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Public

STATEMENT OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

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Summary

This report proposes a combined and updated Statement of Community Involvement (SCI), to replace the interim SCI and incorporate elements of the Development Management Charter. This is a statutory document and is an important statement of how the Council, as planning authority, informs, consults and engages with the community on Planning Policy and development management. A draft version of the SCI was agreed by Cabinet in June 2010 and was subject to a 12 week consultation between September and November. The final version of the SCI reflects the consultation responses received to the draft, as well as the emerging Localism agenda and the Council's response to it. Following Cabinet on 15 February, the SCI is scheduled to go to before Council on 24 February for agreement for immediate adoption.

Recommendations

- A. That the Statement of Community Involvement is recommended to Council for adoption.

Report

1. This report introduces the final version of the Statement of Community Involvement (SCI). The SCI is an important planning document and one which every Local Planning Authority must adopt. Broadly the SCI sets out how the Council will involve the public and organisations in the planning process, both in terms of planning policy preparation and in the determination of planning applications. In doing this the SCI sets out who the Council will involve, how this process will be handled;

when this involvement will happen; and an indication of what methods will be used.

2. Each of Shropshire's former Councils adopted their own SCI. In 2008, in the build-up to the new Shropshire Council Planning Service, an Interim Community Involvement Statement and a Development Management Charter were both agreed by the Implementation Executive, which provided information on the how the Planning Policy and Development Management Services would seek to involve the public in their areas of work. This SCI brings these two documents together, whilst building on the experiences of involving the public in planning matters since the start of the Unitary Council.
3. At the Cabinet meeting on 9th June 2010, it was agreed to consult on a draft version of the SCI. This consultation was carried out between 16th August and 8th November 2010, and included all Parish and Town Councils as well as other statutory consultees and local interest groups. Responses were received from 29 consultees, including from 14 Parish and Town Councils.
4. The proposed final version of the SCI is included as Appendix 1 to this report. If agreed by the Council, the SCI will provide the framework for supporting community involvement on all planning issues, from Planning Policy documents to individual planning applications.
5. The responses received on the draft SCI have helped to refine parts of the document, and have been particularly useful in providing further suggestions about how the Council could improve the way it communicates with the public. Appendix 2 to this report provides a full breakdown of the responses received, and how the Council has responded to the issues raised. In summary the key issues identified were:
 - The SCI needs to positively recognise and reflect the Government's emerging Localism agenda in ensuring that local communities become increasingly empowered;
 - Assurance that comments on planning issues will be listened to;
 - Avoid using jargon in council publications, and always provide executive summaries of planning policy consultation documents;
 - Make greater use of local newsletters, such as Parish and Town Council publications;
 - Support the increased use of social media formats such as Facebook and Twitter;
 - Recognise that increasing electronic communication methods could lead to issues for non-computer users;
 - Ensure the website is useable and documents easy to download;
 - Clarify the role of Local Joint Committees as a consultation mechanism;
 - Clarification of how Parish and Town Councils will receive notification of planning applications in their area;

- General support for the principle of encouraging pre-application discussions between developers and local communities ahead of full applications, but need to ensure decisions are not predetermined.
6. In addition, the proposed Final SCI has also responded to emerging work on the Council's transformation agenda, especially from the 'Duty to Involve' task and finish group. In particular, the SCI encourages that consultation exercises across the council should be joined-up, proportionate to their purpose, and cost-effective. In doing so community involvement must remain effective and offer a genuine opportunity for people from all sections of society to get involved.
 7. In terms of Development Management, the SCI sets out the standards that the public can expect, including: how planning applications will be consulted on; how people can make comments on applications; and how the council will enter into pre-application discussions with developers.
 8. Recent experiences of planning consultations have shown that the process can have significant resource implications for the Council. In supporting more efficient ways of working and service delivery, the SCI proposes the greater use of electronic communication. In doing so it is the intention to create a more prominent role for web-based consultations and to place a greater reliance on e-mail to contact consultees. The anticipated improvements to the Council website over the coming months will be an important factor in this move away from more traditional forms of communication.
 9. It is recognised that this greater use of electronic communications is likely to require an element of behavioural change from some organisations and members of the public. However, it is considered the greater use of electronic communication will also bring significant financial benefits and offer a genuinely more progressive way of engaging with a wider audience, especially younger groups, as well as maintaining effective relationships with more traditional groups. Looking forward it will also allow limited council resources to be targeted more efficiently.
 10. It is intended that the SCI will be monitored and reviewed if necessary on a regular basis. It is accepted there may well be a need to update the document fairly quickly in order to fully reflect the implications, and potential legislative changes, of the Localism Bill when it is enacted later in 2011.

List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)

Appendix 1: Final Statement of Community Involvement – February 2011

Appendix 2: Draft Statement of Community Involvement: Consultation Response Summary – February 2011

Human Rights Act Appraisal

The SCI deals with how the public will be consulted on planning issues, including statutory stages and processes.

Environmental Appraisal

N/A

Risk Management Appraisal

The SCI discusses how Shropshire Council will engage with communities in the planning process, both in terms of plan making and the assessment of planning applications. To this end there are minimum standards that need to be met to satisfy national legislation, namely the Town and Country Planning (General Development Procedure) Order 1995 (as amended). Additionally, in the preparation of Development Plans the Council also needs to demonstrate that they have followed the requirements set out in the SCI in order to demonstrate the overall 'soundness' of the plan. In taking forward new approaches to locality working there is also a risk to the reputation of the Council if effective engagement can not be demonstrated.

Community / Consultations Appraisal

The draft SCI was subject to a 12 week consultation between August and November 2010. Responses to the consultation have been taken into account in the final version and can be seen in Appendix 2.

Cabinet Member

Malcolm Price – Portfolio Holder Housing and Planning

Gwilym Butler - Portfolio Holder for Partnership Working, Performance and Productivity and Customer Service

Local Member

N/A

Appendices

Appendix 1: Final Statement of Community Involvement – February 2011

Appendix 2: Draft Statement of Community Involvement: Consultation Response Summary – February 2011