

East Herts Council Report

Executive

Date of meeting: 3 June 2025

Report by: Councillor Vicky Glover-Ward – Executive Member for Planning and Growth

Report title: Statement of Community Involvement

Ward(s) affected: All Wards;

Summary – This report sets out a number of proposed changes to the Council's adopted Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) 2019 and seeks Members agreement to adopt a revised SCI.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EXECUTIVE to recommend to Council that:

- a) **The Statement of Community Involvement 2025, as detailed at Appendix A to this report, be approved for adoption.**

1.0 Proposal

- 1.1 A Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) explains how the local authority intends to consult with the community and stakeholders on planning matters. The planning system can be complex, and the SCI aims to address uncertainty by setting out how the Council will engage with individuals and organisations at various stages of the planning process.
- 1.2 It is currently a legal requirement for the Council to update their SCI every five years. This is requirement of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (Section 18) as amended by the Planning Act 2008, the Localism Act 2011 and the Neighbourhood Planning Act 2017.
- 1.3 This report sets out the content of an updated SCI, outlining what changes have been proposed and the reasoning behind them.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 The Council's existing SCI¹ was formally adopted by the Council on 23 October 2019. A review of this document is therefore required under the current legislation.
- 2.2 It should be noted that the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act (LURA) 2023 has proposed a number of changes to the planning system, in particular, the removal of the requirement for local planning authorities to have an SCI. At this point in time secondary legislation is required before these changes can be implemented.
- 2.3 An update to the SCI is therefore not required under the LURA. It is however noted that these changes are not currently in force, and an SCI can help to provide clarity to the public on how the Council will engage and consult on planning matters.
- 2.4 On 16 October 2024 the Council approved the latest Local Development Scheme 2024², which sets out the timetable for the new District Plan. Updating the existing SCI would clearly demonstrate to communities and stakeholders how the Council wishes to engage with them through the preparation of the new District Plan. This also helps to ensure the planning process is transparent, which aligns with the Council's Corporate Plan 2024³ in being open and transparent and acting with the community.
- 2.5 This report provides further details on the proposed changes to SCI for the Council.

3.0 Reason(s)

- 3.1 This section outlines the various changes proposed through the update to the SCI. These amendments are largely a consequence of changes to legislation, the Council's priorities and procedures,

¹ [Statement of Community Involvement \(SCI\) | East Herts District Council](#)

² [Local Development Scheme \(LDS\) | East Herts District Council](#)

³ [Vision and Corporate Priorities | East Herts District Council](#)

best practice and general updates to help make planning more accessible to the public and accurate. A copy of the updated SCI is attached at **Appendix A**.

General updates

- 3.2 The SCI has been updated in the context of the latest Corporate Plan, which sets out the Council's LEAF priorities which were adopted by the Council in February 2024. These are soon to be updated and specifically relate to planning matters, such as the District Plan, Community Forums and Neighbourhood Plans. In addition to the LEAF priorities, the Council consulted on and then adopted 'A Listening Council' document, this sets out a framework for the principles over how we should consult with stakeholders and led by the Executive Member for Resident Engagement whose remit is to champion and lead community engagement. Both of these documents have a focus on the Council being open, transparent, listening and engaging with the community, in a fair and inclusive way. These attributes set out the ethos for the approaches to consultation and engagement within the updated SCI.
- 3.3 As highlighted at paragraph 2.2, the Government introduced the LURA in 2023 setting out a number of changes to the planning system. As secondary legislation is yet to be released, the proposed SCI has reflected this and where appropriate removed references to documents or phrases which will not be relevant in the new system, such as Sustainability Appraisals. This allows the document to transition smoothly into the new system, whilst ensuring the Council will continue to meet its legal duty.
- 3.4 The document also now includes a review section, highlighting what may trigger a review of the document, such as large changes as a consequence of the LURA 2023. This will allow the Council to review and update the document when necessary. This is particularly relevant to the introduction of Supplementary Plans which are proposed under the LURA. At this point in time it would be premature to outline the exact process for Supplementary Plans

in the absence of the secondary legislation. This could be provided in a later review of the SCI.

- 3.5 The existing SCI sets out several principles that the Council would follow when consulting with the public in regard to planning matters. This section has been updated highlighting how these principles will be implemented through action. This demonstrates the Council's commitment in being open with the public.
- 3.6 The updated SCI provides more detail on the principles of consultation and gives examples of different consultation methods that could be utilised during consultations. This document could also be used as a guide to stakeholders when conducting consultations within the district, such as developers consulting on planning proposals.
- 3.7 An ever-growing topic in planning is digital technology. This has been reflected by the Government through the introduction of the Digital Planning Programme⁴. This seeks to modernise the planning system through utilising digital technology. The updated SCI provides commentary on this, highlighting how digital technology may be used to make planning consultations more accessible and inclusive, but also how it can help make the Council more efficient by speeding up processes that traditionally could use a lot of resources, such as processing responses manually.
- 3.8 Additionally, the updated SCI provides further detail on the level of participation that the public should expect at different stages of planning policy consultations. This illustrates how their responses will be used to shape planning decisions and the level of engagement that may be used, providing clarity to the process.

Planning policy

- 3.9 The document provides an update to the stages of plan making in line with the LURA 2023 which is the system the Council intends to

⁴ [The MHCLG Digital Planning Programme | Local Digital](#)

prepare the new District Plan under. This ensures the SCI is consistent with the adopted Local Development Scheme, including the proposed minimum length of consultation at the key stages of plan making.

- 3.10 There is a new requirement within the SCI to prepare and agree an engagement strategy for the two formal stages of plan making, as well as Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs). A template for this can be found in Appendix B in the document. An engagement strategy at these key stages will help the Council to ensure the key messages of the consultation are clear, and highlighting from the outset where particular groups may be impacted and how the Council could try to reach such groups. This helps to make the process more inclusive from the outset. It also clearly sets the parameters of the consultation to the public at the start of consultations, such as timeframes, consultation methods etc which provides clarity.
- 3.11 An important part of consultation is the feedback loop, ensuring those that have taken the time to participate within consultations can see how their input has fed into the process, as well as keeping the public up to date on progress. The updated SCI includes a section on how the Council will keep respondents and the public informed of planning policy matters following periods of consultations. For example, when individuals may be notified at key stages and where information can be found on updates in the process.

Neighbourhood planning

- 3.12 The district has seen several Neighbourhood Plans (NPs) adopted in recent years and more recently a number of these NPs have been reviewed. The proposed SCI therefore now includes further information on the process for NP reviews, including when Examinations may be appropriate and the level of consultation that may be required.

Planning applications

- 3.13 Alongside updates to the planning application section, in line with planning practice guidance, updates have been made to signpost and update the public to information that accurately reflects the Council's current processes where they have changed since 2019. For example, the Council updated the Constitution⁵ on 26 February 2025 which had implications for the masterplan process. The updated SCI illustrates these changes.
- 3.14 The Council has also updated the Amendments and Extensions of Time Protocol⁶ and it is important to correctly link to that document within the SCI.
- 3.15 The Harlow and Gilston Garden Town project has progressed since the previous 2019 SCI, as a consequence the updated SCI provides the latest links to relevant resources on the project and details on the creation of the Joint Committee and future stewardship groups.
- 3.16 Lastly, there are a number of forums and steering groups set up around the district to engage communities and stakeholders in the planning application process. This ranges from agent forums, to community forums and the Development Management Forum. A new Appendix A in the SCI has been provided setting out what the different groups are and how they help to keep different groups engaged in the planning process.

Next Steps

- 3.17 Following agreement to adopt the SCI found at **Appendix A**, the Planning Policy Team will replace the existing SCI on the Council's website with the revised document. The updated SCI will be used for consultation on planning matters from the date of adoption.

⁵ [Agenda for Constitution on Wednesday 26th February, 2025 - East Herts District Council](#)

⁶ [Amendments and Extensions of Time Protocol.pdf](#)

4.0 Options

- 4.1 The Council could choose not to approve the updated SCI for adoption and continue to use the existing adopted SCI. The latest review does however provide additional useful information and ensures that the document is up to date.

5.0 Risks

- 5.1 An SCI is currently a legal requirement for local planning authorities. This is why it is important to ensure the information within the SCI is up to date and accurate.

6.0 Implications/Consultations

- 6.1 An SCI forms an integral part of the planning process. It provides clarity to the public on how the Council will consult on such matters.

Community Safety

There are no community safety implications arising from this report.

Data Protection

There are no data protection implications arising from this report.

Equalities

The SCI has a positive impact to equality, diversity, and inclusion as it outlines how planning can be more inclusive to all groups as set out in the Equality Act 2010. An Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) of the SCI has been carried out and is found at **Appendix B**.

Environmental Sustainability

The SCI encourages more digital engagement with the public, providing a greater variety in the ways in which the public can engage with planning. This can help to reduce paper waste that was more typical in traditional consultation methods, such as hardcopy notifications, responses and leaflets.

Financial

There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. The Council has a legal duty to consult on planning matters and the cost of this has been accounted for in existing budgets.

Health and Safety

There are no health and safety implications arising from this report.

Human Resources

There are no human resources implications arising from this report.

Human Rights

There are no human rights implications arising from this report.

Legal

The Council is required to have an up to date SCI under existing legislation. It also has a duty to consult on a number of planning matters, as set out in the SCI.

Specific Wards

All

7.0 Background papers, appendices, and other relevant material

7.1 Appendix A – Statement of Community Involvement 2025

7.2 Appendix B – Statement of Community Involvement Equalities
Impact Assessment

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