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Introduction

Many of us only come into contact with the planning system if we find out about a planning application near our homes, but it touches the lives of all of us far more than we may think. It shapes where we live, work, shop, and go to school, it also affects how we travel, how we obtain the raw materials we need for construction, and how we dispose of the waste we all produce.

Staffordshire County Council ('we’) are responsible for determining planning applications for minerals and waste development (e.g. quarries or waste recycling facilities), as well as development required to carry out our own services (e.g. development at schools and major highway schemes). We are also required to prepare local development documents (e.g. Local Plans) to set out how and where we consider that the area’s needs for minerals and waste management facilities should be met.

Whenever we consider a planning application, or produce local development documents for our area, we need to consult and engage with people and organisations to gain their views. This Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) sets out how we will do that.

Our first SCI was adopted in 2006 and needed to be reviewed to take account of changes in legislation and the approach to planning. This new Statement of Community Involvement provides updated guidance and a straightforward explanation of the opportunities to become involved with consultations relating to all aspects of the planning we undertake.

This document was made available for public consultation between 9 October 2013 and 20 November 2013, and amendments were made in response to the comments received. The final document was formally adopted by Staffordshire County Council on 19 February 2014.

In addition to anything set out in the SCI, any consultation or engagement exercise we carry out will also have regard to the Corporate policies in our Community Engagement Framework and other legislation including:

- Equality Act.
- Freedom of Information Act
- Environmental Information Regulations, and
- Data Protection Act.
Consultation on Planning Policy

1. We are required to prepare local development documents (e.g. Minerals and Waste Local Plans) to set out how and where they consider that the area’s needs for quarries and waste management facilities should be met. In preparing these plans, we have to consider the views of the people and organisations that might be interested. The Statement of Community Involvement sets out how we do this.

2. As we develop our plans we aim to build common ground on the best way forward about where, when and how mineral and waste sites are developed. We accept that we may never achieve complete consensus. We hope, however, that greater understanding of the issues, and options to tackle them, may help to minimise conflict as we prepare our planning policies, as well as later when we use those policies to determine planning applications.

3. To help people understand what we are doing, we maintain a web site (www.staffordshire.gov.uk/planning) with background information that has helped us to make decisions throughout our plan making process. This includes Annual Monitoring Reports and links to other information available on the internet.

Who do we consult?

4. As we develop our plans, we consult a wide range of groups and individuals who may be interested. These include the “key stakeholders” / “consultation bodies” in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key stakeholders / consultation bodies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Specific consultation bodies</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjoining Planning Authorities (including adjoining Parish Councils)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staffordshire District and Parish Councils</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government Agencies / Departments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statutory Undertakers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>General consultation bodies</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minerals and Waste Operators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning Consultants / Professional Organisations (Including Minerals and Waste, and General)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Industry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government Agencies / Departments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statutory Undertakers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental / Amenity Groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport Groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Registered Interested Individuals / Groups</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. We maintain and publish a list of stakeholders and encourage interested parties to register with us so that we can keep them informed about the progress of our plans, and let them know about any consultation events.

6. Even if you are not on any of our lists, anyone can comment on our plans during the consultation periods.
How do we consult at each stage?

7. **Government regulations** set out how and who we must consult during the plan-making process. The table below shows key stages of preparing a Local Plan and the opportunities to make your views known.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>What we do</th>
<th>How we will consult</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Plan preparation</strong></td>
<td>At the start of the plan making process, we will notify interested parties of the subject of the plan being prepared, and invite them to make representations on what it ought to contain <em>(Reg. 18 of 2012 Regulations)</em>.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gathering evidence. Deciding what to look at in the plan. Developing possible options. Looking at possible social, environmental and economic impacts through the Sustainability Appraisal (SA) process.</td>
<td>Consultation is primarily aimed at checking that we have got the approach right. Consultation period to last for a minimum of 6 weeks. Documents available on our website. Also viewable at our main office and libraries. E-mails or letters sent to relevant consultees and anyone who has asked to be involved.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Draft Plan</strong></td>
<td>This is an informal stage so we will plan any consultations to try to get the best range of opinion without too much delay to the plan-making process.</td>
<td>Producing the Draft Plan. Continuing the SA.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Producing the version of the Plan that we want the Inspector to examine. Concluding the SA.</td>
<td>Consultation is primarily aimed at ensuring that the draft policies are right for Staffordshire. Consultation period to last for a minimum of 6 weeks. Notification of consultation on our website, with details of how to respond. Documents available on our website. Also viewable at our main office and libraries. E-mails or letters sent to relevant consultees and anyone who has asked to be involved. Targeted events may be used where these are particularly relevant.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Publication of the Proposed Submission Plan</strong> <em>(Reg. 19-20 of 2012 Regulations)</em></td>
<td></td>
<td>Consultation is primarily aimed at checking the “soundness” of the plan and its legal compliance. Consultation period to last for a minimum of 6 weeks. Notification of consultation on our website, with details of how to respond. Documents available on our website. Also viewable at our main office and libraries. E-mails or letters sent to relevant consultees and anyone who has asked to be involved. All representations will be submitted to the Inspector for examination along with the Draft Plan.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Formal decision making:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Stage</strong></th>
<th><strong>What we do</strong></th>
<th><strong>How we will consult</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Submission Stage</td>
<td>The Council will send its “submission version” of the plan to the Planning Inspectorate, together with supporting documents, final Sustainability Appraisal report, and all formal representations received at this stage.</td>
<td>Consultation is primarily aimed at providing the Inspector with sufficient detail and clarity to fully assess the plan. Inspector will decide on the length, scale and nature of any public consultations that may be required. Inspector’s report and all proposed modifications will be published on our website. Also viewable at our main office and libraries. All respondents to the plan will be notified when it is adopted. Adoption statement will be published in local papers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent Examination</td>
<td>An independent Inspector will be appointed to examine the plan. The Inspector will decide on the issues to be considered, who should be involved. The Inspector will produce a report, and may recommend modifications to the Plan to make it sound. These may require additional consultation.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adoption</td>
<td>Council resolve to adopt the plan and publish an adoption notice. There is then a 6 week period for legal challenges if anyone feels that the process has not been carried out properly.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

8. We may also produce Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD) from time to time, providing guidance for local policy. These go through a simpler process with one period of consultation prior to adoption, summarised in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>What we do</th>
<th>How we will consult</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Plan preparation</td>
<td>Gathering evidence. Drafting the SPD / Guidance.</td>
<td>Where appropriate, seeking initial views from interested parties.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Consultation</td>
<td>Consult on the Draft SPD. Modify the Draft SPD as appropriate.</td>
<td>Draft SPD available on our website. Also viewable at our main office and libraries. E-mails or letters sent to relevant consultees. Consultation period lasts for a minimum of 4 weeks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adoption</td>
<td>Council resolve to adopt the plan and publish an adoption notice. There is then a 3 month period for legal challenges if anyone feels that the process has not been carried out properly.</td>
<td>&quot;Adoption statement&quot; published with the SPD.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
How can you access consultation documents?

9. We now use the internet to publish all of our plan documents, and only print paper copies when it is absolutely necessary.

10. You can use IT facilities free of charge in the reception area of Staffordshire Place, and at local libraries, some of which are open in the evenings and at weekends. You can find your nearest library on our website, together with details of facilities and opening hours.

11. If you need help to view or understand documents or plans, assistance may be available in local libraries, and we can make information available in alternative formats or languages if required.

12. Finally, if access to the internet is not possible, we can provide paper copies of consultation documents on request, though we will normally need to make a charge to cover the costs. We will always let you know the charge in advance.

How can you make an effective response?

13. To be effective, a comment should be clearly argued and based on good evidence. In the early stages of plan making, we need to be sure that we have considered all of the relevant options. We will be happy to hear about other options that should be considered, and what people think of the options that we have considered.

14. As we progress through the process, we will narrow down the options to produce a preferred strategy, and the scope for change will be more limited.

15. From the publication stage onwards, we can only consider objections that relate to whether the necessary processes have been followed in preparing the plan, or whether the plan is “sound”.

16. Paragraph 182 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) explains that, to be sound, a plan must be:

- **Positively prepared** – the plan should be prepared based on a strategy which seeks to meet objectively assessed development and infrastructure requirements, including unmet requirements from neighbouring authorities where it is reasonable to do so and consistent with achieving sustainable development;

- **Justified** – the plan should be the most appropriate strategy, when considered against the reasonable alternatives, based on proportionate evidence;

- **Effective** – the plan should be deliverable over its period and based on effective joint working on cross-boundary strategic priorities; and,

- **Consistent with national policy** – the plan should enable the delivery of sustainable development in accordance with the policies in the Framework.
How do we handle responses?

17. All comments received during the consultations will be used to inform the subsequent stages of developing the Plan.

18. We will normally produce a consultation report summarising all of the comments received, and setting out how we propose to respond to each of the issues raised.

19. Petitions or standard letters submitted as part of an organised campaign will also be acknowledged by e-mail or letter to the sender or main contact, but individual signatories will not be acknowledged or recorded.

20. Comments will normally be made available for anyone to see via our website (www.staffordshire.gov.uk/planning).
Consultation on Planning Applications

21. As the minerals and waste planning authority, we are responsible for determining planning applications relating to minerals and waste development. We are also responsible for determining applications relating to our own developments (e.g. at schools and new road improvement schemes). All other types of planning application (e.g. housing and commercial development) are dealt with by District/Borough Councils, although they do consult us on certain proposals before they make their final decisions.

22. In accordance with legislation, we are obliged to undertake a formal period of public consultation before we determine a planning application. The main consultation stages are outlined below, and further information can be found in National Planning Practice Guidance, which has links to the relevant legislation.

Pre-application discussions

23. We encourage developers to come and talk to officers before making an application. The value of the process is clearly stated in paragraph 188 of the National Panning Policy Framework and in National Planning Practice Guidance.

24. We also encourage applicants and landowners to discuss their proposals with the local community before submitting planning applications. Section 122 of the Localism Act 2011 will introduce a requirement to carry out such consultations and to take account of the responses received.

25. Early consultation should also be undertaken with our own in-house specialists, external consultees such as the Environment Agency and Natural England, Local Parish/Town Councils, local residents and any existing site liaison committee.

26. Applicants who do decide to undertake pre-application community consultation before submitting an application should contact us to discuss the methods to be used and any resulting planning application should include details of this process, the results of the consultation exercises and any changes made to the proposals as a result of this process.

27. Pre-application consultation does not change the way we consult the public and other organisations when we receive a planning application.
How would you find out about a planning application in your area?

28. In accordance with the Development Management Procedure Order 2010 and the Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations 2011, we publicise all planning applications that are received and notify any local residents who may be directly affected by these proposals. To do this we:

- erect a site notice/s on the boundary of the application site;
- place an advertisement in the local newspaper when:
  ~ the application is a ‘major’ development;
  ~ the application is accompanied by an Environmental Statement, or
  ~ when additional information is supplied to support an Environmental Statement in accordance with the EIA Regulations (Reg. 22)
  ~ the proposal is a departure from the Development Plan;
  ~ the proposal affects a Public Right of Way, affects the setting of a Listed Building or affects the character or appearance of a Conservation Area;
- publish details of planning applications received on our website*;  
- write to neighbours likely to be directly affected by the proposals

* You can use IT facilities free of charge in the reception area of Staffordshire Place, and at all local libraries, some of which are open in the evenings and at weekends. You can find your nearest library on our website, together with details of facilities and opening hours. If you need help to view or understand documents or plans, assistance may be available in local libraries. You can also view documents at District Council offices via their Planning Register.

29. Finally, if access to the internet is not possible, we can provide paper copies of the documents on request; though will normally need to make a charge to cover the costs. We will always let you know the charge in advance.

Who do we consult?

30. We consult a wide range of groups and organisations on all planning proposals by e-mail or letter before making a decision. The groups and organisations consulted will vary according to the type and location of the development. The requirement is set out in legislation, and explained in National Planning Guidance.

31. We maintain a consultee list of all relevant statutory and non-statutory consultees who may be consulted on planning applications on our website.

How should you respond?

32. Anyone is allowed to comment on a planning application: You do not have to wait to be asked.

33. We encourage anyone who wishes to make comments to do so using our on-line Comment Form or by email to our Planning Inbox planning@staffordshire.gov.uk.
You can also write to us at:

Planning, Policy & Development Control (Floor 2)
Staffordshire County Council
c/o Wedgwood Building (Block A)
Tipping Street
Stafford
ST16 2DH

34. Legislation sets the minimum time to comment depending on the type of application:

- 21 days for a standard application;
- 28 days for an application accompanied by an environmental statement; and,
- An additional 21 days when we re-consult following receipt of further information to support an environmental statement EIA Regulations (Reg. 22)

It is also our practice to re-consult and give a further 14 days in which to respond if significant changes are made to any planning proposals which are under consideration.

How do we make planning decisions?

35. The comments and specialist advice we receive through the notification and consultation process is used to help us assess the impact of the development, the need for planning conditions to minimise the impact of the development, or to identify reasons why planning permission should not be granted.

36. Planning applications are either determined by the Planning Committee, or in accordance with our Scheme of Delegation. National Planning Guidance explains how decisions must be made in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

37. The Planning Committee normally meets every month. Committee reports are published on our website. The Committee follow a number of protocols dealing with member’s interests, lobbying, etc.; public speaking arrangements; and site visits. These, together with other guidance, are available through the Planning Committee web page.

38. Public speaking is allowed at Planning Committee and Committee meetings are webcast live and archive recording are available for 6 months.

39. For any planning application under consideration the Planning Committee will either: refuse it, grant it, grant it subject to conditions, or defer it for a site visit or to receive further information or clarification of the proposals. The Committee will give reasons for all its decisions which will be minuted and will be made available to view via our website - www.staffordshire.gov.uk/planning
How do we let people know about our decisions?

40. We notify all those who made representations on a proposal either in writing, by email or in some instances via the local press.

41. All decisions are recorded on the Planning Register held by the relevant District/Borough Council. Copies of decision notices are also published on our online Applications Register.