

**INSPECTOR'S REPORT**  
**SOUTH NORTHAMPTONSHIRE COUNCIL**  
**STATEMENT OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT**

Inspector: Keith Holland

Date: 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2006

## **South Northamptonshire Council - Statement of Community Involvement (March 2005)**

### **INSPECTOR'S REPORT**

#### **Introduction**

- 1.1 An independent examination of the South Northamptonshire Council Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) has been carried out in accordance with section 20 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act. Following paragraph 3.10 of Planning Policy Statement 12: Local Development Frameworks, the examination has been based on the 9 tests set out (see Appendix A). The starting point for the assessment is that the SCI is sound. Accordingly changes are made in this binding report only where there is clear need in the light of tests in PPS12.
- 1.2 A total of 123 representations were received all of which have been considered.

#### **Test 1**

- 2.1 The Council has undertaken the consultation required under Regulations 25, 26 and 28 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Development) (England) Regulations 2004. However Parish Councils in the adjoining borough (Milton Keynes) were not consulted due to a procedural error. This was rectified by a separate consultation exercise (08/08/05 to 23/09/05). I am satisfied that none of the Parish Councils have been prejudiced by this error. This test is therefore met.

#### **Test 2**

- 3.1 Paragraph 4.6 acknowledges that close links with the Local Strategic Partnership and the Community Strategy are necessary, and that the Council will work closely with other partnerships within the area. However the SCI does not acknowledge the full role of the Community Strategy. Furthermore there is no explicit recognition that there may be opportunities to run joint consultation particularly to avoid duplication. I have recommended an amendment to the text to address this issue.

#### **Recommendation**

**(R1)** Add the following additional text and paragraph to the end of Paragraph 4.6:

“....Major consultation undertaken by the Council is subject to a Corporate Consultation and Community Engagement Strategy to enable the co-ordination of all community consultation. A corporate Consultation Calendar is in place to facilitate the effective coordination of all surveys. Consultation into each development plan document will be subject to the

Consultation Strategy and can be linked with other consultation initiatives and the feedback obtained, where appropriate.

The Council has a number of Community Forum Groups, which represent different interests, and in some cases particular sections of the Community. As part of the consultation on each Local Development Document, use will be made of these groups i.e. Youth Council, Agents Forum and Town Centre Partnerships etc to obtain feedback on issues of relevance to these groups.

The Council recognises the close relationship between the Local Development Framework and Community Strategy and the need to ensure that Local Development Documents will feed off this document that will give a spatial dimension to its aims, objectives and initiatives. A sub-Group of the Council's Local Strategic Partnership (LSP), chaired by the lead officer on the Local Development Framework has been set up to ensure that this close relationship is maintained. All LSP representatives will be contacted using the Local Development Framework mailing database."

### **Test 3**

4.1 The Council has set out in Section 4 *Who will the Council Consult*, Table 1 page 44 and Appendix B page 41 of the SCI those groups which will be consulted. This includes the statutory bodies listed in PPS12 Annex E and additional local stakeholders. Section 5.0 *How the Council will Consult* of the SCI sets out how the Council propose to meet the consultation requirements set down in the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

4.2 This test is met.

### **Tests 4 and 5**

6.1 These tests are considered together as they are interrelated. In terms of the timescales involved Figure 2 provides some information concerning timescales but the SCI does not place sufficient emphasis on the importance of early involvement of the community in DPD production and it is not clear how sufficient time will be built into the process to allow meaningful consultation and the results of such exercises to be considered. I have recommended that additional text be added to the SCI to address this concern.

6.2 Section 4 and 5 both set out a range of appropriate and accessible methods for community consultation for LDDs. Paragraph 4.9 recognises the importance of engaging hard to reach groups and sets out how the Council will approach this practically.

### **Recommendation**

**(R2)** Add the following new Paragraph (6.3) to the SCI after Paragraph 6.2:

“A fundamental feature of the new system is that key decisions should be taken early in the preparation of a Local Development Document and become progressively more firm as it progresses through the formal stages. It is therefore very important that there is early community involvement in the process. The Council will engage with the public on the issues and options stage of each development plan document prior to its formal submission to the Secretary of State. The Regulations neither prescribe how long this stage of the plan preparation process should take nor the nature of consultation. The Council is committed to ensuring that the time allowed for this stage of community engagement will be at least the same 6 week period required for the formal consultation stages required later in the plan making process. Consultation will be carried out using the methods set out in Table 1 and all comments received will be considered, made available and reported back in the manner set out in the section on ‘Reporting Back’ of this Statement. The Local Development Scheme will ensure that sufficient time is allowed for this stage of the process.”

*N.B. The remaining paragraphs of section 6 should be renumbered accordingly.*

### **Test 6**

7.1 Section 8 of the SCI explains how the Council will seek to ensure that sufficient resources are put in place to achieve the scale of consultation envisaged.

7.2 This test is met.

### **Test 7**

8.1 Paragraph 4.15 “Decision Making” explains how the results of community involvement will be taken into account by the Council and used to inform decisions. What is not clear is how the results of community involvement will be reported and additional text should be added to the SCI to meet this concern.

### **Recommendation**

**(R3)** Add the following additional paragraphs to the end of Section 6:

#### **“Reporting Back**

Anyone who makes a comment at any stage of the preparation of a development plan document will be included on our database of interested parties and will automatically be kept informed at all subsequent stages of the process. The Council recognises that it is important to report back on the outcomes of community involvement in the planning process and is

committed to reporting back to those making comments, showing how and where comments have influenced preparation.

The Council will produce a summary report on the consultation for each stage in the preparation of development plan documents. This report will outline the responses to consultation exercises and how the responses were used to inform any decisions or documents. At the end of statutory consultation periods the Council will produce documents summarising the representations received, officer comments and recommended changes, with a justification for those changes. These reports will be considered by members of the Council's Cabinet and, where appropriate, full Council, who will make a decision on the recommendations. Members' decisions will be reported in minutes of Council meetings. This report will be made available on the Council's web-site, in local offices and libraries and will be available to individuals/organisations on request. In addition individuals and organisations will receive a written response to any comments they have made at statutory consultation stages in the process. Complete copies of representations made will also be made available for viewing on request."

### **Test 8**

- 9.1 Although Paragraph 11 contains information on how the Council evaluates the community involvement process, the SCI as drafted does not contain sufficient information on the mechanisms by which the SCI will be reviewed, particularly with respect to the Annual Monitoring Report. Additional tests should be added to the SCI to address this concern.

### **Recommendation**

- (R4)** Add the following additional (11.2) paragraph after paragraph 11.1

"Following adoption of the Statement of Community Involvement, the Council's Annual Monitoring Report will consider the effectiveness of the Statement of Community Involvement. Including monitoring to detail consultative exercises that have taken place in the year in relation to development plan documents produced. Where it becomes evident that the SCI is failing to meet its objectives, or where significant changes are required, the Council will consider reviewing the SCI. Any review of this document will necessitate following the same statutory process of public involvement, submission to the Secretary of State, examination and adoption."

### **Test 9**

- 10.1 The SCI at Part B, Section 9 clearly describes the Council's policy for consultation on planning applications. Paragraphs 9.1-9.3 meet the minimum requirements and provides for additional methods of consultation. This distinguishes between procedures appropriate for

different types and scale of application. The Section *How the Decision* is taken (page 35) includes information on how consultation results will inform decisions.

10.2 This test is met.

### **Additional Changes**

11.1 The Council have set out in the document "Responses to Consultation - Statement of Community Involvement" (undated) a number of proposed changes to the SCI in response to representations received on the submission document. These suggested amendments do not affect the substance of the SCI but they do improve the clarity and transparency of the submission SCI. I therefore recommend that they be included and I set out the recommendations below.

### **Recommendation**

**(R4)** Amend the SCI in accordance with the suggested changes set out in the "Responses to Consultation - Statement of Community Involvement" (see Appendix B).

### **Conclusions**

12.1 The South Northamptonshire Borough Council SCI (March 2005) is sound.

Keith Holland BA(Hons) Dip TP MRTPI ARICS

**APPENDIX A**  
**TESTS OF SOUNDNESS**

### **Examination of the soundness of the statement of community involvement**

3.10 The purpose of the examination is to consider the soundness of the statement of community involvement. The presumption will be that the statement of community involvement is sound unless it is shown to be otherwise as a result of evidence considered at the examination. A hearing will only be necessary where one or more of those making representations wish to be heard (see Annex D). In assessing whether the statement of community involvement is sound, the inspector will determine whether the:

- i. local planning authority has complied with the minimum requirements for consultation as set out in Regulations;<sup>1</sup>
- ii. local planning authority's strategy for community involvement links with other community involvement initiatives e.g. the community strategy;
- iii. statement identifies in general terms which local community groups and other bodies will be consulted;
- iv. statement identifies how the community and other bodies can be involved in a timely and accessible manner;
- v. methods of consultation to be employed are suitable for the intended audience and for the different stages in the preparation of local development documents;
- vi. resources are available to manage community involvement effectively;
- vii. statement shows how the results of community involvement will be fed into the preparation of development plan documents and supplementary planning documents;
- viii. authority has mechanisms for reviewing the statement of community involvement; and
- ix. statement clearly describes the planning authority's policy for consultation on planning applications.

*From:* Planning Policy Statement 12: Local Development Frameworks

<sup>1</sup> The Town and Country Planning (Local Development) (England) Regulations, 2004.

## APPENDIX B – Additional Changes

- 1) That the Woodland Trust be added to Appendix D (Other Organisations and Agencies)  
Add the Woodland trust to the table in paragraph 9.15 as to be consulted on applications within or adjacent to woodland.
- 2) That appendix B be amended to replace RMPH with Atis Real and that Atis Real Weargeralls be deleted from Appendix C.
- 3) That the NRCC be added to Appendix D (Other Organisations and Agencies)
- 4) That TW be moved from Water Undertaker to Sewage Taker in Appendix B.
- 5) CTC are added to Appendix D. (Other Organisations and Agencies)
- 6) Remove the word “a” from the first sentence in paragraph 2.3.
- 7) Remove the word “an” from the first sentence in paragraph 3.8.
- 8) Update mailing list to replace Tony Clark MP with Brian Binley MP.
- 9) Amend Figure 2 to correct typographical error.
- 10) Amend Paragraph 6.15 to refer to a 6 week consultation period.
- 11) Amend Appendix B to refer to Home Builders Federation.
- 12) Amend Paragraph 2.3 to correct typographical error.
- 13) Amend Paragraph 2.4 to refer to specific Regulations.
- 14) Amend Paragraph 2.5 to refer to stakeholders.
- 15) Amend first sentence by changing “these” to “this”.
- 16) Correct the typographical error in paragraph 6.13.
- 17) Re-write the start of the final sentence of paragraph 4.11 as follows:  
“Councillors are democratically accountable and have....”
- 18) Re-write the start of the final sentence of paragraph 4.15 as follows:  
“Each main stage of an LDDs preparation process will be discussed and decisions made by the Council’s Cabinet or Full Council meeting”
- 19) That paragraph 9.32 be amended to state “within 6 months”

20) Add to Appendix A

The Regional Spatial Strategy for the East Midlands (RSS8) was published on 17 March 2005. The purpose of the document is to provide a clear, agreed, long-term spatial vision for the region up to 2021. It replaces the Regional Planning Guidance for the region that was published in January 2002.

21) Taylor Woodrow Developments Ltd & the Midland Office of Barton Willmore will be added to the list in Appendix C.

22) Add the following text into paragraph 6.8

The following documents will be published alongside the development plan document:

- The sustainability Report
- A statement setting out which bodies have been consulted, how they were consulted, a summary of the main issues raised and how the issues have been addressed.
- A statement setting out the number of representations made a summary of the main issues and how these issues have been addressed.
- Any supporting documents that the authority feels necessary.

23) Re-write paragraph 6.13 as follows:

The Council will publish the following on its website:

- Where practicable, the site allocation representation
- The period within which representations on the site allocation representation must be made.
- The address and person to whom written and electronic representation must be made
- A statement of the fact that the site allocation representation is available for inspection and the places and times at which it can be inspected.

A notice will be placed in the local press setting out the fact that the document is available for inspection and the places and times at which it can be inspected. A summary of the main issues raised at this stage will be published.

24) Add a new paragraph after 6.14 as follows:

#### ADOPTION OF A DEVELOPMENT PLAN DOCUMENT

In accordance with Regulation 36, as soon as reasonably practicable after the Council has adopted a DPD it will:

- Make the DPD, adoption statement and sustainability report available for inspection
- Publish the adoption statement on their website
- Give notice by local advertisement of the adoption statement and the fact that the DPD is available for inspection

- Send the adoption statement to any person who asked to be notified of the adoption of the DPD
- Send the adoption statement to the Secretary of state.

25) Amend Appendix B to include the countywide Council for Voluntary Services Northamptonshire and the Northamptonshire Voluntary and Community Sector Alliance in the consultation list.

26) Amend Appendix B to include the Tenants Forum and Local Strategic Partnership to the consultation list.

27) To add 'documents can be provided in other languages' if required to Paragraphs 6.8 and 6.16.

28) Delete 'try to' from paragraph 4.8.

29) Add a new paragraph after 5.12

The Council has entered a COMPACT agreement with voluntary and community groups and other public bodies within Northamptonshire. The Northamptonshire COMPACT sets out the principles by which it is expected that organisations will work alongside each other. It is increasingly important for the voluntary and community sector that these relationships are based on respect and trust, built through mutual understanding. The Compact sets down the framework for positive, equal relationships. The Council will seek to use this agreement as a way of improving the involvement of the voluntary sector in the preparation of the LDF.