

Report to Cabinet

Subject: Gedling Borough Statement of Community Involvement

Date: 12 September 2013

Author: Planning Policy Manager

Wards Affected

Borough-wide

Purpose

To seek Cabinet's agreement to the attached draft updated Statement of Community Involvement which will be subject to public consultation.

Key Decision

This is not a Key Decision;

Background

- 1 It is a legal requirement for Gedling Borough to have in place a Statement of Community Involvement setting out the Council's policy for involving people in the preparation of development plans and for consulting people on planning applications. Gedling Borough adopted its first Statement of Community Involvement in October 2006 and this document has governed the public participation undertaken since then, including the preparation of the Aligned Core Strategy which is now subject to examination in public.
- 2 As the Aligned Core Strategy is now at the examination stage there is an opportunity to update the Statement of Community Involvement in order to reflect changes to the planning system that have been introduced since 2006. In this context it is also timely to bring into effect an updated draft Statement of Community Involvement to fit in with the preparation of the draft Gedling Borough Local Planning Document (which is also on the Cabinet Agenda).

Proposal

- 3 Cabinet is asked to approve the revised Statement of Community Involvement attached as Appendix A, which we are renaming the 'Statement of Consultation', for the purposes of public consultation. Radical changes to the existing Statement of Community Involvement are not being proposed but rather there is a need to update it in the light of changes to the regulations, current planning practice and to make it more user friendly. In this context, the principles of the original 2006 version are retained. These reflect the need to:

- Involve the public at the earliest opportunity in the preparation of planning documents;
 - To be transparent, open and accessible to all sections of the community;
 - To ensure the consultation process will allow local communities to see how ideas have evolved at various stages through effective feedback.
- 4 There are two main elements to the draft Statement. Firstly, it deals with the preparation of planning policy¹ and secondly, it sets out the process for people to comment on planning applications.
 - 5 In terms of **planning policy preparation**, it is considered that the proposed revisions would lead to additional publicity on consultation processes over and above that set out in the existing Statement of Community Involvement. A key element to this is the reference within the draft Statement of Consultation to the preparation of an individual consultation strategy for each development plan document and supplementary planning document in preparation. This consultation strategy will be published early on in the policy preparation process and will be kept up to date on the Council's website providing more specific information on the consultation processes that will be undertaken for that document and giving real time information on progress.
 - 6 The regulatory framework is now much less prescriptive about how Councils should consult with their communities. The regulations now prescribe two (rather than three) stages of public consultation including at least once early in the process and more formally at the publication stage prior to a plan being submitted. The draft Statement of Consultation includes these two consultation stages but provides for a level of community involvement above the statutory minimum set out in the regulations. Consultation documents (in both hard copy and on-line versions) will continue to be prepared as the main means of gathering people's comments for the purposes of the two required consultation stages (issues and options stage and publication stage), but there is flexibility for the Council to undertake additional consultation documents as it sees fit. In addition, the Statement of Consultation proposes the use of publicity material including leaflets, posters, press releases but also makes reference to using social network sites which is increasingly common practice.
 - 7 In terms of consultations on **planning applications**, the revisions are relatively minor and the current practice relating to publicising planning applications will continue. However, revisions are necessary in order to reflect current practice of referring interested persons to the Council's on-line systems as the best means of finding out information and progress on planning applications or alternatively to contact officers at the Civic Centre.

¹ Formerly known as the Local Development Framework, now the Local Plan – and comprises the suite of development plan documents such as the Aligned Core Strategy and the forthcoming Gedling Borough Local Planning Document and also supplementary planning documents.

- 8 Whilst, the update and revisions to the Statement of Consultation would not significantly change how and when the Council will engage with the community, it is proposed that the document is made available for people to comment should they wish to do so. In order to minimise the number of separate consultations it is therefore proposed to make this document available alongside the draft Gedling Borough Local Planning Document that is being considered at the same Cabinet meeting.
- 9 To comply with the public sector equality duty an **Equality Impact Assessment** (Section 1(1) of the Equality Act 2010) has been carried out on the Draft Statement of Community Involvement (Sept 2013). This has identified a number of possible changes related to the availability of Planning Applications in different formats and languages and at different locations around the Borough. Due to the number of applications submitted and the information included it is not possible to make planning applications available in different formats or languages. Planning Officers, however, will use appropriate methods to communicate with local residents if the need arises. The Draft Statement of Community Involvement has been updated to state that the availability of information on major planning applications will be considered on a case by case basis and if it is judged necessary information will be made available at places in addition to the Gedling Borough Council website and Civic Centre.

Alternative Options

- 10 An alternative option would be for the Council not to consult with the public on the attached draft Statement of Consultation in which case the public would have no opportunity to comment on a document setting out the Council's policy on public consultation which is of direct relevance to local communities. A further alternative would be to consult on a different version of the Statement of Consultation, however, the proposed revisions are considered necessary in order to reflect changes to the planning system and current practice.

Financial Implications

- 11 The costs of consultation can be met from existing budgets.

Appendices

- 12 Appendix A – Gedling Borough Draft Statement of Consultation

Background Paper

- 13 Equalities Impact Needs Assessment for the Statement of Community Involvement

Recommendation(s)

THAT:

- (i) Cabinet approve the attached draft Statement of Consultation for the purposes of public consultation.

- (ii) The Portfolio Holder for Leisure and Development to consider the consultation responses received and be authorised to approve the final Statement of Consultation.

Reasons for Recommendations

- 14 To seek views on the proposed draft Statement of Community Involvement as part of the preparation of an updated and revised Statement of Community Involvement (to be called the Statement of Consultation) that complies with legislative requirements.