



Statement of Community Involvement 2024

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1 Introduction

What is the Statement of Community Involvement?

1 This Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) is a statutory document and is a requirement under The Planning and Compulsory Act 2004¹. It sets out how Stevenage Borough Council will involve the community and other stakeholders in the preparation, alteration and review of local planning policy and decisions on planning applications. The council recognises the importance of community engagement in the planning process and to make the best-informed decisions we need to hear from those in the communities who will feel the impact of development.

2 The SCI states our approach to engaging with anyone who may have an interest in development that is happening around them. This new SCI will improve the way we engage with our communities in the planning process. The council's last SCI was adopted in 2018 and this provides an update to that document. Regularly reviewing the SCI allows for its effectiveness to be monitored and for amendments to be made to incorporate any policy changes, and to increase levels of public involvement, where possible.

3 Whilst some requirements for consultation and engagement are set out in national legislation, the Council is committed to going beyond these statutory requirements and aims to get as many people involved in the plan preparation process as possible. The SCI aims to frontload this process by ensuring that the community is involved at an early stage. This document sets out:

- Why consultation is important
- What will be consulted on
- Who will be consulted
- When consultation and engagement will take place
- How your views will be considered

The SCI should help to ensure that all consultation activities are carefully planned to enable a useful and effective outcome, which can be fed directly into the planning process, offer everybody the opportunity to get involved, and ensure that resources are used efficiently. It also allows for monitoring to take place on the effectiveness of consultation activities and for new ideas and approaches to be added, where required.

¹ Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (legislation.gov.uk) s18

If further information is required, please contact the Planning Policy Team:

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Planning & Regulation, Stevenage Borough Council,
Daneshill House, Danestrete, Stevenage, Herts SG1 1HN

Phone: 01438 242242

Customer Service Team Webpage: www.stevenage.gov.uk/contact-us

What is Town Planning and why should we get involved?

4 Planning helps to shape the places people live, work and relax, by guiding development to appropriate locations, protecting important assets, ensuring development is of a high quality and ensuring that adequate infrastructure is available to meet its needs. Planning affects everyone in some way, so it is important that communities understand the process fully and are given the opportunity to get involved. Town Planners have to balance how they will meet social, economic and environmental objectives.

5 A key objective of the town and country planning system, is to strengthen community and stakeholder involvement in the planning and development process. By involving the whole community, a locally-based strategy can be developed that seeks to meet the aspirations and expectations of the widest possible range of residents, employees, communities and organisations.

6 Getting involved in the planning system at an early stage is essential to shaping the decisions which are made. There are three key functions of town planning that you can be involved in, which are discussed in greater detail throughout this document:

- **Determining planning applications** (Development Management) - decisions on whether or not a proposed development should receive planning permission, based on adopted planning policies and other considerations. Anyone can view and make comments on a planning application.
- **Plan making** (Planning Policy) - which sets out policies to guide development and planning decisions over time; This includes the Local Plan and Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs), such as the Design Guide and Parking Standards SPD, as well as the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL). Decisions on planning applications are made in line with local planning documents, so getting involved in the production of these is essential.
- **Neighbourhood planning** - this is a way for local communities to take the lead on preparing planning policies for their areas. Once produced, a neighbourhood plan would sit alongside the Local Plan and would also need to be considered when assessing planning applications.

7 Not all forms of development require planning permission from the council as some types of development, such as small extensions to the rear of some residential properties, or some changes of use, are covered by ‘permitted development rights’². For development proposals in Stevenage that do require planning permission, the council is responsible for consulting with the community and deciding whether the development should go ahead based on the policies in the development plan.

How our approach to community involvement has developed

8 Stevenage’s previous SCI was published in 2018, but since then we are working on a new Local Plan, and the way we interact with stakeholders and communities has changed. New technologies have emerged, such as online engagement tools and social media channels, which can help us reach out to more people.

9 Face to face meetings will not be replaced, but the Covid-19 pandemic has enabled new digital ways of involving people in the planning process, which we want to build on for future engagement with our communities, in addition to traditional consultation methods.

The corporate policy context

10 As a Co-operative Council, Stevenage Borough Council is committed to ensuring local people are at the heart of the decisions we make as an authority. This means avoiding top-down approaches and enabling and encouraging local people to get involved and have their say through proactive and innovative consultation methods and close working relationships.

11 The Council is currently reviewing its corporate strategies relating to consultation and engagement. However, the key objectives are clear:

- Ensure a proactive approach to consultation and engagement
- Take advantage of new technologies and ideas to improve consultation effectiveness and to broaden the opportunities for people to get involved
- Ensure all members of the community have the opportunity to get involved, fulfilling our duties under the Equality Act 2010
- Ensure appropriate consultation timescales are used
- Provide feedback about how we have used the comments made and any next steps
- Ensure greater co-ordination between council services
- Ensure the Council will fulfill our duty under the Data Protection Act 2018 and General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR).

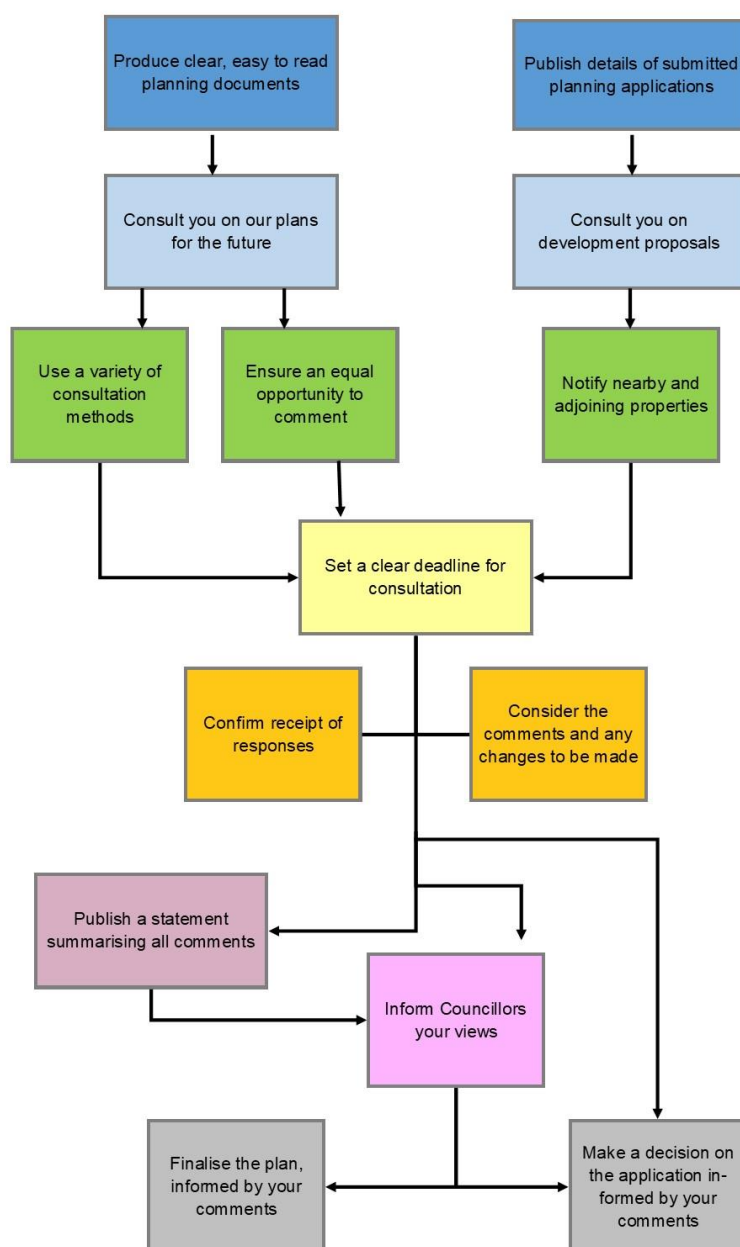
² As set out in [The Town and Country Planning \(General Permitted Development\) \(England\) Order 2015](#)

12 These objectives not only apply to local residents, but also to local businesses, retailers, organisations, and to those people who work or choose to spend time in the Borough. It is important that we reach out to all members of the community in order to achieve the true community-led approach we are seeking.

13 This SCI seeks to ensure these objectives are embedded within the planning process and that consultation is undertaken effectively throughout the process. We will work with other departments to ensure that a consistent approach is taken to consultation. Where, appropriate, we may also link our public consultation with events and activities organised by other council departments and vice versa.

2 Summary of consultation activities

A simple process map to show the steps of our consultation process:



3 Planning Policy

What is planning policy?

14 Planning policy shapes the long-term vision for development in Stevenage. It sets out plans and policies against which planning applications are determined and helps give the local context for making decisions. Planning policy is set out at national, regional, local and neighbourhood levels. These different levels of the plan are designed to work together to achieve the goals of the plan while also taking into account the unique characteristics of a local area.

National policy	The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out the government's planning policies and how they expect them to be applied.
Regional Policy	The Minerals and Waste Plan is prepared by Hertfordshire County Council and sets out the vision, objectives and overall spatial strategy for minerals and waste planning in Hertfordshire.
Local policy	Stevenage's local plan sets out the framework for long term growth in the Borough. The local plan guides planning decisions in the area. Supplementary Planning Documents provide additional detail on the policies in the local plan.
Neighbourhood policy	Neighbourhood Plans are produced by neighbourhood forums and community councils and address policy issues at a neighbourhood level.

15 Local Planning Authorities are required to produce local development documents, which set out the spatial strategy for the Borough and provide the basis on which planning applications are determined. There are two types of local development documents:

- **Development Plan Documents (DPDs) - The Local Plan.** This sets out policies to control land use, including the allocation of sites for particular types of development. It covers the whole of the Borough.
- **Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs)** - these provide further details on policies within the Development Plan Documents (the Local Plan).

16 The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 sets out the legal requirements for consultation and engagement during the preparation of local development documents. The Localism Act 2011 sets out an additional requirement for local authorities and other prescribed bodies to actively engage on cross-boundary/strategic matters, known as the Duty to Co-operate.

17 The following chapters explain these requirements in more detail, but also set out additional consultation we will aim to undertake in order to ensure more meaningful engagement is achieved. The Duty to Co-operate should be ongoing through all stages of the plan-making process, as such it is not referenced specifically in the text below.

The Local Plan - key stages of preparation

Stage	Details
1. Evidence gathering/scoping	Evidence will be gathered/produced to identify the key issues the plan needs to deal with. An up-to-date and comprehensive evidence base is required to justify policies within the plan. Early consultation may be undertaken to ensure the correct issues have been identified. This is not a statutory requirement.
2. Public participation - preparation stage (Regulation 18)	The draft plan will be prepared using the evidence gathered at Stage 1 and the results of any initial consultation undertaken. It will set out the main issues to be covered within the plan and the options for meeting the needs and requirements of the Borough. An accompanying Sustainability Appraisal (SA), which assesses the plan's social, economic and environmental impacts, will also be consulted upon. The initial draft of the Local Plan will be published for formal, statutory consultation (see para 17 below).
3. Consideration of responses	Comments received in response to the consultation will be considered by the Council. Once processed, all comments will be made publicly available. The Local Plan will be revised, where necessary, to take into account comments received and any objections raised at this stage, to create a final draft of the plan for further consultation.
4. Public participation - publication stage (Regulation 19)	Formal, statutory consultation (see para 17 below) on the final draft of the Local Plan and its accompanying Sustainability Appraisal (SA).
5. Submission to Secretary of State (Regulation 22)	The Local Plan is formally submitted to the Secretary of State, along with the responses made at Stage 4 (above). It is accompanied by other 'submission documents' including the Sustainability Appraisal, Policies Map, and a statement summarising all consultation undertaken when producing the plan.
6. Examination of the plan by Independent Planning Inspector (Regulation 24)	Following submission, an independent inspector is appointed by the Planning Inspectorate, who will be responsible for assessing the submitted plan and determining whether it is acceptable (or 'sound'). The Inspector will consider the consultation responses received. Generally this stage will involve a Public Examination, where people who have made comments on the plan previously are invited to discuss their concerns around the table, in front of the Inspector, or to submit further statements. The Planning Inspector is in charge of these sessions and will determine what is discussed. These sessions are public, so anyone can come and observe. The Planning Inspector is likely to recommend a number of changes to the plan (known as Main Modifications), to make the plan sound.
7. Consultation on Main Modifications	Consultation is required on any Main Modifications recommended. The scope of this consultation will need to be agreed by the Inspector, but will include the minimum statutory requirements in para 17 below.

Stage	Details
8. Adoption	The Inspector will consider any responses made to the consultation and then issue a report to the Council containing his/her recommendations relating to the plan. The Council will then decide whether to adopt the plan, with those recommendations, or not.

Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) - key stages of preparation

Stage	Details
1. Evidence gathering/scoping	Evidence will be gathered/produced to identify the key issues the SPD needs to deal with. Early consultation may be undertaken to ensure the correct issues have been identified. This is not a statutory requirement.
2. Public participation (Regulation 12)	The draft SPD will be prepared using the evidence gathered at Stage 1 and the results of any initial consultation undertaken. This will be published for formal, statutory consultation (see para 17 below). Sustainability Appraisal (SA) is not required for SPDs.
3. Consideration of responses	Comments received in response to the consultation will be considered by the Council. Once processed, all comments will be made publicly available. The SPD will be revised, where necessary, to take into account comments received.
4. Adoption of the SPD (Regulation 14)	Adoption of the SPD by the Borough Council

Community Infrastructure Levy

18 The Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) is a planning charge introduced by the Planning Act 2008, as a tool for local authorities in England and Wales to help deliver infrastructure to support the development of their area. It allows local authorities to raise funds from developers undertaking new building projects. The money can be used to fund a wide range of infrastructure that is needed as a result of development taking place.

19 Key stages in the preparation of CIL:

Stage	Details
1. Evidence gathering/scoping	Evidence will be gathered/produced.
2. Public participation - Preliminary Draft Charging Schedule (Regulation 15)	The Preliminary Draft Charging Schedule will be prepared using the evidence gathered at Stage 1. This will be published for formal, statutory consultation (see para 17 below).
3. Consideration of responses	Comments received in response to the consultation will be considered by the Council. Once processed, all comments will be made publicly available.
4. Public participation - Draft Charging Schedule (Regulation 17)	The Draft Charging Schedule will be finalised, taking into account the comments received. This will be published for formal, statutory consultation (see para 17 below).
5. Submission to independent examiner (Regulation 19)	The Charging Schedule is submitted to an independent examiner, along with the consultation responses received at Stage 4 and other statutory submission documents.
6. Examination (Regulation 21)	Following submission, an independent examiner is appointed to assess the Charging Schedule and determine whether it is acceptable. The Inspector will consider the consultation responses received. Generally this stage will involve hearing sessions. Anyone who has responded to the consultation at Stage 4 has a right to be heard by the examiner. If the Council makes changes to the Charging Schedule following Stage 4, other people can also request to be heard. The examiner is in charge of these sessions and will determine what is discussed. These sessions are public, so anyone can come and observe.
7. Adoption (Regulation 25)	The examiner will issue a report to the Council setting out his/her recommendations. The Council will then decide whether to adopt the Charging Schedule.

Statutory consultation requirements

20 For local development documents, the following statutory consultation requirements must be met;

Local Plan	SPDs and CIL
Minimum of 6 weeks	Minimum of 4 weeks
Make consultation documents available on our website, Make consultation documents available on our website, in libraries and in the council offices	Make consultation documents available on our website, Make consultation documents available on our website, in libraries and in the council offices
Send notifications to consultation bodies and those on our consultation database	Send notifications to consultation bodies and those on our consultation database

21 We will seek to ensure a wide range of responses are achieved by going above and beyond the minimum requirements and using a variety of consultation methods at all stages of the process. These methods are discussed in more detail in para 22 - 23 of this statement.

Who we will consult

22 National planning legislation requires local authorities to meet a minimum level of community involvement and specify a number of organisations which must be consulted if the Council considers that they will be affected, known as statutory consultees and general consultation bodies.

23 In addition to meeting its statutory obligations, the Council is committed to ensuring that local groups, organisations and individuals are provided with the best possible opportunity to become involved in the preparation of local development documents. The consultation methods in para 25 - 27 set out the ways in which we seek to do this.

24

We also currently have a database of interested parties who have expressed an interest in planning policy consultations. If you would like to be added to our database to hear of future consultations, please sign up by email to: **PlanningPolicy_SBC@stevenage.gov.uk**

When enrolling on the planning consultation database please note that Stevenage will capture and store some personal details. We will use this information to ensure that you are consulted on planning policy issues across the borough. These details will be kept by Stevenage Borough Council and will only be used for the purpose set out above. Your personal details will remain with us until you wish to no longer be consulted.

Consultation methods

25 Using a variety of different consultation methods and techniques can help to ensure our consultations are understood and are easy to get involved in for as many people as possible, from an early stage. With technologies improving, and changing the way many people communicate, we seek to ensure our methods are up-to-date and make use of all of the opportunities available to us, whilst still ensuring our consultations are available to those who are not familiar with new technologies.

26 Since the 2018 SCI, the way we interact with communities has changed. New technologies have emerged, such as online engagement tools and social media channels, which can help us reach out to more people. During and after the Covid-19 pandemic we implemented new digital ways of involving people in the planning process, which we want to build on for future engagement with our communities, in addition to traditional consultation methods.

27 We will take a flexible approach to consultation, depending on the consultation activity being undertaken. We may choose to use some, or all, of the methods below, as well as looking for alternatives, where they might be appropriate:

Email Alerts from Consultation database	Emails and reminders are sent to people who have registered an interest in hearing about planning consultations and statutory consultations. Contact details are provided to offer a direct link to the Planning Policy Team.
Council Website	We will publicise, update and provide dedicated consultation pages to allow easy access to documentation and supporting information / evidence.
Social Media	We will publicise consultations and any planned events on social media platforms Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.
Local Media	We may promote consultations using local newspapers, online media and newsletters in both hard and digital formats.
Accessibility of documents	As well as using online platforms, hard copies of consultation documents will be available to view at Council offices and local libraries.
Community events and presentations	We may give presentations and attend community events to promote our consultation activity within the community for example attending Stevenage Day.
Council Meetings	We have a number of existing public meetings and committees that happen on a regular basis. For example, Full Council, Council Sub committees, Scrutiny committees. Where appropriate we may take our consultation activities and emerging plans to these meetings to raise awareness or seek feedback or approval
Focus groups and workshops	Where appropriate we may invite stakeholders and partners to discuss a specific topic or consultation.
Using our networks	Consultations are shared among wider council departments who can promote it further among their contacts.
Online consultation tools	We will explore using new online consultation tools where we see necessary to help widen the reach of our online activity.

Equalities, Diversity and Data Protection

28 The Equality Act (2010) defines nine 'protected characteristics': age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. We will aim to ensure that these characteristics do not affect people's ability to respond to our consultations and to have their voice heard.

29 The Council recognises that some groups are harder to engage with than others. In more specific terms, these hard-to-reach groups include: people whose first language is not English, people with disabilities, children and young people, older people, ethnic minorities, asylum seekers, gypsies and travellers, religious groups, the homeless, substance abusers and people who have experienced domestic violence (this list is not intended to be exhaustive). Such groups may not be engaged by, or may be unable or generally unwilling to engage in, traditional consultation methods.

30 We will consider the barriers faced by these groups and try to overcome these by using alternative methods of consultation, or by asking the affected groups / individuals how they would like to be involved. We will use the expertise and networks of communication already established throughout different areas of the Council to engage such groups. Where appropriate, the Planning Policy team will hold meetings and host presentations with such groups at a mutually convenient time and venue.

31 The Council will comply with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and UK Data Protection Act 2018 with regard to the rights of individuals and personal information held on our systems. A data protection guide and how we protect your data can be found on our website at: www.stevenage.gov.uk/about-the-council/access-to-information/data-protection-act .

Enabling people with disabilities to access planning documents

32 We aim to ensure that the Stevenage Borough Council website is accessible and usable to as many people as possible. It has been designed to conform with Level AA of the [W3C's Web Content Accessibility Guidelines](#), the minimum standard required by the UK Government. Our full accessibility measures are listed on our website at: www.stevenage.gov.uk/accessibility . To assist users, the following features can be used: contrast and text size manipulation, navigation through the use of just a keyboard and enable screen readers on most pages on the site.

How we will use the comments we receive

33 Following any consultation or engagement stage, we will analyse and take into consideration any submitted comments or representations. We can only consider comments that are relevant to the scope of the consultation document. Comments not directly related to the consultation will be directed to the relevant council department, and will be followed up as appropriate.

34 Comments received during public consultation will always be made public. The Council will however, redact certain information such as residents' addresses and signatures consistent with our obligations under the Data Protection Act 2018 (and any subsequent amendments).

35 Consultations received outside of the specified consultation dates will not normally be taken into account. When consultees are struggling to meet the consultation deadline, they should contact the planning policy team to see whether a late submission will be accepted.

36 A Statement of Consultation will be produced which contains an overview of the consultation activities undertaken, a summary of the responses received and how we have taken these into account when producing the final version of the document. A copy of the statement will be placed on the Council's website and will be made available to view at our Councils' offices / libraries. The responses will also be reported to the Council's Executive, along with recommendations for future action.

4 Neighbourhood Planning

37 Neighbourhood planning gives communities the power to shape the development and growth of their local area. It provides the opportunity for local people/businesses to choose where they want new homes, jobs and facilities to be located, what development should look like and what infrastructure is required, and grant planning permission for the new buildings they want to see go ahead.

38 A neighbourhood plan must be in general conformity with the strategic policies of the Council's development plan. Once approved, the neighbourhood plan will have the same legal status as the Council's own plan. Policies and guidance set out in a neighbourhood plan will be used by local authorities when considering planning applications within that area.

39 There are specific processes that need to be followed, as briefly set out below. Please do not let the process put you off, if you need help understanding anything, we can offer support and guidance. There are lots of other sources of advice and support too. Further information can be found on the planning policy webpage:

www.stevenage.gov.uk/planning-and-building-control/planning-policy

Stage	Details
1. Creation of Neighbourhood Forum (Regulation 8)	A group or organisation must apply to the local planning authority to be designated as a neighbourhood forum (a forum application). This group must include a minimum of 21 individuals who live or work in the area, or are elected members. They must submit this to the Council for approval.
2. Public participation (Regulation 9)	The Council are required to publicise the application and carry out public consultation for a minimum of 6 weeks. The Council will publish the outcome of the application on its website and notify relevant stakeholders.
3. Pre-submission consultation (Regulation 14)	A draft neighbourhood plan is prepared by the neighbourhood forum group. The group must carry out public consultation on the draft plan for a minimum of 6 weeks. A copy of the draft plan must also be sent to the Council.
4. Submission to Council (Regulation 15)	The forum takes into account the consultation responses received before preparing a final version of the plan, along with a consultation statement setting out how the responses have been dealt with. This is then submitted to the Council.
5. Publication consultation (Regulation 16)	The Council must carry out public consultation for a minimum of 6 weeks.
6. Submission to examiner (Regulation 17)	The Council appoints an independent examiner to examine the plan. The plan is submitted to the examiner for consideration, along with the responses of the consultation (at Stage 5).
7. Independent examination (Regulation 18)	The examination is likely to be carried out through written representations, but a hearing sessions(s) can be held if required. A written report will be issued by the examiner. The report will conclude that either the draft neighbourhood plan should proceed to a referendum (with or without modifications) or that the draft neighbourhood plan should be refused. The Council will publicise the report. The Council must also be satisfied that the plan meets the legal requirements.

Stage	Details
8. Referendum	A referendum is then held, in the same way in which a local election would be. The Council is required to publicise the referendum.
9. Adoption	If a majority vote is gained for the plan (over 50% of those voting, the Council will adopt the plan.

39 If you are interested in being involved in preparing a neighbourhood plan, we would suggest talking to your local Ward Councillor in the first instance.

5 Planning Applications

40 Planning applications for development can shape the character of the borough and the areas where people live, work and spend their leisure time. In 2022/23, the Council determined over 400 planning applications ranging from household extensions, listed building applications, to major new housing estates and business premises.

41 Opportunities exist for informing and consulting the community on development proposals and planning applications at both application stage and after a decision has been made.

Pre-application discussions

42 National planning policy supports efficient and effective early community engagement and has the potential to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the planning system. Engaging residents, councillors and other local stakeholders (e.g Hertfordshire County Council) at the earliest possible stage in the schemes' development process, provides an opportunity for them to shape their place and allow developers the benefit of local knowledge.

43 Pre-application engagement can:

- identify opportunities for scheme improvements at a stage when a proposal can still be modified, resulting in a higher quality development;
- significantly increase the likelihood of gaining a positive recommendation by our planning officers;
- help to communicate the vision and objectives for the area;
- develop a shared understanding of constraints, opportunities and context;
- agree information requirements and identify schemes which are unlikely to be supported;
- establish timescales and explain administrative processes; and
- reduce delays through early engagement of key parties.

44 Costs for pre application are available on our website:

www.stevenage.gov.uk/planning-and-building-control/planning/development-management

Application stage

45 Once an application has been lodged with the council, it will be registered and checked to ensure that it contains all the information necessary to be determined, a process known as 'validation'. Once validated, it will be included on the weekly list of received applications and made public. The public register, which includes all active planning applications, is available to view on the Council's website. Copies of applications can also be viewed at the Council's offices

46 The council is required to publicise planning applications in accordance with The Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015, as follows:

- The properties directly adjoining the application site will be notified of an application by letter from the council and/or a notice will be posted on, or close to, the application site. These communications will contain details of the planning application proposal and information on where plans (and any supporting information) can be viewed. They will also explain how to make comments about the application.
- For certain types of application, such as applications for major development, an advertisement will be placed in the local newspaper.
- For certain types of planning applications, the council is also required to consult specific organisations and groups. A list of the statutory consultees, and details of the regulation requirements, is set out in Appendix B.
- Occasionally, for larger proposals, the Council may decide to issue a press release to communicate proposals more widely. The need for this will be determined on a case-by-case basis.

47 Applicants are also encouraged to engage in their own pre-application consultations with neighbours and/or the wider community prior to submitting a planning application. Further information on how to go about such community consultations can be sought from the Council's Development Management team.

48 From time to time, planning applications are revised after they have been submitted. Often this is in response to concerns raised by council officers or matters raised in objections. In these cases, where considered necessary, the council will re-consult those people originally notified of the application in order for them to be given an opportunity to comment on the amended design.

49 All applications for major development and applications made by the Council itself are determined by councillors via the Planning and Development Committee. The Planning and Development Committee also determine applications where an application has received more than a threshold number of objections (the thresholds are set out in the Council's constitution). In these cases, the council's Development Management officers will prepare a report for the Committee that outlines the proposal and the main issues for consideration, with a recommendation as to whether approval should be given.

50 Decisions on most minor and householder applications are made by the Assistant Director for Planning and Regulation, under powers delegated by the Planning and Development Committee. However, any councillor may request, under the 'call-in' procedure, that a particular application is decided by the Planning and Development Committee, if they consider there to be sound reasons for doing so. Councillors have 28 days from the date of receipt of an application to request that it be considered by the Planning and Development Committee and the councillor is required to set out their reasons for doing so.

51 The Secretary of State also has the power to call-in planning applications. If this happens, the council will provide copies of all correspondence to the Secretary of State. Objectors will be notified of the call-in and given the chance to comment directly to the Secretary of State.

How we will use the comments we receive

52 All written comments received by the council will be acknowledged in writing. At the end of the consultation period all responses will be considered. Officers will not usually respond directly to any questions raised by members of the public.

53 The Council is required by law to determine planning applications in accordance with the development plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise. This means that comments may not always be reflected in changes being made to an application or the ultimate decision. However, the Assistant Director for Planning and Regulation and/or The Planning and Development Committee will always take into account all comments before making a decision on an application.

54 If the application is to be determined by the Planning and Development Committee, anyone who made comments on the application will be notified in writing of the date, time and venue of the meeting where it will be determined. Any person who lodged an objection to a planning application may apply to speak against the proposal at the Committee meeting. If any objector elects to speak to the Committee, then a similar right will be granted to the applicant, his or her agent, and members of the public who support the application. Each side may address the Committee for a maximum of 3 minutes and if more than one person from either side wishes to speak, then a representative should be nominated to express their combined views. In exceptional circumstances and upon request, the Chairman of the Planning and Development Committee may allow more than one representative from each side or other interested parties to speak.

Post-application stage

55 After a decision has been made on an application, the Council will place notice of the decision and the officer's report on the public register, which can be viewed on the Council's website. Decisions also appear on the weekly list of decisions. If the application was determined at Planning and Development Committee, a list of decisions taken at the meeting and the minutes of the meeting will also be placed on the Council's website.

56 Where an applicant is unhappy with the council's decision, they have the right to appeal. Applicants must lodge an appeal with the Planning Inspectorate who will determine its validity before initiating proceedings and setting a start date. Where an appeal is accepted, the council will notify all relevant statutory consultees and those who submitted comments of the appeal and how to make representations (where applicable) and then again once the Inspectorate has made a decision. Further information on appeal procedures can be viewed at www.gov.uk/appeal-planning-inspectorate.

Planning Aid

57 Planning Aid England (PAE) provides planning advice and support to help individuals and communities engage with the planning system and get involved in planning their local area. PAE is built on the principle that everyone should have access to the planning system, regardless of their ability to pay. The services are delivered by a range of volunteer members of the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI). PAE is separate from both central and local government and provides completely independent and impartial planning advice.

58 Planning Aid England can be contacted via their website at:
www.planningaid.co.uk/hc/en-us

Complaints procedure

Customer complaints

59 If you are not happy with the service you have received from the council, you should contact the Planning Team in the first instance. However, if you are dissatisfied with the response, you can make a formal complaint through the Council's Complaint Procedure. There are 2 stages to the complaint procedure. These are:

Stage 1

We will:

- Try to resolve the issue the first time you contact us.
- Send you an acknowledgement with a target response date within 5 working days.
- Respond to your complaint in full within 10 working days. If we need more time to investigate, we'll contact you to let you know.
- If we've made a mistake, then we'll apologise, explain what happened and let you know what we are doing to put things right.

Stage 2

- If you are not satisfied with our response at Stage 1, you can escalate it to Stage 2 by getting in contact within 15 working days.
- You will need to tell us why you remain dissatisfied and the outcome you are looking for.
- We'll send you acknowledgement with a target response date within 5 working days.
- Your complaint will be reviewed by a senior manager.
- You will receive a full written response within 20 working days. If we need more time to investigate, we'll contact you to let you know.
- If you're not happy with the Stage 2 response you can take your complaint to one of the Ombudsman services. We will advise you who to contact and how to do this.

60 You can also read our [complaints policy](http://www.stevenage.gov.uk/have-your-say/compliments-and-complaints/complaints-policy) at www.stevenage.gov.uk/have-your-say/compliments-and-complaints/complaints-policy

61 The Ombudsmen Services investigate complaints of injustice arising from misadministration by Local Government and certain other bodies. The Ombudsmen can investigate complaints about how the council has done something. But they cannot question what a council has done simply because someone does not agree with it. For further information, please visit our website: www.stevenage.gov.uk/have-your-say/compliments-and-complaints .

62 It is important to note that the Ombudsman does not deal with planning issues and decisions, only the process that the council has been through in dealing with a complaint. An Inspector's decision on a planning application can only be challenged through the High Court via a 'judicial review', which must be lodged within 6 weeks of a decision being made. This would challenge the way in which a decision was made and whether it was lawful, not the decision itself.

63 Taking a case to judicial review is an expensive process and, if you are unsuccessful costs could well be awarded against you, so you are strongly recommended to seek legal advice if you are considering this course of action. If the High Court upholds the challenge, a different Inspector will reconsider the appeal avoiding the mistake, but it is possible the outcome will be the same. For further information on this process, please visit the Planning Aid website www.planningaid.co.uk/hc/en-us .

Appendix A - Key Contacts and Information Sources:

Key contact details

Email alerts:

- Sign up to our Planning Policy Consultation database. This database receives notifications on new planning policy document consultations. Please email Planning.Policy_SBC@Stevenage.gov.uk to be placed on the consultation list.

Webpages:

- Latest information on Stevenage's planning policy framework: www.stevenage.gov.uk/planning-and-building-control/planning-policy
- Current Planning Policy consultations: Current and recent consultations www.stevenage.gov.uk/have-your-say/planning-policy-consultations
- Planning application advice: www.stevenage.gov.uk/planning-and-building-control/planning/development-management
- Current planning and other related applications: Search and comment on planning applications - www.stevenage.gov.uk/planning-and-building-control/planning/development-management/find-a-planning-application
- Planning Enforcement: www.stevenage.gov.uk/planning-and-building-control/planning/planning-enforcement

Contact by email:

- Planning Policy can be contacted at Planning.Policy_SBC@stevenage.gov.uk
- Planning Applications can be contacted at Planning@stevenage.gov.uk
- Community Infrastructure Levy / S106 team can be contacted at cil@stevenage.gov.uk
-

Stevenage Borough Council Customer Service Centre

Alternatively, please contact the Council's Customer Service Centre on 01438 242242 and your request will be logged and passed over to the Planning Department for one of our Technical Support Team or Planning Officers to contact you about your planning query.

Appendix B: Stakeholders to be involved in the development of local planning policy

Please note that these lists refer to successor bodies where re-organisation occurs.

Statutory Consultees

The specific consultation bodies which the Regulations³ require the Council to consult are:

- Community and Parish Councils (Including Aston Parish Meeting, Datchworth Parish Council, Graveley Parish Council, Great Ashby Community Council, Knebworth Parish Council, Langley Parish Council, St Ippolyts Parish Council, Walkern Parish Council, Weston Parish Council and Wymondley Parish Council)
- East Hertfordshire District Council
- Hertfordshire Constabulary
- Hertfordshire County Council
- Marine Management Organisation*
- Natural England
- NHS Hertfordshire and West Essex Integrated Care Board (ICB)
- North Hertfordshire District Council
- Relevant communications companies
- Relevant electricity and gas companies
- Relevant sewerage and water undertakers
- The Coal Authority*
- The Environment Agency
- The Highways Agency
- Network Rail Infrastructure Limited (company number 2904587)
- The Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission for England (Historic England)
- Homes England and the Regulator of Social Housing
- The Secretary of State for Transport

³ The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012

*Unlikely to be relevant for Stevenage Borough Council.

General Consultation Bodies

The Regulations also require the Council to consult general consultation bodies, where appropriate. For Stevenage, these include:

- Campaign to Protect Rural England
- Community/resident groups
- Developers, house builders, the development industry and their agents
- Local business groups (including local business forums)
- Local community action groups
- Local community transport groups
- Local disability groups
- Local education trusts and associations
- Local environmental groups (e.g. Hertfordshire Biological Record Centre, Hertfordshire and Middlesex Wildlife Trust)
- Local health associations
- Local housing groups and associations
- Local history and conservation groups (e.g. Friends of Forster Country)
- Local leisure and sport groups
- Local racial, ethnic or national groups
- Local registered social landlords
- Local religious groups
- Local resident associations
- Local retail associations
- Neighbourhood Watch groups
- Older persons groups

- Voluntary organisations
- Youth groups, schools and colleges

Appendix C: Stakeholders to be involved in Development Management

Stakeholders to be consulted according to The Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015

Statutory consultee	Type of development
Canal and River Trust	Schedule 4(za) Development Management Procedure Order
Coal Authority	Article 26 and Schedule 4(o) Development Management Procedure Order
Control of major-accident hazards competent authority (COMAH)	Schedule 4(zb) Development Management Procedure Order
County Planning Authorities	Paragraph 7 of Schedule 1 to the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 , Article 21 Development Management Procedure Order and Schedule 4(b)(c) Development Management Procedure Order
Crown Estates Commissioners	Article 26 Development Management Procedure Order

[Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy](#)

[Article 26 Development Management Procedure Order](#)

Designated Neighbourhood Forum

[Paragraph 8A inserted into Schedule 1 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990](#) and [Article 25A and paragraph \(d\) of Schedule 4 of the Development Management Procedure Order 2015](#)

[Environment Agency](#)

[Schedule 4\(p\)\(t\)\(u\) \(v\)\(zc\)\(zd\) Development Management Procedure Order](#)

[Forestry Commission](#)

[Paragraph 4 of Schedule 5 of Town and Country Planning Act 1990](#)

[The Gardens Trust](#)

[Schedule 4\(s\) Development Management Procedure Order](#) and see also [guidance on conserving and enhancing the historic environment](#)

[Health and Safety Executive](#)

[Schedule 4\(e\) and \(in relation to applications for planning permission made on or after 1 August 2020 \(zg\) Development Management Procedure Order](#), see also [guidance on hazardous substances](#) and advice for [local planning authorities on consulting Health and Safety Executive on planning applications](#); and [paragraph 113 of guidance on minerals](#)

[\[Relevant\]Highways Authority \(including Highways England\)](#)

[Schedule 4\(g\)\(h\)\(i\) Development Management Procedure Order](#)

Historic England	Schedule 4(g)(r)(s) Development Management Procedure Order and see also guidance on conserving and enhancing the historic environment
Lead local flood authority	Schedule 4(ze) Development Management Procedure Order
Local Planning Authorities	Schedule 4(b)(c), Article 19 and Article 24 Development Management Procedure Order, Paragraph 4(2) Schedule 1 and Paragraph 7 of Schedule 1 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and Paragraph 3(b) of Schedule 4 to the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990
National Parks Authorities	Schedule 4(a) Development Management Procedure Order
Natural England	Schedule 4(w)(y)(zb) Development Management Procedure Order and Paragraph 4 of Schedule 5 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990
Office for Nuclear Regulation	Schedule 4(f) Development Management Procedure Order and see also deciding planning applications around hazardous installations guidance
Oil and Gas Authority	Article 26 Development Management Procedure Order
Parish Councils	Article 25 Development Management Procedure Order and Schedule 4(d) Development Management Procedure Order

Rail Infrastructure
Managers

[Article 16 Development Management Procedure Order](#)

Rail Network Operators

[Schedule 4\(j\) Development Management Procedure Order](#) and see
also [guidance on transport](#)

[Sport England](#)

[Schedule 4\(z\) Development Management Procedure Order](#) and see
also [guidance on open space, sports and recreation facilities](#)

[Theatres Trust](#)

[Schedule 4\(x\) Development Management Procedure Order](#)

Toll Road Concessionaries

[Schedule 4\(m\) Development Management Procedure Order](#)

Water and sewerage
undertakers

[Schedule 4\(zf\) Development Management Procedure Order](#)

Appendix D – Statutory publicity requirements for applications for planning permission and listed building consent

Type of development	Site notice	Site notice or neighbour notification letter	Newspaper advertisement	Website
Applications for major development as defined in Article 2 of the Development Management Procedure Order (which are not covered in any other entry) (including an application for public service infrastructure development made on or after 1 August 2021)	-	X	X	X
Applications subject to Environmental Impact Assessment which are accompanied by an environmental statement	X	-	X	X
Applications which do not accord with the development plan in force in the area (including an application for public service infrastructure development made on or after 1 August 2021)	X	-	X	X
Applications which would affect a right of way to which Part 3 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 applies (including an application for public service infrastructure development made on or after 1 August 2021)	X	-	X	X

Applications for planning permission not covered in the entries above eg non-major development	-	X	-	X
Applications for listed building consent where works to the exterior of the building are proposed	X	-	X	X
Applications to vary or discharge conditions attached to a listed building consent or involving exterior works to a listed building.	X	-	X	X
Applications for development which would affect the setting of a listed building, or affect the character or appearance of a conservation area.	X	-	X	X

Note: the [Environment Impact Assessment guidance](#) sets out further publicity and consultation requirements for applicants where this is relevant.

However, the statutory consultees which need to be consulted vary depending on the type of application submitted, and the specific site circumstances. Therefore, the detailed table within Schedule 4 of The Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015 should be referred to for more detailed information.



