



**STATEMENT OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT (Part 1)
THE LOCAL PLAN**

July 2016

(Temporary Update for COVID restrictions – August 2020)

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) (Part 1) sets out how Darlington Borough Council will involve local communities, businesses and key stakeholders in the preparation of the Local Plan and any future Development Plan Documents' (DPD's) or Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD's).
- 1.2 It has been updated to account for changes to legislation and to help shape the preparation of the Local Plan. It replaces the previous SCI insofar as it relates to Local Plan preparation.

2. General principles

- 2.1 We will always apply some general principles to our planning consultations/ engagement. These are set out below:
 - a) We will communicate clearly;
 - b) We will make it easy for you to be involved;
 - c) We will make sure your involvement is effective;
 - d) We will share information and provide feedback;
 - e) We will keep the process simple;
 - f) We will learn from our mistakes
- 2.2 Involvement in consultations will be open to all regardless of age, gender, race, faith, disability or knowledge and experience.
- 2.3 If you have difficulty in communicating with us, we will make information available in other formats such as braille, large print audio, or another language, on request.
- 2.4 Wherever possible, consultation will be carried out in tandem with other community engagement initiatives.

3. When will we consult?

- 3.1 The Local Planning Regulations state that there must be a minimum of two consultation periods for Local Development Documents (including Local Plans). The first consultation relates to the issues and options that the Local Development Document should address, and the second consultation should take place prior to the submission of the Local Development Document to the Secretary of State for Examination in Public.
- 3.2 In addition to the statutory consultees, the Council will ensure that local communities, businesses and key stakeholders can be involved throughout the preparation of the Local Plan and the means of doing this will be set out in separate Engagement Plans.
- 3.3 Supplementary Planning Documents will normally undergo a minimum of four weeks consultation prior to adoption by the Council.

4. Who will we consult?

4.1 The Council must conform to certain rules and regulations set by Government on how it consults. The *Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012* list 'specific consultation bodies' that we must consult with (as applicable). For Darlington Borough these are:

- a) The Coal Authority;
- b) The Environment Agency;
- c) The Homes and Communities Agency;
- d) Tees Valley Local Enterprise Partnership
- e) The Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission for England (known as Historic England);
- f) Natural England;
- g) Network Rail Infrastructure Limited;
- h) Highways England;
- i) Parish Councils (including Parish Councils adjoining the borough)
- j) Adjoining authorities;
- k) Relevant telecommunications companies;
- l) The Primary Care Trust or relevant successor body;
- m) Relevant electricity and gas companies;
- n) Sewerage and water undertakers.

4.2 We are also required to consult with any 'general consultation bodies' which may be affected by the contents of the document being produced. These will include:

- a) Voluntary bodies some or all of whose activities benefit any part of the Council's area;
- b) Bodies which in the Council's area represent the interest of different needs groups.

4.3 The Council will also consult 'other consultation bodies' which they consider to be appropriate and who have not fallen into the above categories, which may include:

- a) Residents Associations;
- b) Developers and agents;
- c) Special interest groups;
- d) Environmental groups;
- e) Businesses or business networks;
- f) Educational establishments;
- g) The general public.

4.4 We also hold and maintain a database of names and addresses of residents and stakeholders who have asked to be kept informed of any consultations that may come forward. An individual or an organisation may ask to be added or removed from this database at any time. In the interests of efficiency, we will assume that all those who provide an email address, are happy to be contacted via this means. If you would like to be added to this database, please visit our website at www.darlington.gov.uk/localplan or at the postal address in section 13 of this document.

5. How will we consult?

- 5.1 Before we begin key stages of a Local Development Document, we will produce an Engagement Plan (where officers consider one to be necessary), setting out when and how we will consult/engage throughout the process. This will ensure consideration is given to the most effective way of communicating the particular issue, and that the methods engaged are proportionate.
- 5.2 The nature of engagement plans will be determined depending on the nature of the issues, and those likely to be affected. For example, they could be area based if the particular issue concerns a specific site, or they could target a particular sector. Consultations plans will ensure that consultations always meet statutory requirements.
- 5.3 We will use a range of communication methods to inform individuals and organisations that a consultation is taking place, what the issues are and how they can be involved in the process, and use the most appropriate consultation methods to ensure maximum opportunities for community involvement.
- 5.4 The Council will use different levels of community involvement as follows:
 - a) Information – Providing information through a variety of methods to inform;
 - b) Consultation – Requesting the community provide their views about particular planning proposals at the appropriate stages;
 - c) Participation – Enabling communities and stakeholders to get involved (i.e. workshops to identify specific issues).
- 5.5 The methods that we employ to notify and involve stakeholders in the consultation process include those listed below. A bespoke combination of consultation methods will be utilised depending on the specific issue being considered:-
 - a) Contact appropriate organisations and individuals directly;
 - b) Publicise consultations along with relevant documents by methods such as website updates, social media, press releases, displays, etc.
 - c) Formal notices in the local media;
 - d) Place consultation documents on display at the Town Hall (provided there are no further restrictions that prevent access). This conforms with The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2020;
 - e) Work with existing community groups or other interest groups, attend community events and joint consultations;
 - f) Consider organising events such as stakeholder meetings or workshops, including place-shaping workshops.

6. What you can do

- 6.1 If you tell us that you are interested in the Local Plan and would like to be kept informed of the Local Plan and /or subsequent consultations, we will add your details to our Consultation database and you will receive an email or letter when there is an opportunity for you to be involved and to let you know that new documents have been produced. If you would like your contact details to

be added to our database, please contact us using the details at the end of

this document. It is important that you let us know of any changes to contact details, so that the database remains up to date.

- 6.2 To ensure that the process is transparent and so that everyone can see how our policies have developed, we need to receive all comments in writing, by email, online form or letter. If we undertake consultation events or workshops, we will make written records of views expressed at the time, so that they can also be taken into account. In order to make your comments as effective as possible, you should:-
- a) Make comments clear and concise so that we know what your main points are;
 - b) Make comments within published time periods;
 - c) Use the form provided, where possible. For most of our consultations we provide a comments form for you to fill in. This is not compulsory, but it can make your comments clearer and makes sure we have all of the information we need;
 - d) Be aware that your comments will be made publicly available on our website, and at our offices;
 - e) If you are a member of a group or organisation, let us know whether you are responding on your own behalf or as a member of that body.
- 6.3 The Council cannot accept anonymous comments. In addition, the Council reserves the right to not consider any representation that contains any inappropriate comments, such as abusive content and offensive language, or discriminatory comments.

7. Responses to consultations – What the Council will do

- 7.1 In response to any consultation responses the Council will:-
- a) Formally acknowledge receipt of all emails and letters;
 - b) Request additional information from you where comments are not clear.
- 7.2 Consultation responses will be made publically available on the Local Plan website as soon as practicable. At the end of the consultation period, we will publish all comments received on our website. A Consultation Statement, in accordance with statutory requirements, will outline the full extent of the consultation, who was consulted, how they were consulted, and a summary of the main issues raised as a result of those consultations. This will be reported to Place Scrutiny Committee and will be available when the Local Plan is submitted to the Secretary of State on the Local Plan website and at the Town Hall and Library.
- 7.3 In responding to enquiries consultees will be referred to the Council's dedicated Local Plan Website where a Frequently Asked Question's page will be updated throughout the plan making process with answers to the most commonly raised issues. If the council considers an individual response is appropriate or further clarification is required then we will contact you via your preferred method of communication.
- 7.4 We will evaluate and learn from consultations that we undertake and will improve our feedback arrangements where this is required. All lessons learnt

will be taken into account in the formulation of Engagement Plans for future consultations. We welcome any feedback on this.

8. How will decisions be made

- 8.1 Local Plans and other planning documents should represent a collective vision, in the context of national priorities, local circumstances and community views. To this extent, there are likely to be conflicting views about the best use of land and broader policy context. To help reduce these tensions, the Council will ensure that early and effective community engagement with stakeholders, prescribed bodies and the local community is undertaken and that everyone has an opportunity to express their views. Methods will be dependent on the planning document being prepared and the stage that the document is at and this will always be considered carefully in the formulation of Engagement Plans.
- 8.2 Despite this, there may still be occasions when differences of opinion cannot easily be resolved. The Council will analyse comments made in response to consultations and balance different needs and opinions, including the need to conform to national policy and guidance. Based on all of the information available, officers will make a recommendation, in the form of a report to:-
- a) Cabinet; and
 - b) Full Council
- 8.3 Once the recommendations have been approved by Full Council, the Local Plan and any future Development Plan Documents will progress to Examination in Public, whilst Supplementary Planning Documents will be adopted by the Council.

9. Duty to Co-operate

- 9.1 The 'Duty to Co-operate, as set out in the Localism Act 2011, places a legal duty on local planning authorities, and other 'prescribed bodies' (including Highways England and the Environment Agency) to engage with one another actively, constructively and on an on-going basis, on strategic and cross boundary planning matters and consider joint approaches to plan making.
- 9.2 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) requires that Local Planning authorities demonstrate evidence of having effectively cooperated to plan for issues with cross-boundary impacts when their Local Plans are submitted for examination.
- 9.3 The Council is committed to working with other Local Planning Authorities and public bodies with an interest in land use and development in the Borough and will continue to work closely with its partners to deliver planning and fulfil its requirements under the Duty to Cooperate.

10. Neighbourhood Planning

- 10.1 Neighbourhood planning introduced by the Localism Act 2011, gives communities the power to agree a neighbourhood development plan, make a Neighbourhood Development Order and make a Community Right to Build

Order. The framework for producing these plans and orders is set out in the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012.

- 10.2 Where local people express an interest in neighbourhood planning, the Council will support them. This will include initial advice about the process, providing detail about emerging and existing Local Plan policies, and sharing other information available to the Council.
- 10.3 Further information about current Neighbourhood Areas, support and funding for neighbourhood planning is available at www.darlington.gov.uk/neighbourhoodplanning.

11. Availability of documents

- 11.1 Local Development Documents and related information, including reports prepared to underpin policy preparation, will be made available on the Council's website. They will also be made available at the Council's contact centre in the Town Hall and within the library during specific consultation periods. At other times, these documents can be made available to view at these locations on request.
- 11.2 Paper copies, including large print and electronic versions, and any formats required as reasonable adjustments, such as braille or audio will be made available and languages other than English can be provided on request wherever practicable and reasonable,, however a charge may be made for these.

12. Contacting the Council

- 12.1 If you wish to know more about the SCI, or any aspect of planning policy, please contact us at the email /address shown below. Information on the Local Plan and the development plan process is also available on the website, along with regularly updated Frequently Asked Questions.

Website: www.darlington.gov.uk/Localplan

Email: planning.policy@darlington.gov.uk

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