

Medway Statement of Community Involvement revision 2014

Report on Consultation

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Council officers identified the need to update the Medway Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) as part of work on a new Local Plan. The review process was designed to encourage input from a range of services, organisations, businesses and residents with an interest in Planning.
- 1.2 The Planning Service made use of links with corporate services to share best practice in community engagement and consultation. An initial internal stakeholders ideas/discussion session was held in March 2014, with colleagues from Development Management, the Corporate Intelligence hub, Children's Services and the Health team sharing ideas about the initial draft. The approach being taken in updating the SCI was explained and ideas were gathered from these colleagues who had experience of consultation. This work helped to inform the consultation draft of the revised SCI document.
- 1.3 The SCI consultation ran from 16 June to 4 August 2014. A copy of the document was made available on the Council's Planning web pages, with printed copies available at Gun Wharf reception and Medway libraries. The consultation was publicised through a Public Notice in the Medway Messenger at the start of the consultation process, and posters placed in libraries. The council also directly contacted organisations and individuals on the Planning Policy database, who had expressed an interest in being kept informed on policy developments.
- 1.4 This database was used to seek the views of statutory consultees and wider stakeholders. The database includes over 1000 contacts of organisations, community groups, businesses and residents with an interest in planning for Medway. A combination of postal and email contact was made, notifying stakeholders of the forthcoming consultation, as well as work starting on the preparation of a new Local Plan.
- 1.5 Planning officers met with major developers and their agents in early June 2014 and notified them of the proposed consultation on the revised SCI. They were encouraged to respond to the consultation and were invited to attend a focus group that was to be set up for further discussion of the issues in the SCI.

- 1.6 All contacts on the Planning Policy database were alerted to the focus group meeting, and a follow up invite was sent to those with email addresses. At the end of July 2014 the focus group was organised at Gun Wharf encouraging views from a wide cross section of stakeholders, from the development industry, local businesses and representatives of the wider community.

2. Responses to consultation

- 2.1 Consultees were provided with an online response form that was also available as a printed copy. The form set out the following questions:

Q1. Does this document in your view explain the process and methods for community involvement in planning issues in a clear, understandable way?

Q2. Do you agree with the general principles and methods identified to guide community involvement in our plan making activities (Part One of SCI)?

Q3. Do you agree with the general principles and methods identified to guide community involvement in our planning application process (Part Two of SCI)?

Q4. Are there any other aspects of consultation and engagement that you feel the SCI should address that are not currently covered in the draft document?

Q5. Do you have any further comments on the consultation draft of the revised SCI document?

- 2.2 Fifteen responses were received to the consultation from local forums, national Statutory Bodies, other Local Authorities and local residents. Nine respondents completed the consultation response form. The broad findings are shown in Table 1 below. Although the numbers of replies was low, this was an increase from the level of responses received to the previous round of consultation on the existing version of the SCI.
- 2.3 Overall the majority of respondents were in agreement with the processes and methods suggested for community engagement and found the document to generally be clear and understandable. A number of useful suggestions were made to improve sections of the document and make the context of the document clearer. Details are listed in the responses table (Table 2) towards the end of this document.
- 2.4 Additional information was gathered through the use of the focus group. In total, seventeen consultees attended and feedback from the session has been collated in Table 2 towards the end of this document.

Table 1: Responses received to Consultation on revised SCI

Consultation response form questions and answers (Total of nine form responses)			
Q1. Does this document in your view explain the process and methods for community Involvement in planning issues in a clear, understandable way?			
Agree	Disagree	Neither	No answer
7		2	
Q2. Do you agree with the general principles and methods identified to guide community involvement in our plan making activities (Part One of SCI)?			
Yes	No	Neither	No answer
8			1
Q3. Do you agree with the general principles and methods identified to guide community involvement in our planning application process (Part Two of SCI)?			
Yes	No	Neither	No answer
7		1	1
Q4. Are there any other aspects of consultation and engagement that you feel the SCI should address that are not currently covered in the draft document?			
Yes	No	Neither	No answer
4	4	1	
Q5. Do you have any further comments on the consultation draft of the revised SCI document?			
<i>See response table for comments to this question and other comments</i>			

3. Diversity Considerations

- 3.1 The Planning Policy consultation database includes the contact details of a number of disability groups, religious groups, age specific groups and BME groups, representing characteristics protected under Equalities legislation. A follow up exercise was considered noting that responses had not been received from those groups following the main consultation mail out and the further invitation to the focus group.
- 3.2 Contact was made separately with the Medway Disabled Workers Forum, The Medway Ethnic Minority Forum and the Youth Parliament. Following discussions, it was agreed that it would be more appropriate to coordinate further work with these groups to coincide with the directorate and Council wide consultation process being developed. This would avoid such groups having unnecessary and untimely contact that have been raised as concerns.

Table 2: Statement of Community Involvement Consultation Responses with replies

Respondents	Comment	Medway Planning Service response
Medway Towns Footpath Group	Q5. Concern that section 2.15 in SCI regarding an application that has environmental impact or affects a public right of way does not recognise the appropriate importance of notification of relevant organisations.	Confusion in document layout to be addressed.
Medway Countryside Forum	Q1. Do not find the text of par. 1.9 to be helpful. Still confused about definitions of 'statutory', 'specific' and 'general' (consultees).	Section to be reviewed to improve the clarity.
	Q2 Formal request to consider allowing objectors to an application (especially residents) to speak briefly to elected members at Planning Meetings.	This has been previously considered by Planning Committee and has not been viewed as appropriate to introduce.
	Trouble completing response form on-line. Trouble searching on Planning web-pages. IT systems need to be user friendly.	Noted – after hearing of this difficulty with the on-line form, officers updated the website instructions explaining how to save and open with Adobe reader software as there appears to be incompatibility issues with some web browsers. Further consideration to be made of IT/website improvements.
(RH) Medway Local Access Forum	Q1 [SCI] only reaches a few residents	Steps made to reach broad range of stakeholders. Awareness of need to publicise Local Plan work to wider population, eg through use of Medway Matters.
	Q2 Ward Councillors should be more active in	Noted in sections 1.15 and 1.16.

	representing local views.	
	Q3 Consultation is always 'too little, too late'.	Statement of Community Involvement seeks to address these concerns. The new Local Plan process will involve consultation at key stages.
	Q5 Page 13 2.15 is confusing I am concerned that applications that have an environmental impact or affect public rights of way seem to have no comments beside them concerning publicity. I assume the layout means to state all three items in the box are covered by the comments?	Confusion in document layout to be addressed.
	Local Access Forum are not satisfied with the length of time given to consultation as groups such as the LAF who only meet quarterly cannot be expected to consult with members in such a short time.	We will endeavour to notify stakeholders as early as possible about consultations, we are however unable to extend consultation periods beyond the periods stated in the SCI without delaying the Local Plan and Planning Application process.
(SO) Medway Local Access Forum	Use 'key search terms' rather than links that can become out of date quickly.	To be considered in updates.
(GJ) Medway Ramblers	Q1 ...the drafting of the document could be tightened to make actions even clearer and commitments firmer.	Text to be reviewed.
	Q4 Par 2.15 does not include any obligation to inform relevant groups about planning applications which impact on public rights of way – this seems like a significant omission for the minority of such applications which have such an impact.	Confusion in document layout to be addressed.
	Q5 There are a number of places where the draft ways 'may' or 'can be' when it should be	Detailed comments to be considered for text revision to improve clarity.

	much more definite.	
	Q5 Lack of precise wording occurs in 2.16. I assume that Council Officers and/or Council members would be involved in pre-application discussions but this isn't actually said.	Text to be reviewed.
	Q5 Other presentational issues: Member sometimes has a capital sometimes not. LPA abbreviation is not defined.	Will correct
Mineral and Waste Planning Central Bedfordshire Council	Q3 It may be helpful to note that other major applications include mineral extraction and waste management, which should be publicised by – displaying a site notice for not less than 21 days. Serving notice on any adjoining owner of occupier and a local newspaper advert.	Noted. Text to be reviewed.
	Q5 It would be useful if the definition for Local Plan (LP) provided in the glossary stated whether the Plan includes Minerals and Waste policies and strategic sites, or if Minerals and Waste matters will be included in a separate Local Plan.	Noted. Text to be reviewed.
	Q5 It may be useful to residents of Medway who do not speak English if a short paragraph was included at the start of the document which explains the purpose of the SCI and how the individual can contact Medway if he/she requires help with interpretation of the document.	Noted. Text to be reviewed.
Resident - Rochester	Q1 Could be more context at the outset eg what is a local plan? What is a Statement of Community Involvement? This would help 'lay people'.	Will look to expand introduction and include a fuller explanation of the context of the document.

	Q2 I would not use social media but younger stakeholders I am sure would find this form of communication very helpful as a 'hard to reach group.	Noted.
	Q3 Very clear	Noted
	Q4 The document is comprehensive yet generally concise.	Noted
	Q5 The section of p.6 1.9-1.12 could be clearer.	Noted. Text to be reviewed.
Francis Iles Gallery	Q3 In the case of business 'change of use' – these should be notified to a wider area and to town centre forums, well in advance.	Noted. For further discussion.
Kent Wildlife Trust	Q5 I would like to see the wording in the table on page 16 clarified, "Publicity on Planning Applications". This relates in particular to the row for major applications (10 or more dwellings) or those requiring an environmental impact assessment. Here it states that you will contact government and statutory consultees. However, here there needs to be an acknowledgement of the wider consultation with non-statutory consultees (or "general consultation bodies" in the words of the T & C Planning Regs 2012), such as Kent Wildlife Trust. Although we are not statutory consultees we really do need to be consulted on this type of development proposal and therefore I would appreciate this being acknowledged in your SCI.	Noted. Text to be reviewed.
Equalities and Human Rights Commission	Requested future contact to be via email only	Noted – database details amended
Highways Agency	Thank you for consulting the HA on the above document. I can confirm we have no	Noted

	comments	
Natural England	<p>We regret we are unable to comment, in detail, on individual Statements of Community Involvement.</p> <p>We now ask that all planning consultations are sent electronically to the central hub for our planning and development advisory service</p>	Noted