

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENT, CULTURE AND SPORT

TO:	STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT, PLANNING AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE		
DATE:	20 th NOVEMBER 2013	AGENDA ITEM:	15
TITLE:	DRAFT STATEMENT OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY APPRAISAL SCOPING REPORT		
LEAD COUNCILLOR:	COUNCILLOR PAGE	PORTFOLIO:	REGENERATION, TRANSPORT AND PLANNING
SERVICE:	PLANNING	WARDS:	ALL
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JOB TITLE:	PRINCIPAL PLANNER	E-MAIL:	mark.worringham@reading.gov.uk

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The Statement of Community Involvement and Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report are two planning documents that specifically deal with the process of producing planning policy and making major planning decisions. The Statement of Community Involvement details how consultation and community involvement on plans and applications will be carried out, whilst the Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report sets the basis for assessing the environmental, social and economic effects of documents. Both documents are statutory requirements.
- 1.2 The Council has existing versions of both of these document, dating from 2006 and 2008 respectively. However, with work expected to begin soon on reviewing the local development plan, there is an opportunity to revise these documents to take account of recent changes, learn from experience, and make them more appropriate to current circumstances.

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 That the draft Statement of Community Involvement (Appendix 2) be approved for community involvement.
- 2.2 That the draft Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Consultation Paper (Appendix 3) be approved for community involvement.

3. POLICY CONTEXT

- 3.1 The Statement of Community Involvement is a document which is part of a local authority's set of planning policy documents, and its purpose is to set out how the local planning authority will involve the community in producing planning documents, as well as on planning applications and pre-application enquiries. It discusses which groups will be consulted, when, how and for how long. It is a statutory requirement that a local planning authority should have a Statement of Community Involvement.
- 3.2 A Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report sets out the framework for undertaking sustainability appraisal of plans and proposals. Sustainability appraisal is a process of assessing plans or proposals against a range of environmental, social and economic effects to highlight what the effects of the plan or proposal would be. Each version of each of the Council's development plan documents has been accompanied by a sustainability appraisal. A Scoping Report determines which environmental, social and economic objectives will be used in the assessment, and sets out key baseline information for carrying out the assessment. For example, if one of the objectives is to do with air quality, the Scoping Report sets out up-to-date information on current levels of air quality in Reading.

4. THE PROPOSAL

(a) Current Position

- 4.1 The Council adopted its current Statement of Community Involvement in July 2006, after going through two consultation stages and an independent examination (which was undertaken by written representations rather than by hearing). Its role was to provide the basis for undertaking consultation and community involvement in producing the Local Development Framework (LDF).
- 4.2 The SCI therefore was used in designing and carrying out community involvement in producing the Core Strategy (adopted in January 2008), Reading Central Area Action Plan (adopted January 2009) and the Sites and Detailed Policies Document (adopted October 2012), as well as a number of Supplementary Planning Documents providing more detail on these documents. The Council is now at a stage where the main LDF documents have been produced, and now intends to work towards replacing these documents with a single Local Plan. The process for undertaking this is set out in the Local Development Scheme, approved by this Committee on 9th July 2013 (Minute 8 refers), and it includes production of a revised SCI.
- 4.3 A revised SCI represents an opportunity to bring the document into line with new Council consultation guidance, to reflect the substantial recent experience of community involvement, to streamline processes to make the most of resources, and to slim down the document to make it more concise.

4.4 The last version of the Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report was published in October 2008. Its main purpose was to ensure an up-to-date basis for undertaking sustainability appraisal on site allocations and development management policies which were included in the Sites and Detailed Policies Document. However, the baseline information included in the document is now somewhat out of date.

(b) Option Proposed

4.5 Committee is recommended to approve the Draft Statement of Community Involvement (Appendix 2) and Draft Sustainability Appraisal Consultation Paper (Appendix 3) for consultation.

4.6 Once consultation is complete, the Council will consider the need for further changes to the two documents. Unless very significant changes are required, the documents can then be adopted at some point early in 2014.

4.7 The draft version of the Statement of Community Involvement is an entirely new document from what was adopted in 2006. The main changes can be summarised as follows:

- The Regulations on what to include within a SCI have been substantially relaxed and the process simplified. This means that much of the content and presentation has been streamlined, as it will not be required to include specific elements in order to pass a public examination. It has therefore been made substantially shorter and more concise.
- It has been updated to be based around the Council's 2012 Community Involvement Guidance.
- It has drawn on a substantial amount of experience of consultations between 2006 and now, in terms of what works, at which time, and in which places. In particular, it strengthens the approach of undertaking the widest possible consultation at the earliest possible stage to ensure the community have the maximum opportunity to help shape plans and strategies.
- Past experience of community involvement has also highlighted which respondents are under-represented, which particularly include people under 40, ethnic minority groups and people living in certain parts of Reading, particularly the South. The SCI therefore identifies these groups in particular.
- There needs to be an increasing move towards communicating electronically, through contacting consultees by e-mail and also use of social media. Whilst there is still a need for notifying some consultees by letter, particularly where they do not have internet access, moving increasingly to electronic communication will represent a significant resource saving.

4.8 In terms of the Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report, a new version will need to update the baseline information and make amendments to

the sustainability objectives against which plans are assessed. It is important to ensure up to date baseline information, as the appraisal should be informed by the most accurate data possible to avoid being open to challenge. In addition, the objectives need some review to keep up to date with local strategies and priorities and to be more practical to operate. There are also other assessments of plans that are usually required, particularly Equality Impact Assessment and Habitat Regulations Assessment, and this represents an opportunity to combine sustainability appraisal with the initial screening-level assessment to comply with those requirements. A full version of the Scoping Report is not required at the consultation stage, as much of the baseline data is merely factual information. Therefore, a Consultation Paper is proposed which summarises the principal changes proposed (Appendix 3).

(c) Other Options Considered

4.9 There is one alternative option, which is not to produce new versions of the documents and instead continue to rely on the 2006/2008 versions.

4.10 This option would continue to fulfil the statutory minimum requirements. However, it would have a number of disadvantages. For the SCI, it would result in a consultation approach which does not target resources most efficiently and which does not reflect the Council's current consultation guidance. For the Scoping Report, it would mean relying on outdated baseline data, which could lead to less accurate assessment of sustainability effects, and therefore provide a poor basis for developing planning policy. It would also result in the duplication of effort with other assessments such as Equality Impact Assessment.

5. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

5.1 The Statement of Community Involvement and Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report will contribute to achieving the following strategic aims, through ensuring that planning policy takes account of the views of the community and that environmental, social and economic effects are taken account of:

- The development of Reading as a Green City with a sustainable environment and economy at the heart of the Thames Valley;
- Establishing Reading as a learning City and a stimulating and rewarding place to live and visit;
- Promoting equality, social inclusion and a safe and healthy environment for all.

6. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

6.1 The Statement of Community Involvement sets out how community involvement on planning matters will be carried out. The Draft Statement of Community Involvement and Draft Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report will be subject to a six-week period of consultation. This

will be carried out in line with the existing Statement of Community Involvement (SCI), adopted by Council on 27 June 2006 (minute 17 refers).

7. EQUALITY ASSESSMENT

- 7.1 The Scoping Assessment, included at Appendix 1 identifies that an Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) is relevant to the Statement of Community Involvement and Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report. The EqIA (also at Appendix 1) identifies that there are positive impacts for all protected characteristic, but particularly on age and racial groups, as defined in the Equality Act, because some of these groups have traditionally been underrepresented in consultation in the past meaning that specific measures are proposed in the draft SCI. Compliance with the duties under S149 of the Equality Act 2010 can involve treating some persons more favourably than others, but it is not considered that there will be a negative impact on other groups with relevant protected characteristics.

8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 A Statement of Community Involvement is a requirement under Section 18 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. The 2004 Act was amended by section 180 of the Planning Act 2008, which streamlined the process of production, including removing the need for independent examination. An additional amendment to Section 18 was made by Schedule 12 of the Localism Act 2011 to reflect neighbourhood planning.
- 8.2 The need to undertake sustainability appraisal of plans and policies and publish the results is set out in Section 19(5) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. The Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 contain more detailed regulations on how sustainability appraisal is to be carried out.

9 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 The work undertaken on drafting the documents and the expenditure on community engagement has been, and will continue to be, funded from existing budgets. There are no other direct revenue or financial implications arising from this report.

Value for Money (VFM)

- 9.2 The SCI will provide value for money in that it specifically considers how resources could be most efficiently used in carrying out community involvement, particularly including through electronic communications. It also considers how to target specific groups and areas to make best use of resources.

- 9.3 The Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report will provide value for money in particular by seeking to combine the initial screening level Equalities Impact Assessment and Habitat Regulations Assessment with the Sustainability Appraisal process to avoid duplication of effort.

Risk Assessment

- 9.3 There are no direct financial risks associated with the report.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

- Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004
- Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012
- Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004
- National Planning Policy Framework
- Statement of Community Involvement (adopted June 2006)
- Revised Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report (October 2008)
- Local Development Scheme (July 2013)

Provide basic details

Name of proposal/activity/policy to be assessed:

Statement of Community Involvement (SCI)

Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report (SASR)

Directorate: DENS - Directorate of Environment and Neighbourhood Services

Service: Planning, Development and Regulatory Services

Name: Mark Worringham

Job Title: Principal Planner

Date of assessment: 01/10/13

Scope your proposal

What is the aim of your policy or new service?

SCI - to set out how community involvement on planning documents and decisions will be carried out.

SASR - to establish the basis for assessing the significant effects of plans and proposals on environmental, social and economic objectives.

Who will benefit from this proposal and how?

SCI - the local community and other stakeholders will benefit through being involved in planning documents and decisions at a time and in a way when there is a genuine opportunity to shape the results.

SASR - the local community will benefit through environmental, social and economic effects being taken into account throughout planning policy development.

What outcomes will the change achieve and for whom?

SCI - the community will have a genuine say in planning documents and decisions. For planning policy documents, specific efforts will be made to reach previously underrepresented groups, e.g. younger people, ethnic minorities and people in certain areas of Reading.

SASR - the SA process will influence the development of planning policy, resulting in policies which seek to avoid or mitigate significant environmental, social or economic effects.

Who are the main stakeholders and what do they want?

SCI - Local residents, community and voluntary groups, local businesses, relevant developers and landowners, infrastructure providers, statutory consultees. All stakeholders would like a greater say in the planning process, and in a manner which enables them to have a genuine influence.

SASR - statutory consultees such as the Environment Agency and Natural England are particularly relevant, and they would like their specific areas of interest strongly represented in the objectives. Developers and landowners would wish the document to clearly set out the authority's assessment process and avoid unreasonable burdens

on development. All other stakeholders (local residents, community and voluntary groups, local businesses, relevant developers and landowners, infrastructure providers) could be affected by the document, and they would wish the document to clearly reflect how the assessment process will be carried out on a consistent basis.

Assess whether an EIA is Relevant

How does your proposal relate to eliminating discrimination; promoting equality of opportunity; promoting good community relations?

Do you have evidence or reason to believe that some (racial, disability, gender, sexuality, age and religious belief) groups may be affected differently than others? (Think about your monitoring information, research, national data/reports etc)

Yes No

Is there already public concern about potentially discriminatory practices/impact or could there be? Think about your complaints, consultation, feedback.

Yes No

If the answer is Yes to any of the above you need to do an Equality Impact Assessment.

If No you **MUST** complete this statement

An Equality Impact Assessment is not relevant because: N/A

Assess the Impact of the Proposal

Your assessment must include:

- Consultation
- Collection and Assessment of Data
- Judgement about whether the impact is negative or positive

Consultation

Relevant groups/experts	How were/will the views of these groups be obtained	Date when contacted
Local residents, community and voluntary groups, local businesses, relevant developers and landowners, infrastructure providers, statutory consultees	Consultation will involve notifying consultees of the documents, publication on the website, availability in key offices, press releases, social media etc.	November - December 2013

Collect and Assess your Data

Describe how could this proposal impact on Racial groups

In the SCI, ethnic minority groups have been specifically identified as being groups whose involvement should be specifically sought due to their underrepresentation in previous consultations. The SCI proposes measures to achieve this.

The SASR links the sustainability appraisal and equality impact assessment processes to ensure that equality impacts are factored into planning policy production from the outset.

Impacts are therefore expected to be positive.

Is there a negative impact? Yes No Not sure

Describe how could this proposal impact on Gender/transgender (cover pregnancy and maternity, marriage)

The SASR links the sustainability appraisal and equality impact assessment processes to ensure that equality impacts are factored into planning policy production from the outset.

Impacts are therefore expected to be positive.

Is there a negative impact? Yes No Not sure

Describe how could this proposal impact on Disability

The SCI specifically identifies disability groups as needing to be included within consultation exercises where appropriate.

The SASR links the sustainability appraisal and equality impact assessment processes to ensure that equality impacts are factored into planning policy production from the outset.

Impacts are therefore expected to be positive.

Is there a negative impact? Yes No Not sure

Describe how could this proposal impact on Sexual orientation (cover civil partnership)

The SASR links the sustainability appraisal and equality impact assessment processes to ensure that equality impacts are factored into planning policy production from the outset.

Impacts are therefore expected to be positive.

Is there a negative impact? Yes No Not sure

Describe how could this proposal impact on Age

In the SCI, younger people (under 40) have been specifically identified as being groups whose involvement should be specifically sought due to their underrepresentation in previous consultations. The SCI proposes measures to achieve this.

The SASR links the sustainability appraisal and equality impact assessment processes to ensure that equality impacts are factored into planning policy production from the outset.

Impacts are therefore expected to be positive.

Is there a negative impact? Yes No Not sure

Describe how could this proposal impact on Religious belief?

The SCI specifically identifies religious groups as needing to be included within consultation exercises where appropriate.

Impacts are therefore expected to be positive.

Is there a negative impact? Yes No Not sure

Make a Decision

Tick which applies

1. **No negative impact identified** Go to sign off
2. **Negative impact identified but there is a justifiable reason**

You must give due regard or weight but this does not necessarily mean that the equality duty overrides other clearly conflicting statutory duties that you must comply with.
Reason
3. **Negative impact identified or uncertain**

What action will you take to eliminate or reduce the impact? Set out your actions and timescale?

How will you monitor for adverse impact in the future?

The results of consultation exercises will continue to be analysed to identify whether any particular groups are particularly excluded from the community involvement processes.

The SASR contains proposals for monitoring the significant effects of plans and proposals against sustainability objectives, including objectives relating to equality and diversity.

Signed (completing officer) Mark Worringham Date: 1st October 2013
Signed (Lead Officer) Mark Worringham Date: 1st October 2013