

Greater Cambridge Statement of Community Involvement 2019 – Updated Addendum (December 2020)

Amended Practice in Response to COVID-19 Pandemic

This document provides an update to the addendum to the Greater Cambridge Statement of Community Involvement 2019 that was agreed in May 2020.

It should be read alongside the original Statement of Community Involvement 2019 document, available to view on the [Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service: Statement of Community Involvement webpage](#), along with background documents.

Introduction

The councils are committed to keeping essential services running during the Coronavirus outbreak. Planning has an important role to play in supporting our economy and our communities. It is important that we find a way to keep the planning process moving forward. There are a number of ways in which the councils are having to adapt the approach to planning decisions and plan making. This addendum to the Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) sets out these measures, and how it will continue to enable full involvement of people in planning matters.

Note: For more general updates about the impact of the Coronavirus outbreak on council services please visit:

[Cambridge City Council: Coronavirus](#)

[South Cambridgeshire District Council: Coronavirus](#)

Involving the Community at the Planning Application Stage

Site notices

Following a short period during the early part of COVID-19 lockdown where site notices were not being erected, site notices are now being displayed in the normal way. Each site notice will set out the date when the consultation by way of the site notice finishes. This may be before or after the date contained in neighbour notification letters or press notices.

Site visits

Measures are in place to allow officers to make site visits subject to required social distancing measures and self-isolation requirements. The Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service has put a site visit protocol in place and site visits will be conducted in accordance with that protocol. Face masks, gloves and other personal protective equipment will be used by officers undertaking site visits as applicable to ensure that site visits are conducted safely at all times. If it is necessary for an officer to enter a property, the agent/applicant will be asked a series of triage questions in advance of the site visit taking place.

Whilst it is not possible for members of the councils' Planning Committees to routinely carry out group site visits at present, officers will ensure that members have all the information that they require, including photographs and other contextual information, in order to make decisions. This situation is being kept under review in the context of Central Government COVID-19 restrictions.

Hard copy documents

We are currently unable in most circumstances to make available hard copies of planning application documents in either the council or parish offices as these offices are currently closed to the public in response to government advice and specific local responses to manage the spread of COVID-19. This situation will be kept under review as restrictions change. The Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure, Listed Buildings and Environmental Impact Assessment) (England) (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2020, that came into effect on 14 May, provide for local authorities to use electronic mechanisms to make the planning register available. Copies of all planning application documentation can be viewed on the councils' websites. Information on who to contact in the event of difficulties in viewing electronic documentation will also be available on the councils' websites. The councils will continue current practices in respect of notifying neighbouring occupiers of planning applications directly in writing and by site notices and newspaper advertisements as applicable.

Decision making process

At present, the decision-making process for planning applications remains as it was prior to the COVID-19 outbreak. Following recent changes to legislation, and revisions to the councils own procedures for holding public meetings, the councils are holding Planning Committee meetings virtually, with members of the public able to view the meetings live online and to participate through the adopted public speaking process.. This situation will be kept under review but will continue for the immediate future whilst both council offices are closed to the public in general and to comply with social distancing requirements and restrictions on large gatherings.

Planning enforcement

Planning enforcement site visits are being conducted in the same way as with planning applications, detailed above.

Involving the Community in Planning Policy

The Government is encouraging all local planning authorities to continue, as much as possible, to work proactively with their community and other stakeholders to progress plans, even if some adjustments to timetables are necessary.

The Planning Advisory Service advise that, 'This is an opportunity to think differently about how you consult and how you use the online and virtual tools you have to promote your consultation and allow people to get involved.' The Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service has been developing and improving its methods of online consultation and community engagement and we will continue to do so.

Some specific changes are needed to our current methods to reflect the government restrictions in place related to COVID-19. When the SCI was amended in May, it was hoped that the Councils would be able to open their offices to the public by the autumn, but there continue to be restrictions and therefore we have had to reconsider how we can fulfil our responsibilities to carry out consultations on policy documents, particularly those relating to neighbourhood planning.

Please refer to the councils' websites for information on any planning policy or related document. Consultation documents will be made available on the councils' websites. Reflecting this, when we invite representations (through a notice on the councils' websites, and advertising through other methods such as social media, news releases, council publications or press adverts), we will include an email address and phone number for the Planning Policy team, so that anyone having problems viewing the documents can discuss the consultation and seek assistance to view them or to make comments.

The service will also continue to explore new engagement measures. This may include virtual events, webinars or other media releases but will also need to reflect current government guidance in force at that time.

How the community can prepare a Neighbourhood Plan or Order

Hard copy documents

One of the requirements of the national legislation regarding neighbourhood planning is that local planning authorities should have hard copies of documents available for inspection during public consultations relating to different stages of the plan making process. This is particularly the case after the neighbourhood plan and associated documents are submitted to the local planning authority when a public consultation is carried out by the authority and the documents being consulted upon should be available for inspection. We must indicate when and where the documents can be inspected. In our SCI, we commit to having available for inspection a set of the documents in our council offices and also a set in a location within the neighbourhood plan area. In May, we amended our SCI to reflect the fact that we could not make such documents available as our council offices were closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Government guidance, published in May, indicated that it is not mandatory for copies of documents to be made available at a physical location. We wished to ensure that everyone in the community could have access to neighbourhood plan documents and hoped that by the autumn of 2020 that there would be a lifting of COVID-19 restrictions and we would be able to reopen our council offices to the public. This has proved not to be the case and therefore we have had to consider how documents can be made available during the current COVID-19 pandemic as we are aware that the government is keen for neighbourhood plans to continue to make progress.

During the submission consultation of a neighbourhood plan carried out by us we will publicise that if anyone has difficulties in accessing the on-line documents there will be a contact phone number and email address for them to ask for help of the Planning Policy Team to access documents which includes help to access a hard copy of the documents .

We will keep the situation under review as government advice in response to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic is updated.

The Ministry of Housing, Community and Local Government has published a new section to the [on-line planning guidance](#) relating to neighbourhood planning specifically about the impact of the Coronavirus pandemic and neighbourhood plans. The guidance also indicates that no referendums can be carried out now until May 2021.

Appendix 1

Revised approaches in the adopted SCI in response to COVID-19 pandemic which apply alongside the original existing procedures

Page	Paragraph	Text in the adopted SCI	Revised approach in response to COVID-19 pandemic.
9	Table 1	<p>Consultation methods:</p> <p>Consultation documents will be available to view on the councils' websites, and at council offices.</p> <p>Public consultation events if appropriate to the nature of the consultation.</p>	<p>Documents will not be available to view at council offices until further notice.</p> <p>Any public consultation events will take account of government guidance.</p>
12	Table 2	<p>Consultation methods:</p> <p>Consultation documents will be available to view on the councils' websites, and at council offices.</p> <p>Public consultation events if appropriate to the nature of the consultation.</p>	<p>Documents will not be available to view at council offices until further notice.</p> <p>Any public consultation events will take account of government guidance.</p>

10	3.16	If the Inspector has concluded that the Plan is 'sound' the council will adopt the Plan and will publish an adoption statement on their website and make it available to view at council offices.	Documents will not be available to view at council offices until further notice.
13	3.32	Upon adoption, the Supplementary Planning document (SPD) will be published together with an adoption statement, made available to view on the councils' websites, and at the councils' main offices during normal working hours.	Documents will not be available to view at council offices until further notice.
13	Table 3 - Regulation 5, 6 and 7 Neighbourhood Area Designation	<p>The relevant qualifying body will be asked to assist the local planning authority in publicising the consultation by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Placing information about it in any local newsletters or on their website, and • Placing around their local area at key locations the consultation poster prepared by the council. <p>Consultation documents available to view on the councils' websites and at council offices during normal working hours; and additionally, at the relevant qualifying body's office or other</p>	<p>Any public consultation events or putting up of posters will take account of government guidance.</p> <p>Documents will not be available to view at council offices. In publicising the consultation contact details (both phone and email of the Planning</p>

		<p>appropriate publicly accessible venue within the neighbourhood area.</p>	<p>Policy team) will be available for people to ask for help to access the documents which includes help to access a hard copy of the documents.</p> <p>Deposit of documents within the neighbourhood area will not be available until further notice.</p>
13	<p>Table 3 Regulation 9, 10 and 11 Designation of a neighbourhood forum</p>	<p>The relevant qualifying body will be asked to assist the council in publicising the consultation by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Placing information about it in any local newsletters or on their website, and • Placing around their local area at key locations the consultation poster prepared by the council. <p>Consultation documents available to view on the councils' websites and at council offices during normal working hours; and additionally, at the relevant qualifying body's office or other appropriate publicly accessible venue within the neighbourhood area.</p>	<p>Any public consultation events or putting up of posters will take account of government guidance.</p> <p>Documents will not be available to view at council offices. In publicising the consultation contact details (both phone and email of the Planning Policy team) will be available for people to</p>

			<p>ask for help to access the documents which includes help to access a hard copy of the documents.</p> <p>Deposit of documents within the neighbourhood area will not be available until further notice.</p>
13	Regulation 15 and 16 Submission	<p>Consultation documents available to view on the councils' websites and at council offices during normal working hours; and additionally, at the relevant qualifying body's office or other appropriate publicly accessible venue within the neighbourhood area.</p>	<p>Documents will not be available to view at council offices. In publicising the consultation contact details (both phone and email of the Planning Policy team) will be available for people to ask for help to access the documents which includes help to access a hard copy of the documents.</p> <p>Deposit of documents within the neighbourhood area will not be available until further notice.</p>