with the government requirements for preventing the spread of COVID-19. There are two compulsory consultation stages for neighbourhood plans and the council will continue to advise neighbourhood plan groups on suitable approaches to consultation through their lead officer.
 - Regulation 14 consultations require community engagement and encourage feedback and exchange of views with the public. This is conducted by the parish/town council.
 - Regulation 16 consultations seek views on the final draft plan and are less geared towards engagement. This is conducted by the Local Planning Authority.

Temporary solution required in the SCI:

- For Regulation 14 consultations, among other mechanisms to support neighbourhood planning, the council will:
 - Work with the parish council as the qualifying body to ensure the pre-submission consultation is publicised appropriately including on the parish council website.
 - Work with parish councils to ensure documents and consultation forms are available to a wide range of interested parties including those who do not have internet access.
 - Advise parish councils on appropriate methods of engagement in light of Covid-19 and its implications for consultation exercises.
 - Advise parish council's to consider extending consultation periods to provide time for accessing documents and responding, if relevant.
- For Regulation 16 consultations:
 - The council will publish the consultation and documents available online via specific consultation pages on the council website.
 - If customers would like to receive a paper consultation form, for example due to lack of internet access, they should call the council contact centre on 01256 844844 where they can request a paper consultation form is posted to them. Forms can then be returned to the council offices via post.

- Consultation periods may be extended to provide time for accessing documents and responding.
- The SCI refers to the council's role in arranging Examinations into submitted neighbourhood plans. The council will continue to do this and support the process. If social distancing measures have an impact on parts of the Examination, such as site visits, the council will work with the Examiner and Neighbourhood Plan groups accordingly.
- All neighbourhood plan referendums have been postponed until 6th May 2021, in line with the Local Government and Police and Crime Commissioner (Coronavirus) (Postponement of Elections and Referendums) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 which came into force on 7th April 2020.

2. Changes required which are relevant to the Development Management process

In response to the COVID-19 situation, the Government has issued amended guidance and legislation to facilitate the use of social media to publicise planning applications. Consequently the council may implement new arrangements for advertising applications that differ from those normally deployed for a temporary period.

a) Pre-applications

Issue:

- Applicants or developers are expected to consult with the local community before submitting planning applications which are likely to generate public interest. Such consultations should be accessible and clear to the whole community. This could conflict with COVID-19 related restrictions by encouraging large public gatherings.

Temporary solution required in the SCI:

- For pre-application consultations run by applicants or agents, the council recommend that engagement measures recommended within the government's Planning Practice Guidance² are used. These include holding virtual exhibitions, digital consultations and video conferencing in order to avoid social gatherings.

b) Duty Planning Service

Issue:

- The council have previously offered a duty planning service where verbal advice on small scale domestic (excluding new dwellings) and small scale business projects is provided. This service was offered via a face-to-face meeting at the council's offices.

Temporary solution required in the SCI:

- Customers can continue to receive duty planner officer advice by calling the council on 01256 844844 and selecting option 4 for the Contact Centre. This service will be for duty planning officer queries only on small scale domestic (excluding new dwellings) and small scale business projects only. Customers will need to provide their details and an explanation of the proposal which will be passed on to the duty officer who will contact the customer by phone/email. The only change in the duty service is that the advice will no longer be given face-to-face.

c) Planning applications

² Paragraph: 078 Reference ID: 61-078-201200513

- In light of the ongoing situation with regards to the COVID-19 pandemic, the council are strongly advising that planning applications are submitted electronically where possible. Paper submissions will still be processed, although in light of the impacts of COVID-19 delays in processing paper submissions may be experienced.

d) Virtual Planning Committee meetings

Issue:

- The 1972 Local Government Act requires councillors to be physically present to decide applications and there was no provision for remote participation or voting enacted.

Temporary solution required in the SCI:

- The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 allows greater flexibility for the holding of council meetings, in particular including provision for persons to attend, speak at, vote in, or otherwise participate in, local authority meetings without all of the persons, or without any of the persons, being together in the same place.
- In light of the legislative changes, meetings of the Development Control Committee will be convened virtually on a 2 weekly basis using appropriate technology e.g. Zoom or another appropriate platform and broadcast live online via YouTube, where they can be viewed by clicking the link on the council's webpage on the day of the meeting. Alternatively, they can be viewed at a later time on the council's YouTube channel. Details of upcoming virtual Development Control Committee meetings are available to view on the council's website [here](#).³
- The virtual committee has been designed to be in a format which replicates previous committees held at the council offices before the pandemic, with interested parties still able to interact with members of committee. In response to the introduction of virtual committees the council have created a virtual meetings procedure which can be viewed on the council's website [here](#).

e) Site notices

- The council will continue to send out site notices to applicants or agents which should be placed on site if it is safe and appropriate to do so. This approach will continue to be used unless legislation or guidance from government is released which requires the council to use other methods of publicising a site notice.

f) Site visits

Issue

- Due to government guidance on social distancing, site visits could be more difficult to undertake by the case officer, particularly where the inspection of internal spaces need to be undertaken and/ or an applicant or agent is on site.

Temporary solution required in the SCI:

- The council published a COVID-19 site visit protocol in May 2020, which was revised in July 2020 in response to government guidance, which can be found on the council's website [here](#).⁴ It sets out the approach to site visits in relation to

³ <https://democracy.basingstoke.gov.uk/ieListMeetings.aspx?Committeeld=134>

⁴ <https://www.basingstoke.gov.uk/content/doclib/3063.pdf>

planning applications. Where relevant the terms by which sites visits are to be undertaken will need written agreement from the applicant/agent of the application.

- Case officers will continue to undertake site visits, from the public realm only. The agent/applicant will be contacted to make them aware of the time of the visit to minimise the likelihood of applicants coming out to enquire what the officer is doing. It will be for the case officer to determine whether this approach provides sufficient information to assess the application.
- If unable to view the site sufficiently from the public realm then the case officer will contact the applicant/agent to establish that they are able to accommodate a site visit in a safe manner.

Viewing of historic documents

Issue:

- The council maintains a historic record of planning applications, the majority of which are available to view online via the council's website. Historic planning records dated pre 1986 cannot be viewed online and therefore customers need to go into the council offices to view these documents.

Temporary solution required in the SCI:

- The council offices are closed and therefore historic records are unable to be viewed in person. Any customers who wish to view the historic planning records should call the council on 01256 844844 or email development.control@basingstoke.gov.uk, where they can discuss their specific requirements with a planning officer.
- When the council offices re-open, subject to government guidance and it being safe to do so, historic planning records will be available for public inspection. This will be communicated via the council's website.

3. Review of the SCI

Paragraph 7.2 of the adopted SCI notes that any necessary changes to the SCI will be made following appropriate public consultation, having regard to emerging best practice guidance and/or changes in legislation. The council undertook a four week consultation on the proposed temporary revisions to the SCI between July- August 2020. The comments received as part of the consultation can be viewed on the council's website:

<https://www.basingstoke.gov.uk/BD03>

The amendments made to the SCI are temporary in nature, to take account of issues associated with the COVID-19 pandemic and the implications this has for community engagement in light of the government restrictions in place.

In the event of changes by government to the requirements for preventing the spread of COVID-19, this addendum will be reviewed and either updated or suspended, as appropriate.

If you have any questions on any of the changes outlined in this addendum please contact the planning policy team via email on: Local.plan@basingstoke.gov.uk or by calling 01256 844844.