

Meeting: Strategic Planning Advisory Panel
Date: Wednesday 13th July 2005
Subject: Developing the Statement of Community Involvement (SCI)
Responsible Officer: Director of Strategy (Urban Living)
Contact Officer: Charles Alonge
Portfolio Holder: Portfolio Holder for Planning, Development and Housing
Key Decision: No
Status: Public

Section 1: Summary

A key part of the process for producing the Local Development Framework is securing effective community engagement. The Statement of Community Involvement (SCI), setting out the Council's proposals for involving the community in the preparation of the various documents included in the Local Development Scheme (LDS), is thus an important document which the Council must produce. In addition, the SCI is required to set out the Council's approach to involving the community in the determination of planning applications. This initial report sets out:-

- (a) the process for producing the SCI,
- (b) seeks comments from the Panel on a preliminary draft SCI which will be subject to formal public consultation.

The SCI is being developed at the same time as the corporate strategy on community engagement. This reports acknowledges the need for continued joint working to ensure a consistent approach to community involvement.

Decision Required

The Panel is requested to :-

- (a) Note the process for producing the SCI; and
- (b) Agree this first draft Statement of Community Involvement as a basis for discussion with stakeholders, statutory consultees, residents and community groups, noting that the process of audit and consultation as set out in 1.12 will lead to a final document that meets best practice guidance in respect of community engagement in the planning process.

Reason for report

The Council is required to prepare a Statement of Community Involvement as one of the documents in the Local Development Scheme. Because of the key emphasis on community involvement in the new development plan system, and the importance of similar involvement in relation to planning applications, it is important that the public clearly understands how, when and why they will be involved. Obtaining views at an early stage of preparation of the SCI is thus a key part of the process.

Benefits

The Council has a statutory duty to prepare an SCI, and the programme for its production is included in the Local Development Scheme. Achieving effective community involvement is a key part of the government's modernising agenda. Setting down the Council's approach with regard to planning matters will also beneficially inform the process for production of the corporate strategy on community engagement. Conversely, the development of the latter will need to be related to the draft SCI, and its implementation.

Cost of Proposals

The cost of preparing the SCI is contained within the current Departmental Budget.

Risks

Undertaking effective community involvement requires commitment of appropriate resources and failure to engage can undermine the development plan process or result in greater opposition to the LDF. In order to maintain a consistent approach to implementation of the SCI, continuity would be required over a number of years.

Implications if recommendations rejected

If the SCI is not developed in line with the timetable set down in the LDS, failure to meet milestones would be likely to result in the Council losing an element of future Planning Delivery Grant. In turn, this would also be likely to impact on the Council's ability to resource the LDF programme.

Section 2: Report

- 1.1 The Council has agreed the timetable for the production of the Statement of Community Involvement within the Local Development Scheme. This timetable was prepared against the background of a range of guidance,

and in particular Planning Policy Statement 12:Local Development Frameworks. Members have also discussed the issue of community involvement at a workshop earlier this year. Members will also be aware of the development of a corporate strategy on community engagement, which will be the over-arching document – clearly the SCI and the corporate strategy will be inextricably linked (see also paragraph 1.11).

- 1.2 The importance attached to the SCI is reflected in the fact that it will be subject to independent examination, just like the Development Plan Documents to be produced. It will be assessed to determine whether it is 'sound'. The level of community involvement in the process is a key test of soundness.
- 1.3 Involving the community effectively in both the preparation of the Local Development Framework documents and the determination of planning applications requires that the Council investigates the range of techniques which optimise involvement. Clearly an important early part of this process involves asking the community how and when they would like to be involved, and means of communication. Subsequently the community will continue to be actively involved in the development of the SCI to be submitted to the Secretary of State. After that, people will still be able to make representations which may be considered at the examination.
- 1.4 The government has set down a number of key principles which should be reflected in the SCI, including:-
 - The approach to community involvement should be appropriate to the level of planning involved;
 - The methods of involvement should be relevant to the communities involved;
 - Communities should be involved at the outset of the process (termed frontloading) to help determine decisions and obtain a sense of ownership;
 - There should be continuing opportunities for involvement as part of the overall programme;
 - Preparation for involvement needs to be carefully planned, both in the production and review of local development documents but also the processing of planning applications, and
 - There should be transparency and accessibility.
- 1.5 Clearly one of the main challenges is to ensure that all sections of the community who wish to be involved are afforded that opportunity. An extensive database of organisations, groups and individuals has been developed during production of the previous Harrow Unitary Development Plans. A key issue will be keeping that list up-to-date to ensure that effective communications are maintained, and developing it to include new

organisations and partners that emerge. For that reason, whilst it is impractical to include definitive lists of organisations within the SCI, an indication is given of the diverse range and types of groups that the Council will be involving.

1.6 Stages in the production of the SCI

There are various statutory stages that the Council will have to follow:-

- 1 **Pre-production** – scoping the content of the SCI
- 2 **Production** -
 - a) Consultation and participation on draft SCI;
 - b) Considering representations on proposals and
 - c) Preparation and submission of SCI to Secretary of State
- 3 **Examination** –
 - a) Representations on the submitted SCI
 - b) Pre-examination meeting (if required)
 - c) Independent examination
 - d) Inspector's binding report

3 **Adoption**

1.7 **Pre-production** – The Council is now at the initial part of the process which involves preliminary consultation with various sections of the community via a questionnaire, asking them some basic questions about how they would like to be consulted, in addition to providing up to date details for the database. This information will then be fed into the preliminary draft SCI.

1.8 **Timetable** - It is intended that the preliminary questionnaire referred to in 1.7 above will be sent out in early July. Necessary changes to the preliminary draft SCI following consideration of responses will be undertaken. There will then be an extended period of informal public consultation on the draft SCI, firstly with statutory bodies, and then with the wider community. The latter is the most important phase because it involves the community considering a large document. It has also been programmed to avoid the key summer period. Clearly amendments will be required as a result of responses received to this informal consultation, and a report will be brought to a special meeting of the Panel which will need to be arranged for the first week in November. Cabinet should agree the submission SCI on 10 November. This would then be followed by the statutory period of public consultation of 6 weeks on the submission SCI, commencing on the 14th November 2005 and finishing on 23rd December.

1.9 **Form and Content of the preliminary draft SCI**

Much of the content of the SCI is effectively prescribed in general terms by guidance set down in PPS 12, informed by advice in the Companion Guide, and PPS1. The preliminary draft SCI included as an Appendix to this report reflects these requirements. The examination to be undertaken on the SCI will test the soundness of the document - these tests are set out in PPS12, whilst draft advice from PINS on testing the soundness of SCIs has also helpfully informed this process.

1.10 In summary, the SCI :-

- (a) Sets out the different techniques that may be used to secure effective community involvement in both the preparation of local development documents (LDDs) and the determination of planning applications;
- (b) Sets out in general terms the range of stakeholders and groups with an interest in development on the Borough;
- (c) Identifies the minimum standards that need to be achieved in LDD production, and determination of planning applications;

1.11 **Future development of Community Engagement**

In order to achieve the above principles we need to understand how people feel about our current consultation to identify any barriers to involvement and make sure what we do is effective and tailored to the needs of the different consultees. The outcomes from this will also help us in the roll-out of community involvement in the Development Control process.

1.12 Further to consideration of the draft SCI by the Strategic Planning Advisory Panel it is proposed to carry out an audit of our existing planning consultation mechanisms, in partnership with the HSP, leading to a best-practice consultation plan that responds to the needs of different groups within the community and stakeholders. This will reflect some of the key issues being addressed in the community engagement strategy, namely to increase trust between the community and the Council, build social capital, ensure that we are responsive to residents, and to educate residents to influence their behaviour.

1.13 The LDF budget contains a provision for community involvement and it is proposed to engage consultants to carry out this discrete piece of work over the next 6 weeks. During this period consultation with statutory consultees can continue.

1.14 Consultation

No consultation has been undertaken.

1.15 Financial Implications

The costs of the preparing this preliminary draft SCI is contained within the current Departmental Budget and Planning Delivery Grant.

1.16 Legal Implications (Comments included in the report).

1.17 Equalities Impact

Commitment to the early production of the Statement of Community Involvement in the LDS indicated the Council's intentions that the involvement of all sections of the community in the LDF process and determination of planning applications will be sought.

Section 3: Supporting Information/ Background Documents

Appendix – the preliminary draft SCI.

Supporting information

Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004

The Town & Country Planning (Local Development) (England) Regulations 2004

Community Involvement in Planning: the Government's objectives

PPS1, and PPS 12: LDFs

Creating Local Developing Frameworks: A Companion Guide to PPS12