



Coventry City Council

9.7.1

Public report

Report to

Cabinet
Council

31 October 2006

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Report of

Director of City Development

Title

Adoption of Coventry's Statement of Community Involvement (SCI)

1.0 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to advise Members of the outcome of the binding report by the Planning Inspectorate following the independent examination of the submission version of the Statement of Community Involvement (SCI), and to seek Cabinet and Council approval for the adoption of the revised SCI.

2.0 Recommendations

The Cabinet are asked to:

- 2.1 endorse the final version of the SCI for adoption and recommend its adoption to full Council.

3.0 Information/Background

- 3.1 SCIs are required by the Government as part of the new planning system introduced by the 2004 Planning & Compulsory Purchase Act. Coventry's SCI explains, in clear terms, how people and organisations can get involved in the preparation of planning policies and in specific proposals and planning applications. The Council is also obliged to adhere to the recommendations set out in the binding report. The submission draft of the SCI has been prepared against a broad backcloth of consultation activity.

- 3.2 In May 2005 an informal consultation exercise comprised a citywide newspaper questionnaire featured in the Coventry Observer, and a leaflet questionnaire sent to local community and resident groups, statutory consultees and partner organisations. In July 2005, a formal 6 week period of statutory consultation generated numerous comments on the draft of the SCI. A significant amount of information and comment was considered as a result of the consultation process that was used to improve the SCI. This culminated in a further draft that was submitted to the Government for independent examination.

3.3 The purpose of this Statement of Community Involvement is to set out Coventry City Council's policy for involving the community in the preparation and revision of all Local Development Documents and in consultations on planning applications. The Statement of Community Involvement:

- is a clear public statement enabling the community to know when and how they can get involved in the preparation of local development documents, and how they will be consulted on planning applications.
- sets out the standards to be achieved and how the minimum legal requirements for consultation will be met or exceeded.

3.4 Effective community involvement in the planning system brings several benefits. Involvement:

- helps to promote planning as a strategic, proactive force for delivering sustainable development;
- leads to outcomes that better reflect the views, aspirations and needs of the wider community in all its diversity
- improves the quality and efficiency of planning decisions, by drawing on local knowledge and reducing conflict; and
- promotes social cohesion by making connections with communities and offering them a tangible stake in decision making.

3.5 The vision of the SCI is that:

- people and organisations from all backgrounds and communities are able to engage in planning for sustainable development;
- the knowledge and foresight of residents and planners is combined to prioritise and detail planning policy to meet current and future needs;
- all stakeholders, elected members and officers have a high level of awareness of planning policy and processes and built environment quality issues;
- highly skilled staff with a commitment to community engagement facilitate an open, transparent and accessible process;
- shared values, enshrined in agreed policy, underline a spirit of partnership between stakeholders; and
- leading to a user-friendly, attractive and sustainable city.

3.6 Coventry's Statement of Community Involvement has five objectives. These objectives say what we will aim to do to fulfil our vision of engaging people and organisations in planning Coventry's future. We aim:

- to help make the planning system transparent, by making plans, policies, development proposals and planning decisions available in a form which is easily understood and accessible;
- to make the planning system proactive by combining the knowledge of residents and planners to provide greater foresight in anticipating and satisfying future needs for planning policy;
- to promote participation and involvement by presenting clear opportunities for people to make their views known and to take part in the planning process, and by demonstrating that people's views have been considered by decision-makers;
- to make the planning system accessible and inclusive, by removing barriers to involvement and by reaching out to groups that have been less engaged in the past; and

- to be accountable, by clearly identifying decision-makers and processes and ensuring that people get feedback about progress and outcomes.
- 3.7 Failure to meet the standards as set out in the final version of the SCI could result in Development Plan Documents being unable to progress through to adoption and leave Supplementary Planning Documents open to challenge. The primary test for Development Plan Documents when subject to Examination is that they are 'sound', as defined in government guidance. One test of soundness is that the document has been prepared in accordance with the approved Statement of Community Involvement (or the relevant Regulations if the Statement of Community Involvement is not yet adopted).
- 3.8 A number of principles have been developed through the Coventry Community Plan, Coventry Corporate Plan, National Policy Statements and examples of good practice across the City and beyond in planning and regeneration activities.

- **EARLY ENGAGEMENT** "Front-loading", beginning consultation at the earliest opportunity, will ensure that people recognise they have the opportunity to make a difference to plans and proposals, and that they experience a sense of ownership throughout the planning process. It is not sufficient to invite them to comment once proposals have been worked up. Involvement at the formative stage of policy development and review or a particular development proposal, is essential to achieve a sense of community ownership over the policies that will shape the future development of the city and improve the quality of development.
- **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT FIT FOR PURPOSE** Arrangements should be built on a clear understanding of the communities' needs and aspirations depending on the nature of the planning purpose. It is essential that all main interest groups and key stakeholders are aware and respect a common understanding of the approach adopted. This is particularly relevant in communities where they may be sceptical of others trying to gain territorial advantage. People will want to be involved for a variety of reasons; including, curiosity, fear of change, financial gain, neighbourliness, professional duty, protection of interests or socialising. The need to recognise different agendas is important so that the consultation technique(s) employed can aim to embrace all sections of the community.
- **TRANSPARENCY AND OPENNESS** The process of consultation and people's roles should be clear and transparent at all levels of engagement so people know when they will be able to participate and seeking to ensure participation extends beyond those who are familiar with the planning system. Being open and straightforward about the nature of the activity will generally mean communities will participate more freely as they may have a greater understanding and trust of the process. This also means being clear about what is 'on offer'. Clear explanations as to what can and cannot be influenced and how the results will be used and what feedback will be given are essential.
- **BUILDING LOCAL CAPACITY AND TRUST** Genuine long-term community sustainability depends on developing local links and partnerships. The continuing opportunities to develop local skills and involve local people in surveying their own situation, running their own programmes and managing local assets cannot, and should not be underestimated.
- **INVOLVE ALL THOSE AFFECTED ACROSS ALL SECTIONS OF THE COMMUNITY** Planning tends to work best if all parties are committed to the process. Activities in which key players (such as landowners or planners) sit on the sidelines are all too common and rarely achieve their objectives completely. Investment in time spent winning over cynics before formal consultation can be worthwhile. If there are people or groups, who cannot be convinced at the outset, keep them informed and give them the option of joining in later on. Planning documents need to be in plain language, satisfying clear print standards and available in different formats to encourage wide readership;

paper and electronic versions will be necessary, and languages other than English, large print, audio and Braille versions should be provided on request wherever practicable. Techniques and practical arrangements need to be tailored to engage the relevant parts of the community. Locations and venues for document inspection, exhibitions and meetings must be accessible for disabled people and convenient for the target communities and neighbourhoods. Meetings must be inclusive in the way that they are organised.

- **EMPLOY A MIXTURE OF METHODS** The choice of involvement methods will be crucial, as different people will want to take part in different ways. For instance, some will be happy to write letters, others will prefer to make comments at an exhibition or take part in workshop sessions. A flexible approach needs to be adopted in selecting different techniques and methods of engagement. Need to consider which people may be affected and how people will get involved, what facilities are available and how to work with agencies such as Planning Aid to help communities let their voice be heard.
- **BUILDING CONSENSUS AND ACCEPTING DISAGREEMENT** The process of engagement aims to build as wide as possible consensus around plans for the future of the city and individual development proposals. It is recognised, however, that the nature of planning involves choices and implies decisions as to the weight attached to conflicting economic, social and environmental objectives. All partners enter the process understanding that consensus may not be achieved and that final plans or decisions may disappoint them. Disagreement with particular plans or decisions should not undermine the spirit of partnership or imply disloyalty to the City. It must be recognised by all that the role of Councillors represent the community and they are accountable through the ballot box. They have the statutory responsibility for decision making.
- **PROVIDE FEEDBACK** It is essential for building trust and ensuring future engagement, as well as being a courtesy to those who have been involved, that the contribution of participants in consultation is acknowledged and that they are able to track the influence that their views had on the final outcomes.
- **MONITOR AND EVALUATE CONSULTATIONS** It is essential that mechanisms be put in place to feedback from communities on the process of engagement, and to monitor its effectiveness and its effect on built environment quality and the efficiency of the planning system. Methods used need to be evaluated by partners to inform future practice and the review of this Statement of Community Involvement. A Coventry Compact Code of Practice on Consultation has been developed that amplifies these objectives

3.9 The SCI details the key players engaged and also identifies the forums already provided: Area Forums; Coventry by Design Forum; development forum; residents liaison forum. It identifies tools and commitments in respect of engagement with communities on the formulation of policy and in respect of individual planning applications. Tables 1 and 2 appended to this report provide a summary of techniques.

4.0 Proposal and Other Option(s) to be considered

4.1 The SCI was formally submitted to the Secretary of State on 4 April 2006. From 10 April 2006 to Monday 22 May 2006, the Council invited representations on the submitted version of the SCI. This resulted in 9 representations, 4 of these considered the SCI not to be sound. All representations were submitted to the Planning Inspectorate for consideration as part of the examination. Table 3 provides a summary of the representations and the responses made to the Inspector considering the soundness of the SCI through the consideration of written representations.

4.2 The examination was held in August 2006, which culminated in the Council being sent the Inspectors Report on 30 August 2006. The report is binding, as are all Inspectors Reports under the new planning system. It states that subject to amendment in accordance with the recommendations made, Coventry's Statement of Community Involvement is sound. The recommendations made were:

- In Appendix A, at the end of the first paragraph, add a final sentence as follows: "Please note, the list of bodies in this Appendix is not exhaustive and also relates to successor bodies where re-organisations occur."
- Add a footnote or an additional text box to Figure 2 (Page 49) to read: "An additional period of 6 weeks consultation is allowed after submission but before the examination in the event of site allocation representations being made."
- At Paragraph 6.17, add a final sentence as follows: "LDF documents and any related literature can be made available in a variety of formats e.g. Braille, large print, audio cassette, languages other than English. Documents in other formats can be obtained from: The Development Plans Team, Civic Centre 4, Floor 6, Much Park Street, Coventry CV1 2PY. Tel: (024) 7683 1298 Fax: (024) 7683 1259 E-mail: development.policy@coventry.gov.uk".
- In Paragraph 8.10 after the first sentence, add an additional sentence: "(However, bodies such as English Nature will be allowed a longer period of time to comment on applications where this is prescribed by legislation)."
- In table 2 (Page 58), under the heading Significant Planning Applications in the Pre-application category, remove the tick from the Public Meetings column.
- The Council should remove all references to previous stages of this document and replace any preface containing such references with a statement of adoption.

4.3 The SCI presents a significant step in the Council preparing its Local Development Framework and will provide the foundations for the Council's planning service to continue to seek to develop best practice in community involvement.

5.0 Other Specific Implications

	Implications (See below)	No Implications
Best Value	✓	
Children and Young People		✓
Comparable Benchmark Data		✓
Corporate Parenting		✓
Coventry Community Plan	✓	
Crime and Disorder		✓
Equal Opportunities		✓
Finance	✓	
Health and Safety		✓
Human Resources	✓	
Human Rights Act		✓
Impact on Partner Organisations	✓	
Information and Communications Technology	✓	

	Implications (See below)	No Implications
Legal Implications	✓	
Neighbourhood Management	✓	
Property Implications		✓
Race Equality Scheme		✓
Risk Management		✓
Sustainable Development		✓
Trade Union Consultation		✓
Voluntary Sector – The Coventry Compact		✓

Best Value

- 5.1 It is hoped that the work undertaken to date within the communities and the approach of the SCI will result in improved customer satisfaction.

Coventry Community Plan

- 5.2 Effective linkages between community strategies and Local Development Frameworks are an essential part of spatial planning.

Finance

- 5.3 The formulation of the SCI was funded through the Planning and Delivery Grant (PDG), which the Government introduced to assist planning authorities in dealing with planning related issues. The PDG is due to end at the end of 2006/07 and consultation has taken place regarding its replacement. It is expected that future funding arrangements will be announced as part of the 2007 Comprehensive Spending Review. Officers believe that this Statement of Community Involvement offers the most cost effective and time efficient way forward given Coventry's situation with its relatively up-to-date Coventry Development Plan and the staff resources at our disposal. It is anticipated that the extra costs associated with implementing the SCI at current service levels can be met from within current budgetary resources supported by the PDG and its future replacement, whilst any improvements to service provision would require additional ongoing investment.

Human Resources

- 5.4 The retention of staff is critical to the delivery of projects. The provision of training and staff support is also required to ensure the standard of performance can be improved.
Legal Implications

- 5.5 As part of the new Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, there is a legal obligation to prepare and adopt an SCI. The SCI will be utilised for the purposes set out earlier in this report. Failure to consult on Development Plan Documents in accordance with the SCI will be open to legal challenge and/or the Secretary of State can require the Document in issue to be withdrawn.

Impact on Partner Organisations

- 5.6 The spatial planning approach, which underscores the new planning system, is intended to facilitate and encourage the development of new forms of partnership and continuing

involvement with a range of bodies. The SCI has been prepared in close partnership with the Coventry Partnership, Community Empowerment Network, community groups and Directorates across the Council.

Information and Communications Technology

- 5.7 ICT systems have been extensively developed and are proposed to be used as a media for providing information and communicating and monitoring.

Neighbourhood Management

- 5.8 The development of the Submission Draft SCI has acknowledged the close working opportunities that exist in order to help dovetail consultation with Neighbourhood Management functions and responsibilities.

6.0 Monitoring

- 6.1 Review and monitoring are key aspects of the new Planning approach. In particular, Local Planning Authorities are expected to produce an Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) to assess both the implementation of the Local Development Scheme and the performance of planning policies. The first AMR has been prepared and approved by Cabinet Member in December 2005 and has been submitted to the Government Office of the West Midlands. The second AMR will be presented to the Cabinet Member in December 2006.

7.0 Timescale and expected outcomes

- 7.1 Targets for determination of applications are nationally set whereas in terms of plan preparation LPA's have the opportunity to submit and review through the AMR their project management programmes contained in Local Development Schemes. However experience is showing that community engagement often requires a slowing down of processes to enable front loading to happen.

	Yes	No
Key Decision		✓
Scrutiny Consideration (if yes, which Scrutiny meeting and date)		✓
Council Consideration (if yes, date of Council meeting)	✓ 31 October 2006	

List of background papers

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Papers open to Public Inspection.

Description of paper

Location

LDF 4 (SCI) I – Statement of Community Involvement

CC4/6.03

Appendix

Table 1: Community Involvement Methods and Techniques

Method/Technique	Stage Appropriate			Description	Evidence Base
	Issues & Options	Preferred Options	Submission		
Exhibitions/Roadshows/Open Days	✓	✓		Effective means of providing information to the wider community and inviting views in an informal way.	6% of SCI questionnaire respondents considered this to be a useful means of involvement.
Questionnaires/Surveys	✓	✓		Can enable detailed and focused consultation around a series of worded questions.	
Letter, Email and Website	✓	✓	✓	All consultation documents will be published on the Council's website. Responses can be submitted via downloading documents.	38% of SCI questionnaire respondents considered email to be a useful method of communication but 62% still preferred written letter.
Media & Publicity	✓	✓	✓	Local newspapers will be used to advertise publication of plans/documents and meetings. Use will also be made through the Council's own magazine 'Citivision'. Radio and television may also be willing to assist. Statutory Notices will be used to invite comments during the preparation of plans.	9% of SCI questionnaire respondents considered 'Citivision' to be a useful means of informing.
Planning Workshops	✓	✓		Discussion based event to present and gather information usually focused around a series of topics or issues.	12% of SCI questionnaire respondents considered community workshops to be a useful means of involvement.
Master Planning & Planning For Real	✓	✓		Covers issues such as potential layout, design and incorporates the communities' requirements. Useful techniques in master planning an area can include 'Enquiry By Design' and Planning for Real'.	Proven successes through working examples in the city, which include Swanswell and Stoke Aldermoor Regeneration projects.

Steering Groups, Networks & Forums	✓	✓	✓	Mechanism for focusing and engaging in the production of all plans and documents.	A LDF Corporate Working Group has been established with officers from each Directorate of the Council. Other LDF Task and Finish Groups have been set up with CEN and The Coventry Partnership.
Visioning Events & Stakeholder Meetings	✓	✓		Individual meetings with partners and stakeholders. Can obtain in-depth comments regarding documents and/or plans and useful in understanding and addressing outstanding issues.	Successful meetings held with key stakeholders during preparation of the SCI.

Table 2: Methods of Community Involvement, Consultation & Publicity

Type of Planning Application	Stages of Application	Methods of Publicity, Consultation and Involvement									
		Weekly List	Web Site	Neighbour Notification *	Site Notice	Newspaper Advert	Exhibition of Plans	Press Release	Public Meetings	Development Forum	Planning Advisory Desk & Duty Officer
All Planning Applications	Pre-application (we recommend)										
	Application	✓	✓	✓							✓
	Post application		✓	✓							✓
	Appeal		✓	✓	✓	✓					✓
Significant Planning Applications	Pre-application (recommended methods to be undertaken by prospective developers/applicants)		✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Application	✓	✓	✓		✓			✓		✓
	Post Application		✓	✓							✓
	Appeal		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓			✓

* To notify neighbouring properties immediately adjoining the application site.