

# Statement of Community Involvement 2020 update

Huntingdonshire District Council | Statement of Community Involvement 2020 update

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# Document Information

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## 1 Introduction

- 1.1** This statement sets out how and when the Council, as the Local Planning Authority, will seek to engage with local communities regarding planning matters. It has been temporarily updated to address changes required in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent Government guidance. The statement replaces our previous Statement of Community Involvement, adopted in 2012.
- 1.2** The Council often has to balance differing views and has to make a judgement in the interests of all our communities. By engaging with our communities on planning issues we will strive to balance their needs and aspirations and make decisions in the most informed way possible.
- 1.3** The resources we can devote to community engagement are limited by the Council's budget. The ways in which we intend to engage people, as described in this document, are considered to be the most realistic and appropriate given the limitations of the budget.

## 2 How We Will Consult

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### 2 How We Will Consult

- 2.1** Our approach aims to encourage widespread participation so that decisions are informed by the needs and aspirations of the communities within Huntingdonshire.
- 2.2** We will make the most of modern media techniques, for example the Council's website, Public Access and appropriate social media, using concise and simple statements to inform people about planning issues and individual planning applications.
- 2.3** We will issue press releases on consultations of particular public interest when appropriate. Local newspapers, radio and television news can be effective in engaging a wide audience. Public notices will be placed in local newspapers when required by legislation.
- 2.4** Certain statutory public bodies such as the Environment Agency are required by legislation to be informed of proposals which may affect their interests. We will ensure that these statutory bodies receive automatic notifications.
- 2.5** Where possible we will use established networks such as town and parish councils and other local committees to help let people know about development proposals.
- 2.6** Targeted consultation may take place with specific interest groups such as town partnerships, local community groups, landowners and potential developers. We may use specialist agencies or consultants to help us communicate with specific groups. For issues which may affect many people we may use workshops, focus groups and exhibitions to enable people to get advice and share their views on elements of concern to them.
- 2.7** Neighbours who might be affected by proposals in planning applications will be informed directly by letters addressed to the owner/occupier of that property.
- 2.8** The Local Development Scheme sets a timetable for the production of the Local Plan and will be available on our website. Updates will inform people about progress and forthcoming engagement opportunities. We will maintain a planning policy consultation database<sup>(1)</sup> on which anyone can register and email alerts will be sent about relevant new policy consultations.
- 2.9** We recognise that 'consultation fatigue' may occur when high demands are placed on people. To avoid this we will minimise the number of consultation stages in a planning document's production and seek to co-ordinate and combine consultations where this is unlikely to lead to significant delay or confusion.
- 2.10** We recognise equality issues and will seek to ensure that involvement is open to all, for example by choosing accessible consultation venues. When dealing with Gypsy and Traveller issues, we will specifically seek to engage with local Gypsies and Travellers and their representative bodies as well as the settled community. Comments will be rejected where they offend equality legislation.
- 2.11** Groups that are harder than others to reach include young people and those who work long hours. Where appropriate we will try to have some consultation events in the evening and involve local schools. We will also try, where possible, to avoid the use of jargon.
- 2.12** Planning Aid England exists to provide free, independent and professional planning advice to communities and individuals who cannot afford to pay professional fees. Some people, for example objectors to planning applications, may use this service to help engage in local planning issues.

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1 The policy consultation database is contained within the [consultation portal](#) and requires registration with a name and email address.

### Responding to Change

It should be noted that there may be times when the methods detailed above may not be appropriate or possible. Such situations could include pandemics or national/ local lockdowns where movement and social interaction is restricted by Government; or in order for the Council to protect the physical well-being of its employees. In such instances the Council will attempt to ensure other methods of interaction are employed in order to continue effective consultation and community engagement. Methods utilised could include online surveys and exhibitions and use of social media. Special consideration will be given to alternative means of engaging those in hard to reach groups including those who may have limited or no internet provision.

Any changes to the planning application process as part of the Council's crisis response will be published on the [Planning \(Development management\) Service Changes](#) webpages.

Where alternative consultation and communication methods are to be used in the production of documents relating to planning policy documents such as Neighbourhood Plans <sup>(2)</sup>, Supplementary Planning Documents and Local Development Plan documents, the Council will ensure that this is set out on its website.

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2 When the Council is required by regulation to conduct consultation on behalf of the Parish.

## 3 Supporting Information

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### 3 Supporting Information

- 3.1** Consultation on planning issues sits within the Council's wider frameworks and programmes. The Council's [Corporate Plan 2018-2022](#) and the corporate [Consultation and Engagement Strategy](#) reflect the Council's commitment to consultation and engagement. Huntingdonshire District Council's adopted equality objectives set out the Council's commitment to continue to ensure proposed decisions are assessed for equality impact. Equalities Impact Assessments will be carried out where relevant, for example on the production of planning policy documents such as the Local Plan and Supplementary Planning Documents. Revisions or replacements of the documents mentioned above are likely over time and if necessary this statement will be reviewed in light of them.
- 3.2** Town and parish councils have a particular role to play on planning issues, particularly as they have detailed knowledge of the areas they represent. All planning applications are statutorily referred to the relevant town and parish council for comment.
- 3.3** Council decisions and recommendations on progress with planning documents are taken by the Council's Cabinet, Development Management Committee and Overview and Scrutiny Panels. The agendas and minutes for these meetings are available on the [Council's website](#).
- 3.4** Where issues of particular public interest occur a report will normally be taken to either the Council's Cabinet or the Development Management Committee for approval. These decision making bodies operate within defined remits and all reports are publicly available as part of the agendas, which are available on the Council's website. In addition, the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Panels provide opportunities for appropriate review and challenge.



## 4 The Local Plan Process

- 4.1** The Council's next Local Plan will be prepared in accordance with legislation, conform to relevant national policy and guidance and have regard to the projects and programmes of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority. The first formal requirement will be for consultation on the Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report which sets the framework for how the plan will be assessed in terms of sustainability appraisal and the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive<sup>(3)</sup>. Engagement with specific bodies is a statutory requirement, however the Council will open up consultation to allow anyone to participate.
- 4.2** Local Plan preparation will involve cooperation with neighbouring councils and the County Council to ensure that strategic and cross-boundary issues have been identified and the unmet needs of neighbouring councils have been considered where it is practical to do so. The Council will work with the Cambridgeshire Planning Policy Forum and neighbouring councils, including those outside Cambridgeshire to ensure all communities are appropriately engaged and to try to ensure that cross boundary issues are resolved.
- 4.3** We will consult on issues and options at an early stage in the Local Plan preparation. We will describe key principles and the evidence required for the Local Plan in a simple manner in order to build understanding and encourage a wide range of debate. Techniques such as workshops may also be used at this stage. We will engage with stakeholders such as developers with strategic scale proposals at an early stage of plan preparation to ensure the Local Plan reflects the communities' priorities and is deliverable. Such engagement may involve informal meetings, or take place in the context of other related planning matters.
- 4.4** A more technical stage will follow containing draft proposals. We shall give presentations to particular groups at this stage and will seek written responses to a consultation document.
- 4.5** Following consideration of comments on the draft, the completed Local Plan will be published for comment on the issue of soundness<sup>(4)</sup> for a statutory period as set out in regulations (currently six weeks). The Council will then submit the Local Plan for independent examination, together with a schedule of modifications if considered necessary, and a summary of the final comments received. The Inspector will decide on the arrangements for examining the Local Plan. During this last stage there may be additional consultations on site specific representations and/or suggested changes to the text.
- 4.6** A Statement of Consultation will be prepared for the submission of the Local Plan. This statement will provide detail on the consultation which has been undertaken, summarise comments received and how the consultation results have influenced the final form of the plan.

### Responding to Change

It should be noted that there may be times when the methods detailed above may not be appropriate or possible. Such situations could include pandemics or national/ local lockdowns where movement and social interaction is restricted by Government; or in order for the Council to protect the physical well-being of its employees. In such instances the Council will attempt to ensure other methods of interaction are employed in order to continue effective consultation and community engagement. Methods utilised could include online surveys and exhibitions and use of social media. Special consideration will be given to alternative means of engaging those in hard to reach groups including those who may have limited or no internet provision.

3 The [Planning Advisory Service](#) has published guidance on sustainability appraisal.

4 The [Planning Inspectorate](#) and the [Planning Advisory Service](#) have published guidance on the tests of soundness. The most up to date guidance should be used.

## 4 The Local Plan Process

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Where alternative consultation and communication methods are to be used in the production of documents relating to planning policy documents such as Neighbourhood Plans <sup>(5)</sup>, Supplementary Planning Documents and Local Development Plan documents, the Council will ensure that this is set out on its website.

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5 When the Council is required by regulation to conduct consultation on behalf of the Parish.

### 5 Other Planning Documents

- 5.1** The Council may approve other Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD) and Neighbourhood Plans as part of the development plan. In addition, it may prepare other planning guidance, urban design frameworks and development briefs where they will help people apply adopted policies.
- 5.2** A draft of each planning document prepared by the Council will be published for public consultation during their preparation. There may be a presentation or exhibition that is open to the public during the consultation period<sup>(6)</sup> prior to approval by the Council's Cabinet.
- 5.3** Neighbourhood Plans have been introduced by the Localism Act 2011. They are not prepared by the Council and therefore this statement cannot prescribe what methods of community engagement they must follow. However, the Council will provide technical guidance and support as required by legislation and will offer additional advice where feasible.

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6 This may be online in times of crisis.

## 6 Planning Applications

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### 6 Planning Applications

- 6.1** Applications for planning permission must be made in accordance with the applicable national and local validation requirements<sup>(7)</sup>. The requirements for advertising and consulting on planning applications are set out in the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015 (as amended)<sup>(8)</sup>. The Council has prepared detailed advice notes on planning matters including how to comment on applications<sup>(9)</sup>.
- 6.2** In April 2011 the Council introduced formal procedures for dealing with pre-application enquiries<sup>(10)</sup>. The formalisation of this stage with appropriate fees allows us to dedicate time with applicants to improve the quality of development schemes.
- 6.3** Applicants are encouraged to consult with neighbours and the local town or parish council as early as possible. For very large scale development pre-application consultation is required under the Localism Act 2011. Pre-application consultation should bring draft proposals to the attention of the public and could include public exhibitions, workshops and specific opportunities for written comments to be made. We will take into account any report on consultation undertaken by applicants prior to determining planning applications.
- 6.4** Opportunities for formal community involvement occur when applications are lodged. In accordance with national requirements, some applications are advertised in the local press and site notices are displayed. Comments are sought from statutory and technical organisations as well as people who may be affected by the application.
- 6.5** Applications, including all of their supporting material, are made available online<sup>(11)</sup>. Comments can be made in writing direct to the Council or through the online consultation portal. The comments received and additional information including the officer report (which includes a summary of the comments received) are added to the website so that anyone can view the information upon which a decision is made.
- 6.6** The Council operates a scheme of delegation to officers for making decisions on some planning applications. All other applications will be considered and determined by the Development Management Committee.
- 6.7** The Development Management Committee usually meets monthly and meetings are open to the public. An agenda including the officer's report is prepared in advance. Any additional information received after that is reported in a paper distributed prior to the meeting or in a late comments sheet at the committee meeting. Ward members, the town or parish council, objectors and the applicant/ agent are all given the opportunity to speak at the meeting in accordance with time limits set out in our advice notes<sup>(12)</sup>.

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7 The [Planning Portal](#) is the government's online planning resource for England and Wales, and local information on the validation of planning applications is available on the Council's website in the [Planning Section](#)

8 The Order is available on the Government's legislation [website](#).

9 A series of advice notes about planning applications are available on the Council's website in the [Planning section](#) .

10 Advice and forms at the pre-application stage are available on the Council's website in the [Planning Section](#).

11 [Public Access](#) is the system through which all applications can be viewed.

12 The current time limit for each group of speakers is 3 minutes. A leaflet on the speaking at Development Management Committee is available on the Council's website in the [Planning Process](#) webpage.

- 6.8** Those who commented on a planning application which is refused are notified if an appeal is made against that decision and given the opportunity to make further written comments, except in the case of Householder Appeals<sup>(13)</sup> where the Inspector makes the decision based solely on all the information on the original application file. For appeals decided by informal hearing or public inquiry, interested parties are also given the opportunity to appear before the Inspector at the hearing or inquiry.

## Responding to Change

It should be noted that there may be times when the methods detailed above may not be appropriate or possible. Such situations could include pandemics or national/ local lockdowns where movement and social interaction is restricted by Government; or in order for the Council to protect the physical well-being of its employees. In such instances the Council will attempt to ensure other methods are employed to continue the effective assessment and processing of planning applications.

Any changes to the planning application process as part of the Council's crisis response will be published on the [Planning \(Development management\) Service Changes](#) webpages.

Changes to planning policy and guidance that occur as part of the Government's response to COVID-19 can be found on the Council's [COVID-19 Planning Updates](#) webpage.

In addition, further planning advice can be found on [GOV.UK's coronavirus planning update page](#).

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13 Further information on Householder Appeals is available through the Government's [Planning Permission and Building Regulations](#) webpages.

## 7 Monitoring and Review

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### 7 Monitoring and Review

- 7.1** This statement gives appropriate flexibility in our approaches to community involvement to allow for some changes to other corporate documents and national guidance. Use of additional, new or different approaches to consultation will be considered where appropriate.
- 7.2** It is recognised that the Council's approach to consultation should ideally fit together with consultation undertaken by landowners and developers. The Council's approach may be amended where private consultation has been carried out in a suitable manner and the results made publicly available.
- 7.3** Comments received on the quality or effectiveness of our consultation will be considered and used to inform future practices. Comments should initially be sent to the officer responsible for the consultation that has been undertaken<sup>(14)</sup>.
- 7.4** Summaries will be made in the Statements of Consultation or Cabinet reports which accompany them, of community engagement opportunities and the responses made during the preparation of the Local Plan and other policy documents. Judgements on the effectiveness of the consultation will also be made where appropriate within these in order to inform future processes.
- 7.5** If this statement becomes out of date we will aim to review it as soon as possible.

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14 Advice on comments and complaints is available on the Council's website in the [Councils and Democracy section](#).

## Glossary

**Adoption**

The point at which the final agreed version of a document comes fully into use.

**Development Plan**

The documents which together provide the main point of reference when considering planning proposals.

**Development Plan Documents**

A document containing local planning policies or proposals which form part of the *Development Plan*, which has been subject to independent examination.

**Examination**

Independent inquiry into the soundness of a draft *development plan document*, chaired by an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State.

**Submission**

Point at which a draft *Development Plan Document* is submitted to the Secretary of State for examination.

**Supplementary Planning Documents**

Provides additional guidance on the interpretation or application of policies and proposals in a *Development Plan Document*.