

COUNCIL
17 JULY 2025

UPDATED STATEMENT OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT - PART 1 (LOCAL PLAN)

**Responsible Cabinet Member –
Councillor Chris McEwan, Economy Portfolio**

**Responsible Director –
Trevor Watson, Executive Director Economy and Public Protection**

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To seek Members' approval to adopt an updated version of its Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) Part 1 (Local Plan).

Summary

2. A Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) sets out how Local Planning Authorities 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).
3. Authorities are required to review their SCI's at least every five years. The Darlington SCI – Part 1 was last reviewed in August 2020 with temporary updates made to reflect national COVID 19 pandemic restrictions.
4. The update will remove these restrictions and allow some other minor updates to be consulted on prior to the statutory consultation periods on the Local Plan Review. An updated Design of New Development Supplementary (SPD) will also be prepared and consulted upon alongside the review of the Local Plan in line with the content of the updated SCI.
5. Cabinet approved an updated draft of the SCI Part 1 for consultation on 8 April 2025. This consultation was held between 29th April 2025 and 30 May 2025. Six responses were received none of which raised significant concerns in relation to the content of the Updated SCI Part 1.

Recommendations

6. It is recommended that Council adopt the Updated Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) Part 1 (Local Plan).

Reasons

7. The recommendation is supported as the Council is required to have an up-to-date SCI as part of the plan review process.

Trevor Watson
Executive Director Economy and Public Protection

Background Papers

- (i) National Planning Policy Framework, December 2025
- (ii) Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004
- (iii) Town and Country Planning Act (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012
- (iv) Localism Act 2011

David Nelson: Extension 6291

Council Plan	<p>The Local Plan and supporting documents are integral to the delivery of the Council Plan and its priorities (adopted by Council in July 2024).</p> <p>The priorities are:</p> <p>ECONOMY - building a strong sustainable economy and highly skilled workforce with opportunities for all.</p> <p>The Local Plan allocates land for employment sufficient to meet the future needs of the borough.</p> <p>HOMES – affordable and secure homes that meet the current and future needs of residents.</p> <p>The Local Plan allocates sufficient land to meet the boroughs needs, sets affordable housing requirements and ensures new developments are well planned, safe and attractive.</p> <p>LIVING WELL – a healthier and better quality of life for longer, supporting those who need it most.</p> <p>The existing Local Plan encourages development to consider health and wellbeing with a requirement for larger developments to undertake a Health Impact Assessment (HIA). Allowance is also made for older people’s accommodation and sets a requirement for adaptable homes.</p> <p>CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE – supporting the best start in life, realising potential and raising aspirations.</p>
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	<p>The Local Plan contains a mechanism to secure contributions to education provision and secure sites for new provision in key locations.</p> <p>COMMUNITIES – working together for safer, healthier and more engaged communities.</p> <p>The Local Plan throughout has a focus on delivering cohesive communities rather than individual developments.</p> <p>LOCAL ENVIRONMENT – a well-connected, clean and sustainable borough.</p> <p>The Local Plan contains numerous policies to protect both the natural and built environment.</p>
Addressing inequalities	An Equalities Impact Assessment will be part of the plan and SPD review and process.
Tackling Climate Change	<p>Achieving sustainable development is a fundamental objective of the Local Plan. The early review of the existing Local Plan will enable the council to develop additional policy to tackle climate change matters, reflect updated national policy and improve existing policies where necessary.</p> <p>The reviewed plan will need to be supported by an updated Sustainability Appraisal which will consider climate change in greater detail.</p>
Efficient and effective use of resources	The council has to have an up to date plan this necessitates a review at least every five years. This includes review of the SCI.
Health and Wellbeing	A key objective of Local Plan and supporting documents is to improve people’s health and wellbeing by protecting and improving the economic, social and environmental conditions in the Borough.
S17 Crime and Disorder	The Local Plan has a role in reducing crime through the promotion of good design and location of development.
Wards Affected	All
Groups Affected	All
Budget and Policy Framework	There are no proposed changes to the Council’s budget or policy framework in this report.
Key Decision	Yes
Urgent Decision	No
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	This report has no impact on Looked After Children or Care Leavers

MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis

8. The Updated Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) – Part 1 (Local Plans), attached at **Appendix 1**, is a statutory requirement. SCI's set out how Local planning authorities 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).

9. Government guidance stipulates that:

Local planning authorities must review their SCI's every 5 years from their adoption date. It is important that SCI's are kept up-to-date to ensure effective community involvement at all stages of the planning process. Therefore, a local planning authority should regularly review and update their Statement of Community Involvement to reflect any changes to engagement.

A local planning authority may review and update their Statement of Community Involvement at the same time as reviewing and updating a plan to reflect what action is taken to involve the community in any change to the plan.

10. The Darlington SCI – Part 1 (Local Plans) was last updated in August 2020 with some temporary updates made to reflect national COVID 19 pandemic restrictions. This update will remove restrictions and allow some other minor updates to be consulted on prior to the statutory consultation periods on the Local Plan Review.

11. The SCI sets out the General principles to our planning consultations/engagement. These are:

- (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.

12. The SCI also sets out in more detail:

- (a) When we will consult;
- (b) Who we will consult;
- (c) How we will consult;
- (d) Details of how we will communicate with respondents;
- (e) How decisions will be made;
- (f) Where documents will be made available; and
- (g) How we can be contacted.

13. There are also some details around Duty to Cooperate with other Local Planning Authorities and public bodies with an interest in land use and development in the

Borough. Along with a reiteration of the council's support role in the preparation of any Neighbourhood Plans.

14. The changes to the SCI are minor and primarily relate to:
 - (a) Removal of temporary COVID related restrictions;
 - (b) Updates to reflect the Equality Act;
 - (c) Updates to 'Specific Consultation Bodies' (e.g. Highways England is now National Highways);
 - (d) Information will be hosted on the main corporate website rather than a separate 'Local Plan Microsite'.
15. It should be noted that the Council's SCI – Part 2 (Planning Applications) is not part of this review.

Financial Implications

16. The SCI has been reviewed by the Planning Policy team with no direct additional costs other than officer time.

Legal Implications

17. There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

Consultation

18. Cabinet approved an updated draft of the SCI Part 1 for consultation on 8 April 2025. This consultation was held between 29 April 2025 and 30 May 2025. Everyone on our existing Local Plan Consultation Database were informed directly and information provided online.
19. In total six responses were received. Two from statutory consultees Historic England and Natural England confirming they had no comments to make on the document. The remaining four were from residents.
20. Of these responses from residents, most indicated broad support for the consultation methods, although some did express concern with an overreliance on using the council website to communicate information. This is however in line with the Government's ongoing commitment to make information freely available in digital formats. As part of this we will look to make our documents available in different formats upon request to ensure that our local plan consultations are accessible to all.
21. A number of points raised related to Part 2 of the SCI regarding consultation on planning applications. This part of the SCI is not currently under review.
22. As a result of the consultation no changes are deemed necessary to the SCI but a number of the points raised have been noted and will be considered when individual engagement plans are produced for specific pieces of work. We have also been looking into specific

ways to deliver alternative formats of consultation documents, this included fulfilling a request for an audio document for this consultation.