

STATEMENT OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT (SCI) FOR THE ROCHFORD DISTRICT

1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 The Government's Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 states that the Council must, as part of the Local Development Framework, prepare a Statement of Community Involvement. This document will outline the Council's approach to involving the public in the planning process.
- 1.2 This report seeks Members' approval for modifications to be made to the draft version of the SCI to take into account the results of a consultation exercise conducted in accordance with the requirements of Regulation 26 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Development) (England) Regulations. The modifications will form the version of the SCI for adoption, subject to an independent examination of the document to ensure it meets the tests of soundness set out in the regulations (Regulation 28).
- 1.3 A public inquiry may be required. If this is necessary then the Planning Inspectorate will administer it and the Council will need to employ a programme officer. The Council's Local Development Scheme (LDS) schedules this for October 2006. The Inspector's decision will be binding on the Council.
- 1.4 The Council carried out public consultation between 23 February and 6 April 2006. 24 organisations / individuals submitted a formal response to this consultation. These can be found in Appendix 1 attached to this report, together with the Council's proposed response to them.
- 1.5 A list of proposed modifications to the Regulation 26 draft of the SCI has been prepared and can be found in Appendix 2.

2 DISCUSSION

- 2.1 The draft SCI was produced in line with various ODPM guidance that has been published on SCIs and community participation in general. The document has drawn on advice, information and ideas from numerous sources. These have included, amongst others, RTPI seminars, the Countryside Agency, Home Office, Rural Community Council of Essex, Active Citizenship Centre, Chelmsford Borough Council, Castle Point Borough Council, Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council, and Mid Sussex District Council.
- 2.2 The proposed modifications to the SCI have been prepared following a consultation exercise carried out by the LPA, as per the requirements of Regulation 26 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Development) (England) Regulations 2004.

2.3 The SCI comprises the following:-

- An explanation of what the SCI is, what is its purpose and what perceived benefits it will bring.
- What techniques the Council will deploy in order to encourage public involvement and overcome perceived barriers to participation.
- How and when planning matters will be publicised.
- How and when people can get involved in the LDF, planning applications and enforcement.
- Public involvement at the pre-application stage.
- How the SCI links with other Council strategies.
- Which representative groups and organisations will be consulted.
- How the SCI will be reviewed.
- A list of useful planning contacts.

2.4 The SCI is intended to be as accessible to members of the public as possible. It therefore aims to be easy to read and understand and to be free of jargon.

2.5 The SCI is required to address the need to involve groups who have traditionally been under-represented in the planning process. As part of this process the SCI identifies a number of representative groups and organisations that will be asked if they wish to be consulted on planning matters for the District.

2.6 Although the SCI is required to outline the minimum consultation requirements, it also has to avoid being overly prescriptive in outlining the techniques and methods that will be used to facilitate public involvement. It is intended for the methods outlined in the SCI to be flexible to meet different planning circumstances.

3 RISK IMPLICATIONS

3.1 Operational Risk

It is envisaged that the majority of the requirements that the Council will set itself in the SCI can be met using existing resources. Some of the public engagement techniques may require out of hours working, as was noted during the preparation of the LDS. Additional resources may be required to employ consultants on specific elements of community engagement.

3.2 Regulatory Risk

The timetable for the preparation, consultation on, and adoption of the SCI is contained within the adopted LDS. Failure to meet these deadlines may lead to action being taken against the Council by the ODPM or Regional Government Office. The performance of the SCI against the LDS may affect awards made through the Planning Delivery Grant scheme.

4 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 As stated in paragraph 3.1, the implementation of public engagement as set out in the SCI may require out of hours working and the employment of consultants.
- 4.2 As noted in paragraph 3.2, the ability of the Council to adopt its SCI within the time requirement outlined in the LDS is likely to affect awards made through the Planning Delivery Grant scheme.

5 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The various legal implications are specified in the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act (2004). These outline the implementation and consultation requirements for the SCI.

6 PARISH IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Parish Councils will have the opportunity to object to the SCI version for adoption if they believe it fails to meet the tests of soundness. The SCI notes the need to consult relevant Parish Councils on various planning aspects.

7 RECOMMENDATION

- 7.1 It is proposed that the Committee **RECOMMENDS TO COUNCIL**
 - (1) That the proposed modifications be made to the Statement of Community Involvement for the Rochford District and that the modified version of the SCI be adopted with a view to submission to GO-East, to enable the Council to comply with the requirements of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.
 - (2) That the Council carries out the relevant requirements to prepare for the Public Inquiry including the employment of a programme officer and arranging the appointment of a Planning Inspector.
 - (3) That authority be delegated to the Head of Planning & Transportation Services, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, to carry out minor amendments to the SCI to ensure consistency and correctness.

Shaun Scrutton

Head of Planning & Transportation Services

Background Papers:

None.

For further information please contact Sam Hollingworth on:-

Tel:- 01702 318102

E-Mail:- samuel.hollingworth@rochford.gov.uk