



DARLINGTON
Borough Council

**STATEMENT OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT
(Part 1) THE LOCAL PLAN**

**Draft for Consultation
April 2025**

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) (Part 1) sets out how Darlington Borough Council will involve local communities, businesses and key stakeholders in the preparation of the Local Plan and any future Development Plan Documents' (DPD's) or Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD's).
- 1.2 It has been updated to help shape the review of the Local Plan. It replaces the previous SCI (Part 1) issued in August 2020.

2. General principles

- 2.1 We will always apply some general principles to our planning consultations / engagement. These are set out below:
 - a) We will communicate clearly;
 - b) We will make it easy for you to be involved;
 - c) We will make sure your involvement is effective;
 - d) We will share information and provide feedback;
 - e) We will keep the process simple;
 - f) We will learn from our mistakes.
- 2.2 Involvement in consultations will be open to all, including all protected characteristics listed within The Equality Act 2010.
- 2.3 If you have difficulty in communicating with us, we will make information available in other formats such as braille, large print audio, audio description or another language on request.
- 2.4 Wherever possible, consultation will be carried out alongside other community engagement initiatives.

3. When will we consult?

- 3.1 The Local Planning Regulations state that there must be a minimum of two consultation periods for Local Development Documents (including Local Plans). The first consultation relates to the issues and options that the Local Development Document should address (Regulation 18), and the second consultation should take place prior to the submission of the Local Development Document to the Secretary of State for Examination in Public (Regulation 19).
- 3.2 In addition to the statutory consultees, the Council will ensure that local communities, businesses and key stakeholders can be involved throughout the preparation of the Local Plan. The means of doing this will be set out in separate Engagement Plans.
- 3.3 Supplementary Planning Documents will normally undergo a minimum of four weeks consultation prior to adoption by the Council.

4. Who will we consult?

- 4.1 The Council must conform to certain rules and regulations set by Government on how it consults. The *Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012* list 'specific consultation bodies' that we must consult with (as applicable). For Darlington Borough these are:
- a) The Coal Authority;
 - b) The Environment Agency;
 - c) Homes England;
 - d) Tees Valley Combined Authority;
 - e) The Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission for England (known as Historic England);
 - f) Natural England;
 - g) Network Rail Infrastructure Limited;
 - h) National Highways;
 - i) Parish Councils (including Parish Councils adjoining the borough);
 - j) Adjoining authorities;
 - k) Relevant telecommunications companies;
 - l) Clinical Commissioning Body or relevant successor;
 - m) Durham Constabulary;
 - n) Relevant electricity and gas companies;
 - o) Sewerage and water undertakers.
- (Or any equivalent successor bodies to any of the above).
- 4.2 We are also required to consult with any 'general consultation bodies' which may be affected by the contents of the document being produced. These will include:
- a) Voluntary bodies, some or all of whose activities benefit any part of the Council's area;
 - b) Bodies in the Council's area which represent the interest of different needs groups.
- 4.3 The Council will also consult 'other consultation bodies' which they consider to be appropriate and who have not fallen into the above categories, which may include:
- a) Residents Associations;
 - b) Developers and agents;
 - c) Special interest groups;
 - d) Environmental groups;
 - e) Businesses or business networks;
 - f) Educational establishments;
 - g) The general public.
- 4.4 We also hold and maintain a database of names and postal/email addresses of residents and stakeholders who have asked to be kept informed of any consultations that may come forward. An individual or an organisation may ask to be added or removed from this database at any time. In the interests of efficiency, we will assume that all those who provide an email address are happy to be contacted via this means. If you would like to be added to this database, please email us at planning.policy@darlington.gov.uk or write to us using the postal address in section 13 of this document.

5. How will we consult?

- 5.1 Before we begin key stages of a Local Development Document, we will produce an Engagement Plan (where officers consider one to be necessary), setting out when and how we will consult/engage throughout the process. This will ensure consideration is given to the most effective way of communicating the particular issue, and that the methods engaged are proportionate.
- 5.2 The type of engagement plan will be determined depending on the nature of the issues, and those likely to be affected. For example, they could be area based if the particular issue concerns a specific site, or they could target a particular sector. Engagement plans will ensure that consultations always meet statutory requirements.
- 5.3 We will use a range of communication methods to inform individuals and organisations that a consultation is taking place, what the issues are and how they can be involved in the process. We will use the most appropriate consultation methods to ensure maximum opportunities for community involvement.
- 5.4 The Council will use different levels of community involvement as follows:
- a) Information – Providing information through a variety of methods;
 - b) Consultation – Asking the community to provide their views about particular planning proposals at the appropriate stages;
 - c) Participation – Enabling communities and stakeholders to get involved (i.e. workshops to identify specific issues).
- 5.5 The methods that we employ to notify and involve stakeholders in the consultation process include those listed below. A bespoke combination of consultation methods will be used depending on the specific issue being considered:-
- a) Contact appropriate organisations and individuals directly;
 - b) Publicise consultations along with relevant documents by methods such as website updates, social media, press releases, displays, etc.
 - c) Formal notices in the local media;
 - d) Consultation documents to be made available at the customer contact centre at the Town Hall (by appointment only);
 - e) Consultation documents will be made available at Crown Street and Cockerton Libraries;
 - f) Work with existing community groups or other interest groups, attend community events and joint consultations;
 - g) Consider organising events such as stakeholder meetings or workshops, including place-shaping workshops.

6. What you can do

- 6.1 If you tell us that you are interested in Local Plan documents and would like to be kept informed of future consultations, we will add your details to our Consultation database. You will receive an email or letter when there is an opportunity for you to be involved, and to let you know that new documents have

been produced. If you would like your contact details to be added to our database, please contact us using the details at the end of this document. It is important that you let us know of any changes to your contact details, so that the database remains up to date.

6.2 To ensure that the process is transparent and so that everyone can see how our policies have developed, we need to receive all comments in writing, by email, online or by letter. If we undertake consultation events or workshops, we will make written records of views expressed at the time, so that they can also be taken into account. In order to make your comments as effective as possible, you should:-

- a) Make comments clear and concise so that we know what your main points are;
- b) Make comments within published time periods;
- c) Use the form provided, where possible. For most of our consultations we provide a comments form for you to fill in. This is not compulsory, but it can make your comments clearer and ensures we have all of the information we need;
- d) Be aware that your comments will be made publicly available on our website, and at our offices;
- e) If you are a member of a group or organisation let us know whether you are responding on your own behalf or as a member of that body.

6.3 The Council cannot accept anonymous comments. The Council reserves the right to not consider any representation that contains any inappropriate comments such as abusive content, offensive language or discriminatory comments. The Council will only consider comments that are relevant to the subject or theme of the consultation.

7. Responses to consultations – What the Council will do

7.1 In response to any consultation responses the Council will:-

- a) Formally acknowledge receipt of all emails and letters;
- b) Request additional information from you where comments are not clear.

7.2 Consultation responses will be made publicly available on the website as soon as practicable. At the end of the consultation period, we will publish all comments received on our website. A Consultation Statement, in accordance with statutory requirements, will outline the full extent of the consultation, who was consulted, how they were consulted, and a summary of the main issues raised as a result of those consultations. This will be reported to Place Scrutiny Committee. It will then be available when the Local Plan (or other DPD) is submitted to the Secretary of State, via the website, the Town Hall (by appointment) and Crown Street or Cockerton Libraries. Comments received on Supplementary Planning Documents will be reported to the relevant committee.

7.3 In responding to enquiries, consultees will be referred to the Council's Planning Policy website. If the council considers an individual response is appropriate or further clarification is required then we will contact you via your preferred method of communication.

7.4 We will evaluate and learn from consultations and will improve our feedback

arrangements where this is required. All lessons learnt will be taken into account in the formulation of Engagement Plans for future consultations.

8. How will decisions be made

- 8.1 Local Plans and other planning documents should represent a collective vision, in the context of national priorities, local circumstances and community views. To this extent, there are likely to be conflicting views about the best use of land and broader policy context. To help reduce these tensions, the Council will ensure that early and effective community engagement with stakeholders, prescribed bodies and the local community is undertaken and that everyone has an opportunity to express their views. Methods will be dependent on the planning document being prepared and the stage that the document is at, and this will always be considered carefully in the formulation of Engagement Plans.
- 8.2 Despite this, there may still be occasions when differences of opinion cannot easily be resolved. The Council will analyse comments made in response to consultations and balance different needs and opinions, including the need to conform to national policy and guidance. Based on all of the information available, officers will make a recommendation, in the form of a report to:
- a) Cabinet; and
 - b) Full Council
- 8.3 Once the recommendations have been approved by Full Council, the Local Plan and any future Development Plan Documents will progress to Examination in Public, whilst Supplementary Planning Documents will be adopted by the Council.

9. Duty to Co-operate

- 9.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, December 2024) states that local planning authorities continue to be under a duty to cooperate with each other, and with other prescribed bodies, on strategic matters that cross administrative boundaries.
- 9.2 The NPPF requires strategic policy-making authorities to collaborate to identify the relevant strategic matters which need to be addressed within their plans. They should also engage with relevant bodies including Local Nature Partnerships, local communities, infrastructure providers, elected mayors and combined authorities (in cases where Mayors or combined authorities do not have plan making powers).
- 9.3 The Council is committed to working with other Local Planning Authorities and public bodies with an interest in land use and development in the Borough. To demonstrate effective and on-going joint working, the NPPF advises that strategic policy-making authorities should prepare statements of common ground which document the cross-boundary matters being addressed and make progress in cooperating to address these.

10. Neighbourhood Planning

- 10.1 Neighbourhood planning, introduced by the Localism Act 2011, gives communities the power to agree a neighbourhood development plan, make a Neighbourhood Development Order and make a Community Right to Build Order. The framework for producing these plans and orders is set out in the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012.
- 10.2 Where local people express an interest in neighbourhood planning, the Council will support them. This will include initial advice about the process, providing details about emerging and existing Local Plan policies, and sharing other information available to the Council.
- 10.3 Further information about current Neighbourhood Areas, and support and funding for neighbourhood planning is available at: www.darlington.gov.uk/neighbourhoodplanning.

11. Availability of documents

- 11.1 Local Development Documents and related information, including reports prepared to underpin policy preparation, will be made available on the Council's website. They will also be made available at the customer contact centre in the Town Hall (by appointment only) and at Crown Street and Cockerton libraries during specific consultation periods. At other times, these documents can be made available to view at these locations on request.
- 11.2 Paper copies, including large print and electronic versions, and any formats required as reasonable adjustments, such as braille or audio will be made available. Languages other than English can be provided on request wherever practicable and reasonable. However, a charge may be made for these.

12. Contacting the Council

- 12.1 If you wish to know more about the SCI, or any aspect of planning policy, please contact us using the post or email addresses below. Information on the Local Plan, other planning policy documents and the development plan process is also available on the website.

Website: www.darlington.gov.uk/Localplan

Email: planning.policy@darlington.gov.uk

Tel: 01325 406724

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