

Bolsover District Council

Meeting of the Planning Committee on 21st December 2022

Report of the Interim Planning Policy Manager

STATEMENT OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Classification	This report is Public
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PURPOSE / SUMMARY OF REPORT

- To approve the Council's Statement of Community Involvement
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REPORT DETAILS

1. Background

1.1 As Member's will be aware, the Statement of Community Involvement (October 2017) sets out how the Council will engage with the public in the development of our Development Plan documents, during our stage of the Neighbourhood Plan preparation process and on development control cases / planning applications.

1.2 Work commenced on the review of the Statement of Community Involvement in February 2022 and at its meeting in April Planning Committee approved a 6-week public consultation exercise on a prepared draft Statement of Community Involvement. This exercise ran between 6th May and 17th June 2022 and was publicised as follows:

- writing to everyone on the Planning Policy consultation database to notify them of the start of the consultation exercise and where to find the document;
- using Bolsover TV, a Planning newsletter; the Council's website and Ask Derbyshire websites;
- placing a physical copy including paper survey forms at publically accessible venues such as Libraries, and Customer Contact Centres.
- consulting via the Bolsover District Council Citizens Panel.

- 1.3 In addition to consulting on the document itself, we also devised an online (and paper) survey where we asked specific questions and sought preferences from respondents on options about how we could potentially exceed the minimum requirements of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012, about how we could improve engagement and to allow respondents to suggest other options.

2. Details of Proposal or Information

Feedback on who responded

- 2.1 During the consultation exercise we received 209 responses, 201 of which were made using the prepared online survey with a further 8 written submissions. Of the 201 online survey responses, participants of the Citizens Panel contributed 145 responses and this high number and usage is considered to represent a successful component of the exercise.
- 2.2 The full set of responses are contained within Appendix A to this report, although the headlines from the consultation exercise are summarised below.
- 2.3 Questions 1 and 2 of the survey focussed on who responded to the survey and whether they had recently interacted with the planning department and saw that:
- 58 of the respondents (39%) had not engaged recently with the department;
 - 47 of the respondents (32%) had engaged recently on planning applications;
 - 25 of the respondents (17%) had engaged recently on local plans and plan making;
 - 11 of the respondents (7%) had engaged recently with the enforcement service; and
 - 8 of the respondents (5%) had engaged recently with the built heritage conservation service.
- 2.4 This demonstrates that we have received responses from people with a range of experiences, ranging from no past experience through to people that have been involved in potentially all planning services.
- 2.5 However, it should also be noted that whilst the Citizen's Panel significantly boosted the response rate, the Citizen's Panel members that responded were significantly over-representative of the age group '65 years and over' (61% of members compared to 20% of the District's population in the 2021 Census) and significantly under-representative of the age group '15 to 64 years' (39% of members compared to 64% of the District's population in the 2021 Census).
- 2.6 Finally, 54% of the respondents to the survey were from people answering on their own behalf and 20% were from people answering on behalf of a community group.

Feedback on public engagement in plan-making work

- 2.7 Question 3 focussed on public engagement in plan-making work and asked for views about several suggested options about how the Council could seek to increase public engagement. Overall, feedback to this question was positive and this is detailed below by option:

- 117 respondents (56%) supported the suggestion of consulting directly by letter all properties affected by a draft site allocation for residential, employment, gypsy and traveller, travelling show-people and retail, town centre and tourism uses;
- 104 respondents (52%) supported the suggestion to offer to establish Local Plan Resident Forums where residents can be invited to meetings where we can explain in much greater detail our local planning work outside formal consultation periods;
- 93 respondents (46%) supported the suggestion to publish a Consultation Response Information sheet or a guidance note that would set out the type of comments that are acceptable;
- 92 respondents (46%) supported the suggestion to have at least one Saturday morning drop in session in the District during a Local Plan consultation period;
- 79 respondents (40%) supported the suggestion to offer to hold meetings with key representatives of a community group / organisation to explain the process, the background and to any policy and listen to their concerns;
- 76 respondents (38%) supported the suggestion for more regular meetings with Parish Councils;
- 65 respondents (33%) supported the suggestion to station a Planning Policy member of staff for at least 3 days within the District Offices (or other venues) for each local plan consultation period;
- 37 respondents (18%) supported the suggestion to continue to meet with the Countywide Gypsy and Traveller Liaison working group and the Derbyshire Gypsy Liaison Group;
- 34 respondents (17%) supported the suggestion to consider using 'mobile phone' outreach methods to achieve higher engagement;
- 27 respondents (14%) supported the suggestion to hold meetings with the Showmen's Guild, Access Bolsover and any Eastern European groups in the District.

2.8 This demonstrates that writing directly to all properties affected by a draft Local Plan site allocation and Local Plan Resident Forums were the most popular options and were felt to support greater public engagement, although most options were considered to have a positive impact on engagement levels.

Feedback on interest in attending meetings

2.9 Questions 4, 5, 6 and 7 focussed on whether people were interested in attending Resident Forums or meetings with the Council on planning matters and the following feedback was received:

- 85 respondents said they were interested in participating in a Local Plan Resident Forum, with;
 - 17 saying they wanted a Forum in their own town or village, with Clowne as the most popular with 7 respondents;
 - 15 saying they wanted a Forum for a wider area, such as one covering the whole district;
 - 25 saying they wanted a Forum but not saying where they wanted it;
 - 68 respondents provided their email address saying they were interested in participating in a future Local Plan Residents Forum

(these respondents have since been contacted to ask them if they want to sign up to our Local Plan mailing list).

- 7 community groups / organisations were suggested that respondents thought the Council should meet more regularly with, with Clowne Community Association being mentioned by 6 respondents;
- 15 Parish Councils were suggested that respondents thought the Council should meet more regularly with, including some that border the district (but not always by the Parish Councils themselves), with Clowne Parish Council being mentioned by 7 respondents.

2.10 This demonstrates that in addition to the principle of holding Local Plan Resident Forums and more meetings with community groups, a large proportion of respondents were interested in attending meetings.

Feedback on social media and technologies

2.11 Questions 8 and 9 focussed on whether using social media or other technologies would encourage greater levels of public participation, with the following feedback being received:

- 86 respondents (43%) felt that newer technology was not applicable to them;
- 74 respondents (37%) said they would prefer the Council used Facebook for consultations;
- 66 respondents (33%) would be interested in using mobile phone friendly consultations to help them to engage in the planning process;
- 43 respondents (21%) would be interested in using QR codes to help them view consultations;
- 34 respondents (17%) would be interested in using Digital Mapping Software;
- 33 respondents (16%) would be interested in using virtual reality software.

2.12 This demonstrates that the use of social media or other technologies is yet to replace traditional methods of communication, although this may be skewed by the over-representation of responses from people in the age group '65 years and over'.

2.13 Question 10 asked for any other comments on how we can engage on plan-making, development control and other planning services and 68 individual comments / suggestions were received. These cover a wide range of issues and are tabulated in Appendix A. In summary, they include some technical comments about the document itself received from Derbyshire County Council, The Ramblers; Historic England, National Highways and Clowne Community Association. There are no strong common themes that emerge, with some comments directly supporting some of our suggestions and indeed the consultation methods we use already. Most comments do not however propose changes to the Statement of Community Involvement document itself.

Consideration of the feedback received and proposed changes to the Statement of Community Involvement

2.14 The minimum requirements for public engagement in planning matters are set out in legislation and regulations. However, the Council can choose to go above these minimum requirements should it wish to.

2.15 In light of Vision Bolsover's commitment to seeking to improve customer contact and remove barriers to accessing information, the feedback received during the consultation exercise has been considered by the Local Plan Implementation Advisory Group at its meeting on 21st September 2022 and the following actions received support for addition to the Statement of Community Involvement's public engagement proposals.

Plan-Making

- Consult directly by letter all properties affected by a draft Local Plan site allocation (in the same way as we would an outline planning application), unless it already has planning permission. This will apply to each of the following types of draft Local Plan allocation: residential, employment, gypsy and traveller, travelling show-people and retail, town centre and tourism uses.
- Station a Planning Policy Officer at the nearest Contact Centre (or other suitable alternative venues) for at least 3 days within each plan-making consultation period to make planning officers more accessible to the local area.
- Have at least one Saturday morning drop-in session during a district-wide consultation to provide some availability to those people who cannot make a weekday or evening drop-in session.
- Offer to establish Local Plan Resident Forums during the preparation of district-wide Local Plans where residents can be invited to meetings outside of formal consultation exercises to discuss progress on or any changes to the timetable to the preparation of the Local Plan. The number of, frequency of, and geographical coverage of such Forums would depend upon levels of interest.
- Offer to meet with appropriate representatives of community groups / organisations (particularly those registered as General Consultation Bodies or Other Consultation Bodies on the Council's Local Plan Online Consultation Database) to discuss progress on or any changes to the timetable to the preparation of the Local Plan. The number of, frequency of, and geographical coverage of such meetings would depend upon levels of interest.
- Greater use of social media advertising and digital planning techniques where these would lead to greater public engagement in the plan-making process.

All planning services

- Publish a Planning Consultation Response Guidance Note that would set out the type of comments that are appropriate to the consultation.
- Use QR codes on letters and posters.

2.16 It is considered that these additional requirements for public engagement in planning matters will both improve the Council's public engagement on planning matters and fulfil the Council's commitment to seeking to improve customer contact and remove barriers to accessing information.

- 2.17 A small number of minor changes have also been made to the document in respect of the comments received and to clarify certain elements of the document.
- 2.18 Given the nature of the Statement of Community Involvement document, the Local Plan Implementation Advisory Group also approved a four week 'feedback stage' following the publication of the October 2022 edition of the InTouch newspaper. This stage was to both provide feedback to any interested community group or organisation on what has been said and on what we plan to do in response. The feature in InTouch also advised that Council officers were offering to meet with any interested community group or organisation that requested this during the 'feedback stage'.
- 2.19 In response to this offer, one request was received and this was from Clowne Parish Council. As a result, Council officers went to the Parish Council meeting on 14th October 2022 and the Council's proposals for greater public engagement were welcomed. At the meeting, the Parish Council also asked whether the Council's recently installed Digital Display screens could be used to promote plan-making consultations and whether planning applications for large developments could be advertised in the InTouch newspaper.
- 2.20 In relation to using the Digital Display screens for plan-making consultations, the practicalities of this are currently being explored but it would seem a helpful proposal and will be added to the Statement of Community Involvement.
- 2.21 In relation to advertising planning applications for large developments in the InTouch newspaper, the principal barrier to this is the limited number of editions of InTouch. As a result, most relevant planning applications will probably be received at a time that does not relate well to an InTouch printing deadline and so this would be partial at best and therefore will not be added to the Statement of Community Involvement.

3 Reasons for Recommendation

- 3.1 The preparation of a new Statement of Community Involvement is an important demonstration of how the Council wants to engage with and secure the involvement of the District's local communities in its planning functions.
- 3.2 In reflection of this, the Council has:
- publicised the commencement of this work in February 2022, including writing to over a thousand people registered for plan-making updates;
 - set out a variety of options for how the Council could go beyond what the national regulations require and has sought people's views during May / June 2022 on whether these options would aid public engagement;
 - engaged with the Citizen's Panel on the above consultation;
 - considered the feedback received and set out the public engagement proposals it intends to add to the Statement of Community Involvement;
 - undertaken a 'feedback stage' during October / November 2022 to publicise what public engagement proposals it intends to add to the Statement of Community Involvement and offered to meet with any interested community group or organisation that requested this.

3.3 Following this comprehensive approach, a new Statement of Community Involvement has been prepared and is attached as Appendix B and is recommended for approval.

4. Alternative Options and Reasons for Rejection

4.1 One alternative option available to the Council would be to choose to wait until more is known about how the Statement of Community Involvement will fit into the Government's planning reforms. However, given progress with the national reforms is not certain, this could mean that the Council would not have an up-to-date Statement of Community Involvement by December 2022 and this option has therefore been rejected.

4.2 A further alternative option available to the Council would be to not go above the national regulatory requirements. However, this is considered to not reflect the aspirations within Vision Bolsover and therefore this option has also been rejected.

RECOMMENDATION

That Planning Committee approve the new Statement of Community Involvement (as attached at Appendix A) and approve its publication.

Approved by Council McGregor, Portfolio Holder – Corporate Governance

IMPLICATIONS:

Finance and Risk: Yes No

Details: There are no specific finance or risk issues arising from this report.

On behalf of the Section 151 Officer

Legal (including Data Protection): Yes No

Details: The Council has a statutory duty to prepare a Statement of Community Involvement under the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act (2004) Section 18 As amended by the Neighbourhood Planning Act 2017, The Planning Act 2008 and the Localism Act 2011. There are no specific data protection issues arising from this report.

On behalf of the Solicitor to the Council

Environment: Yes No

Please identify (if applicable) how this proposal / report will help the Authority meet its carbon neutral target or enhance the environment.

Details: The Statement of Community Involvement sets out how the Council will publicise and involve the public in its planning functions. As such, it does not specifically contribute to this subject, albeit it will promote greater use of digital, rather than paper, forms of engagement.

Staffing: Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Details: There are no human resources implications arising from this report. <p style="text-align: right;">On behalf of the Head of Paid Service</p>
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DECISION INFORMATION

Is the decision a Key Decision? A Key Decision is an executive decision which has a significant impact on two or more District wards or which results in income or expenditure to the Council above the following thresholds: Revenue - £75,000 <input type="checkbox"/> Capital - £150,000 <input type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <i>Please indicate which threshold applies</i>	No
Is the decision subject to Call-In? <i>(Only Key Decisions are subject to Call-In)</i>	No

District Wards Significantly Affected	All
Consultation: Leader / Deputy Leader <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Executive <input type="checkbox"/> SLT <input type="checkbox"/> Relevant Service Manager <input type="checkbox"/> Members <input type="checkbox"/> Public <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Yes Details: Local Plan Implementation Advisory Group

Links to Council Ambition: Customers, Economy and Environment.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enabling housing growth; • Developing attractive neighbourhoods; • Increasing customer’s satisfaction with our services.

DOCUMENT INFORMATION	
Appendix No	Title
A	Summary of Responses
B	New Statement of Community Involvement
Background Papers <i>(These are unpublished works which have been relied on to a material extent when preparing the report. They must be listed in the section below. If the report is going to Executive you must provide copies of the background papers).</i>	